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Transformation Abroad: Sojourning and the Perceived Enhancement of Self-Efficacy

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### Abstract

This paper empirically examines communication self-efficacy as a possible profound payoff of sojourning. A review of relevant literature explores the interrelationships of communication, sojourning, and personal growth. Questionnaire data from an international sample of 212 Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) alumni are used to test hypotheses about the sojourn and perceived changes in communication self-efficacy. Data analysis revealed that 95.5% of the sample retrospectively reported a perceived increase in self-efficacy. In addition, positive correlations were found between self-reported challenge of sojourn and reported perceived change in self-efficacy, and between self-reported success of sojourn and perceived communication self-efficacy scores. Discussion addresses these findings as well as study limitations, possible future research directions, and implications for practice.

Keywords: self-efficacy, sojourner, transformation, growth, intercultural adaptation, culture shock, reentry

Speak to people about their time abroad and often their eyes will light up. Many who have sojournd describe their experiences as profoundly meaningful, often crediting them with changing them at fundamental levels.<sup>i</sup> Some sojourners describe a transformation in their very sense of self, both in how they experience their own cultures and in how they view their life paths. Some speak of an increased sense of empowerment, an enriched sense of belief in their own capabilities. The current study focuses on this seemingly common sense of transformation, and explores whether this perceived sense of growth can be empirically measured by specifically looking at sojourners' beliefs about their communication self-efficacy.

Past studies of sojourners tended to emphasize sojourners' psychological well being in encountering unfamiliar environmental demands within the host culture. These studies tended to look at the sojourn from a problem-oriented vantage, often focusing on whether sojourners' effectiveness overseas and their ability to deal with culture shock could be predicted before the sojourn (Kim, 1987, 2001). Some researchers criticized what they saw as an "exclusive emphasis on the negative aspects of geographic movement" (Furnham, 1986, p. 42), and urged researchers to begin to look at positive and growth aspects of the sojourn.

Adler (1975, 1987) argued that, while culture shock was most often associated with negative outcomes, researchers should also look at how culture shock is often important for self-development and personal growth. Adler (1987) explained the sojourn in terms of a transitional process that moves an individual from a state of low self and cultural awareness to a state of higher self and cultural awareness and described culture shock as "an experience in self-understanding and change" (p. 29). Furnham (1986) further examined this growth-oriented vantage, stating, "The implication is that although it may be strange and possibly difficult, sojourning makes a person more adaptable, flexible, and insightful" (p. 47).

Kim and Ruben (1988) integrated the intercultural adaptation-as-problem approach and the intercultural adaptation-as-learning/growth approach with their theory of intercultural transformation. Kim (2001) clarified that all experiences of cross-cultural adaptation are both problematic and growth producing. “Despite, or rather because of, the difficulties crossing cultures entails, people do and must change some of their old ways so as to carry out their daily activities and achieve improved quality of life in the new environment” (p. 21). The present study continues this trend in sojourner research, proceeding with the assumption that the reality of sojourner adaptation is truly the relative, dialectical integration of problem and growth.

Models and theories about growth possibilities of the sojourn are central to the intercultural discussion. In recent years, more empirical studies on the sojourn have begun to look at its impact on individuals (Cushner & Karim, 2004). Many of these newer studies look at positive outcomes, such as creation of a global worldview (Bachner, Zeuschel, & Shannon, 1993); attitude change (Sell, 1983); enhanced awareness and understanding of oneself (Kauffman et al, 1992); higher levels of international concern and cross-cultural interest, as well as more positive, though more critical, attitudes toward one’s home country (Carlson & Widaman, 1988); and general personal growth (Hansel & Grove, 1985, 1986). Most of these types of studies, including those listed here, are limited to student sojourner participants.

Like some of the above studies, the current study is interested in sojourners’ perceptions of growth or transformation as related to the sojourn. In an effort to examine sojourners’ perceptions, the study is empirical. It is also retrospective, as it is particularly interested in sojourners’ perceptions and sensemaking of growth as they relate that growth to the sojourn. This study is one of the few to look at self-efficacy, or belief in capability, in the domain of communication. It is also possibly the first work to empirically relate the domain of

communication self-efficacy to the sojourn. In addition, the study joins other recent research in expanding the focus of sojourner type to examine post-college, international sojourners' outcomes.

This article first explores the relevant communication literature to examine the relationships of communication, sojourning, and self-efficacy, and to illustrate how intercultural communication, adaptation, and sojourn theories can be enhanced by theories of self-efficacy. Questionnaire data from 212 Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) alumni are used to test hypotheses about the relationship of the sojourn to perceived increases in self-efficacy. A report of the findings is followed by a discussion of limitations of the current study, as well as possible future research and implications for practice.

#### A Theoretical Model of Sojourning and Self-Efficacy

The process of the sojourn is filled with challenges and hardships, as well as often extreme highs and lows. Precisely because the sojourn represents a formidable task, it also carries with it the potential for accelerated internal growth. It is in this growth potential that the current study is most interested, particularly in how this growth affects the perception of one's ability to communicate. The following section reviews literature on culture shock, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural transformation theory. These theoretical concepts are then related to self-efficacy to show how the challenges sojourners face might relate to perceived personal growth.

#### *Culture Shock*

Oberg popularized the term *culture shock*, and further oriented culture shock to communication, referring to the phenomenon as the "anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (1960, p. 177). Culture shock has "three basic

causal explanations: (1) the loss of familiar cues, (2) the breakdown of interpersonal communications, and (3) an identity crisis” (Weaver, 1994, p. 171). The return home, in which individuals experience the shock of reentry into a formerly familiar and often unquestioned culture, is called *reentry shock*, and usually represents another traumatic period of adjustment for the sojourner.

Researchers who maintain that culture shock is often positive see the process as a learning experience that leads to greater intercultural understanding (Adler, 1975; Bennett, 1993; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kim, 2001; Pederson, 1995; Ward et al, 2001). Adler (1975) argued culture shock can be seen as a transitional experience that leads an individual to gain “new experiential knowledge by coming to understand the roots of his or her own ethnocentrism and by gaining new perspectives and outlooks on the nature of culture” (p. 22). These gained understandings often entail “psychic growth” and a higher level of intercultural competence, which Kim (2001) termed “intercultural personhood,” “an emerging state of a person’s changed outlook and behavior accompanying a substantial amount of cross-cultural adaptation experience” (p. 184).

#### *Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

Bennett’s (1993; Bennett & Bennett, 2004) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity illustrates a sojourn as an intensive learning and growth experience that one might argue would likely result in a higher level of perceived self-efficacy. Hammer et al (2003) point out that each stage of a sojourner’s growth in the process of gaining intercultural sensitivity introduces the potential for increasingly more sophisticated intercultural experiences. The process of gaining intercultural sensitivity begins with *ethnocentrism*, the view that the world revolves around one’s self and one’s culture, and ends with the ultimate stage of *ethnorelativism*,

an incorporation of multiple worldviews. In the first stage, one experiences three ethnocentric orientations: denial, defense, and minimization. In the second, one experiences three ethnorelative orientations: acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Hammer et al empirically measured both the ethnorelative and ethnocentric orientations, and on their scale scores found no systematic gender differences and no significant differences for age, education, or social desirability, suggesting the concepts are fairly stable and applicable to most people's experience.

The achievement of an ethnorelative state serves to decrease anxiety and enhance the experience of traveling outside of one's home culture. According to Gudykunst and Hammer (1988), the adaptation process "involves working out a fit between the person and the new cultural environment" (p. 107). This fit comes only after the sojourner is able to change her or his role and cognitive processes in ways that lead to more effective communication.

#### *Intercultural Transformation Theory*

Kim and Ruben's (1988) intercultural transformation theory more specifically explains the growth process of the sojourn in terms that fit a self-efficacy framework. Intercultural transformation theory assumes individuals grow during intercultural encounters through a process called the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. The theory maintains the individual is a dynamic, self-reflexive system that observes and renews itself "as it continuously interacts with the environment (a suprasystem made up of many person-systems)" (Kim, 2001, p. 35).

According to intercultural transformation theory, when incoming messages do not fit expectations, the individual's equilibrium is disturbed; resulting stress forces the individual to take adaptive measures to regain equilibrium. Each disequilibrium experience leaves the individual with an experiential lesson, leaving one less stressed and more flexible in subsequent



similar encounters because of greater cognitive, behavioral, and affective capacity from the mastered stressful encounter.

The theory of *disequilibrium*, or the reaction to the introduction of new ideas or experiences that provide new problems, employed in intercultural transformation theory has touched diverse areas in the field of communication and, in the process, has addressed the potential for human growth in relation to communication. In describing their model of disequilibrium via news shock, Chaffee and McDevitt (1997) explain that a disequilibrium model follows human instinct in assuming that the sensation of feeling unsettled, out of place, or experiencing the feeling of vertigo “produces a motivation to do something to avoid tipping over” (p. 5). The researchers add, “the changes the person undertakes to restore equilibrium can constitute human growth” (p. 7).

The theory of disequilibrium is further claimed at a foundational level by researchers who investigate human growth during childhood. Cognitive development theorist Jean Piaget (1985) points to disequilibrium as the impetus children need to regain equilibrium by constructing knowledge. Kim and Ruben (1988) further explain the theory of disequilibrium in terms of fundamental human growth, stating, “The dynamic tension between stress and adaptation and the resultant internal growth essentially characterizes the life processes of humans (as well as all living systems)” (p. 308).

Stress is an inevitable component of the sojourner’s experience; researchers have characterized intercultural experiences as inherently stressful (Kim & Ruben, 1988; Kim, 2001; Ward, 2004). During the stay abroad, a sojourner’s cultural and social expectations, values, beliefs, and attitudes are shown to be deficient in dealing with intercultural issues that arise (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). A sojourner must constantly adjust, through trial and error, many

of the cultural cues by which she or he formerly guided decisions and interactions. Reactions to stress may not always lead to positive outcomes. If sojourners' inner resources do not allow for the maintenance and restoration of equilibrium, they may "experience states of extreme panic, causing serious and prolonged damage to their psyches" (Kim, 2001, p. 60) or they may simply give up and return to their home country. "Such extreme cases are in the minority, however, and do not alter the common experiences of intercultural adaptation by the majority" (Kim & Ruben, 1988, p. 305). For those sojourners who stay, both negative and positive outcomes help form the basic structure of their growth experiences.

Gudykunst and Kim (1992) relate the stressful experience of initial culture shock to intercultural transformation theory by representing it as a sharp episode in the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, which over time is cyclic and continual. Kim and Ruben (1988) further conceptualized the stress of culture shock as "a precondition to change and growth, as individuals strive to regain their inner balance by adapting to the demands and opportunities of the intercultural situation" (p. 310). Kim and Ruben specifically point to communication as a central challenge, stating that, during culture shock, an individual must, at least temporarily, alter "existing cultural patterns of communication in order to make communication work as they intend" (p. 310).

Both intercultural transformation theory and the theory of self-efficacy emphasize similar points about human growth and come to similar conclusions. Both theories argue that in the process of performing activities – as applied to the present case, the combination of communication activities involved in the process of a sojourn – an individual may discover new aspects of her or himself and the task at hand. As with the downward turn of the spiral of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic of intercultural transformation, Bandura (1997) points out

that “these discoveries can sometimes produce the seemingly paradoxical effect of success lowering perceived self-efficacy” (p. 83). An illustration of this might be a sojourner who gains proficiency in the host culture language and in the process discovers aspects of the host culture that discourage her feelings of belonging and, therefore, lower her sense of efficacy. One American friend of the researcher who sojourned in Vietnam explained how she felt relatively capable within the host culture before she was able to speak the language. Once she gained proficiency in Vietnamese, however, she was able to understand that locals were making fun of her while she ate at cafes alone or bicycled in the heat of the day while they rested. What is important to keep in mind, however, is that while singular successes may lead to this paradoxical lowering of perceived self-efficacy, repeated successes in the realm of one activity, such as communication, will conform to an upward rotating cycle of growth in this domain of self-efficacy, resembling that of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic.

Kim (2001) further bridges the theories of intercultural transformation and self-efficacy explaining that, for the most part, individuals tend to successfully handle the “sink-or-swim” situations that come their way. “The natural adaptive drive is reflected in an instinctive curiosity and the power of initiative in pursuit of ‘efficacy,’ a sense of being an agent in the living of one’s life” (p. 35). Adaptation, as a life sustaining and enhancing activity, is rooted in the self organizing and regulating capacities of all living systems, which include perceived self-efficacy.

### *Self-Efficacy*

“People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). *Self-efficacy* does not refer to one’s actual capabilities, but to one’s *belief* in one’s capabilities. Bandura (1986, 1997) asserts that beliefs of personal efficacy, or one’s perceived capability to

organize and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations and produce given attainments, constitute the key factor of human agency. He argues that if people believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen. Conversely, if people believe they do have the power, they will make the attempt. Self-efficacy helps explain why people's behavior may differ widely even when they possess similar knowledge and skills. As a consequence, how people behave is better predicted by their beliefs regarding their capabilities than by what they are actually capable of doing.

Whereas psychology has been judged the most influential discipline in the field of intercultural relations, followed by communication, sociology, and anthropology (Hart, 1999), intercultural scholars have underutilized the theory of self-efficacy, one of the more well-known and useful analytical paradigms of the psychology discipline. Recent studies, however, have begun to relate self-efficacy to the sojourn by measuring self-efficacy as an antecedent to cross-cultural adaptation (See Harrison, Chadwick, & Scales, 1996; Palthe, 2004). Self-efficacy has a particular implication for investigations of the sojourn in that perceived efficacy is related to anxiety reduction. "Efficacy beliefs determine, in large part, the subjective perilousness of environmental events" (Bandura, 1997, p. 140). Threat is not a static presence; instead, threat is a relational matter concerning the match between an individual's perceived coping capabilities and potentially hurtful aspects of the environment.

People who believe they can exercise some control over threats may foresee challenge, fun, and adventure in their days as sojourners, instead of imagined calamities and failures. This concept relates to sojourners' experiences of culture shock and intercultural adaptation. For instance, a person who enters a stressful stage of culture shock with high perceived self-efficacy in dealing with ambiguous or unknown surroundings may judge the potential

perilousness of the experience to be at a lower level than would a person with low self-efficacy and, therefore, may experience adaptation differently.

The present study is specifically concerned with self-efficacy as an outcome of the sojourn and equates a sojourn with a set of mastery experiences, the essential source Bandura (1997) identifies as necessary to form self-efficacy beliefs<sup>ii</sup>. *Mastery experiences* “are the most influential source of efficacy because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed” (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). Further, successes achieved in the face of adversities are especially beneficial. As outlined above, a sojourn, with its multiple communication challenges, its often inherent culture and reentry shocks, and its possibilities of intercultural adaptation and transformation, offers a set of mastery experiences rife with adversity, experiences that reflect the disequilibration and reequilibration processes of the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic.

In addition, repeated performance failures do not necessarily lower self-efficacy levels, except in instances where one is exerting effort and where the situation is not adverse. Because the sojourn cannot be devoid of adversity, performance failures during the sojourn or a failed performance of the sojourn in general, may not necessarily lead to lower beliefs of self-efficacy. Key to the rise or drop of self-efficacy beliefs is the individual’s cognitive processing of the diagnostic information that performances convey about capability. “Therefore, the impact of performance attainments on efficacy beliefs depends on what is made of those performances [by the individual]” (Bandura, 1997, p. 81). A sojourner who judges her sojourn to be a success, whether it was objectively or not, would therefore most likely experience a rise in self-efficacy.

*Self-Efficacy and Communication*

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy has been applied to topics such as health, education, and immigration (Bandura, 1986; 1995; 1997; 1999; Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Maibach & Murphy, 1995; Pajares, 1997). In addition, self-efficacy has become a helpful and illustrative theory of empowerment in many fields of academic research. The concept, however, has only begun to touch the field of communication (Shefner-Rogers et al., 1998), even while human growth remains a central goal of many areas of applied communication research (Chaffee & McDevitt, 1997).

Examining the relationship of self-efficacy and communication can be especially useful in looking at intercultural communication, and specifically sojourner communication. Both mundane and crucial communication, once relatively simple and straightforward in one's home culture, become complex and challenging within one's host culture. In fact, during a sojourn an individual undergoes numerous and frequent communication-specific mastery experiences in adjusting to the host culture. Sojourners must regularly attempt to master host culture communication codes and rules, which Kim (2001) describes as "a monumental and lifelong task." Kim asserts the task "entails much more than 'mastering' the language alone, as strangers face the special challenge of learning the covert, subtle, implicit, complex, and context-bound uses of the language as well as the host's nonverbal codes" (p. 104).

Kim and Ruben (1988) point particularly to culture shock as a period of communication-specific mastery experiences, during which an individual must, at least temporarily, alter "existing cultural patterns of communication in order to make communication work as they intend" (p. 310). Kim (2001) also explicitly orients cultural adaptation with communication by placing adaptation at the intersection of the person and the environment.

Adaptation, therefore, is viewed “essentially as a communication process – the process that makes the intersection possible through the exchange of messages” (Kim, 2001, p. 32).

Communication self-efficacy is specifically evident when looking at how a person chooses to communicate and whether a person chooses to communicate at all. People act according to their beliefs in what they can do, as well as according to their beliefs about likely outcomes of performance. “There are countless attractive options people do not pursue because they judge they lack the capabilities for them” (Bandura, 1995, p. 7). Key to the raising or lowering of self-efficacy beliefs is not so much the performance successes or failures as the individual’s cognitive processing of the diagnostic information that the performances convey about capability. In terms of the present study, sojourners’ communication performances, regardless of success or failure, will convey diagnostic information about their communication capabilities and, therefore, help to shape their communication efficacy beliefs.

### Hypotheses

As Adler (1987) describes the sojourn in terms of a transitional process that moves an individual to a state of higher self and cultural awareness, Bennett (1993) describes the process of gaining intercultural sensitivity during intercultural adaptation as leading toward an ethnorelativist state. Both processes serve to decrease anxiety and enhance the experience of interacting. Sojourners who experience these processes will have stronger beliefs in their communication capabilities. Intercultural transformation theory bolsters this argument, pointing to how the stress one experiences during a sojourn forces one to take adaptive measures to regain equilibrium. Each reestablishment of equilibrium serves to decrease a sojourner’s levels of stress and increase levels of flexibility in subsequent similar interactions

because of greater cognitive, behavioral, and affective capacity from the mastered stressful encounter.

Similarly, Bandura (1997) explained that developing a sense of efficacy through mastery experiences is not a matter of adopting ready-made habits. Rather, it “involves acquiring the cognitive, behavioral, and self-regulatory tool for creating and executing appropriate courses of action to manage ever-changing life circumstances” (p. 3). As self-efficacy is a perceived state, and one’s choices are based on one’s perception of one’s capabilities rather than on one’s actual capabilities, this study is interested in sojourners’ perceptions of change in their communication self-efficacy levels rather than actual change. As “people guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3), people also guide their lives by their beliefs in changes of their personal efficacy.

H1: Respondents report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy after the sojourn, compared to before the sojourn.

Kim and Ruben (1988) stress that a sojourner’s experiences of growth are directly related to the difficulties of the sojourn. Bandura (1997) adds to this reasoning, arguing that performance attainments are partly determined by how hard one works at a given pursuit. Bandura states that an individual’s “value of successes and failures for judging personal efficacy will depend on the perceived difficulty of the task” (p. 82). Therefore, the more difficult the mastery experience, the more its mastery conveys new efficacy information for raising belief in one’s own abilities.

H2: The more respondents rate overseas experiences as challenging, the more they will report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy.



Sojourner reactions to challenges arising during the sojourn will not be judged similarly by each sojourner. If two sojourners have nearly identical performances while living abroad, one may interpret the performances as a success and the other as a failure, depending on what else they bring to the cognitive processing of the diagnostic information. Bandura (1997) argues “the impact of performance attainments on efficacy beliefs depends on what is made of those performances” (p. 81).

H3: The more respondents rate overseas experiences as a success, the more they will report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy.

### Research Methods

The present study measures sojourners’ self-reported perceived change in communication self-efficacy after their sojourn as compared to before their sojourn. International sojourners to Japan were questioned retrospectively after their sojourn using the Sojourner Self-Efficacy in Communication Scale (SSEC), which was created and validated following Bandura’s (1999) guidance on constructing domain specific self-efficacy scales<sup>iii</sup>. Survey questionnaires for pre- and post-sojourn questions were collected at one point in time via the internet from 212 participants.

The current study questions sojourners retrospectively about their perceptions of communication self-efficacy change. Limitations inherent in this approach will be discussed in more detail later, though it should be noted here that the main limitation is that a non-longitudinal study cannot claim to reflect actual sojourner self-efficacy change. The retrospective quality instead focuses the findings on sojourners’ perceptions of change in their self-efficacy beliefs as related to the sojourn. Future studies interested in measuring actual

change in self-efficacy beliefs might attempt longitudinal surveys wherein sojourners are questioned before and after their sojourns using the SSEC Scale or a similarly created scale.

### *Participants*

The sample for the present study comprises 212 respondents, all former participants in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET), a program sponsored by the Japanese government that aims “to promote internationalization at the local level by inviting young overseas graduates to assist in international exchange and foreign language education in local governments, boards of education, and junior and senior high schools throughout Japan” (JET Programme official Web site, <http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/>, Jan. 1, 2005). Since its inception in 1987 with 848 participants from four countries, the JET Programme has expanded to include more than 6,000 participants each year from 50 countries (JET Programme official Web site, <http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/outline/outline.html>, Jan. 1, 2005). Using Cohen’s (1988) power tables, this sample had adequate power to detect relatively small effect sizes ( $r = .18$ ).

The 212 study participants hailed from seven nations, including the United States (58.1%), Canada (26.7%), Great Britain (6.7%), Australia (5.2%), New Zealand (2.4%), Germany (.5%), and Lebanon (.5%). Average age of the respondents was 28.87 ( $SD = 3.91$ ), with 75.6% between 25 and 31, and an age range from 23 to 44. More women (67.8%) than men (32.2%) completed the questionnaire. Respondents had spent an average of 29.17 months ( $SD = 14.59$ ) living in Japan. Under half the respondents (46.2%) reported sojourning before Japan; for the remaining respondents (53.8%) Japan was their first sojourn.

Whereas the SSEC Scale is intended as a measure of any sojourner’s self-efficacy, JET participants, like any other specific group of sojourners, share certain characteristics. JET participants in most cases speak English well enough to teach it, hail from industrialized

developed countries, and have attained a bachelor's degree. Japan, like any country, also has certain cultural characteristics that make the sojourn unique. Japan's collectivist, face- and status-emphasizing, and racially homogeneous culture has been heavily studied by researchers of intercultural communication (Barnlund, 1975; Condon, 1984; Dillon, 2002; Finkelstein, Tobin & Imamura, 1991; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994; Gudykunst, 1993, Kowner, 2002; Tanaka et al, 1994; see Triandis, 2001, for more on collectivism and individualism).

JET alumni are an appropriate sample for the present study in that they are usually fully immersed in the host culture and often find themselves to be the only non-Japanese in their institutions and, in some cases, their villages. Their sojourns, therefore, are often filled with challenge and adversity. Those who have sojourned in various countries state that a sojourn in Japan can be one of the most difficult. While anyone living in a different culture might face difficulties such as language problems, misunderstandings, and cultural dissimilarity, most, but not all, JET participants hail from individualist cultural groups and face the added adversity of being an outsider in a collectivist, often exclusive country where conformity is highly valued and there exists a specific name for the outsider, which translates as "outside person" (*gaijin*). The term is not a compliment.

### *Measurement*

The scale was placed on a web site and participants were alerted to its availability via an e-mail query sent to international JET alumni associations and individual alumni listings. The original 42 scale items were pared down to the 27-item SSEC Scale through factor analysis. In addition, the on-line questionnaire included five demographic questions and four questions that had participants rate their overseas experiences on a scale of extremely unchallenging to

extremely challenging, their experience as a success or failure, locus of control, and whether they believed their overseas experience influenced possible change in their communication.

Participants were asked to answer the 42 self-efficacy questions according to before their sojourn and after their sojourn at the time of filling out the questionnaire (“now”). Only now self-efficacy scores were considered in the SSEC Scale’s validation. Before and now questions, and their differences are used to test the present study’s hypotheses. In exploring the dimension of sojourner communication self-efficacy, a principal components factor analysis was used to determine the measurement quality of the SSEC scale. Scale items had to have a primary loading of .5 and the primary loading had to be at least .2 greater than any potential secondary factor because the data showed a unidimensional factor (McCrosky & Young, 1979). At least three items were needed for a factor.

Following procedures set forth by McCrosky and Young (1979), a single unidimensional factor was identified accounting for 33 percent of the variance in the 42 scale items. For the unrotated matrix, as McCrosky and Young (1979) observed, less than 10 percent, or 2 items<sup>iv</sup>, of the 42 scale items had their highest loading on factors other than the first factor, indicating a unidimensional factor, which was named the SSEC variable (Table 1). The unidimensional factor was represented by 27 items with strong factor loadings yielding an alpha coefficient of .94. Item-total scores were correlated for the factor analyzed 27-item SSEC Scale. As 10 participants of the 212 total failed to answer all questions in the survey questionnaire, their answers were not included in the findings. The present study analyzes data for the 27-item SSEC Scale.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

## Findings

A paired sample t-test was calculated to test Hypothesis 1, which posited that respondents report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy after the sojourn, compared to before the sojourn. Hypothesis 1 was supported: Participants reported significantly lower self-efficacy scores before the sojourn ( $\underline{M} = 4.68$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) than after the sojourn ( $\underline{M} = 5.63$ ,  $SD = .65$ ). This difference of .95 was statistically significant,  $t(202) = 20.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . This difference is equivalent to a correlation of .56. Expressed in raw numbers, a total of 193 of the 202 JET alumni (95.5 percent) reported a perceived increase in self-efficacy after their sojourn in Japan; five reported a perceived decrease; and four reported no perceived difference.

Hypothesis 2 posited that the more respondents rate their overseas experience as a challenge, the more they will report a perceived increase in self-efficacy in communication. Hypothesis 2 was supported: On the 1-to-5 scale provided, mean challenge scores were 4.10 ( $SD = .66$ ). Challenge scores provided by respondents were significantly correlated with their perceived changes in self-efficacy ( $r = .14$ ,  $p = .022$ ).

Whether the trip was perceived as a challenge was significantly correlated with the next variable of interest, the perceived success of the journey ( $r = -.124$ ,  $p = .039$ ). This correlation is not surprising, given that one's perception of challenge can make it more difficult for one to perceive success. This finding underscores that the test of the relationship between perceived efficacy change and challenge is quite different from the test of Hypothesis 3, which posited that the more respondents rate their overseas experience as a success, the more they will report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy.

Respondents generally rated their sojourn as successful, producing high average scores on a 5-point scale ( $\underline{M} = 4.66$ ,  $SD = .68$ ). Perhaps due to the limited variation and generally high

scores on this scale, Hypothesis 3 was not supported: The correlation between perceived success of the sojourn and perceived self-efficacy increase was not significant ( $r = .037$ ,  $p = .299$ ).

Though there was not a significant correlation with perceived change in efficacy, it was possible that perceived success was related to respondents' general sense of communication self-efficacy. That is, there could be a relationship between how efficacious one felt before and after traveling and whether one ultimately perceived one's trip as successful. Post-hoc analyses, using a two-tailed significance test, found that the perceived success of the sojourn was, indeed, correlated with both before efficacy ( $r = .15$ ,  $p = .03$ ) and now efficacy ( $r = .21$ ,  $p = .002$ ).

### Discussion

In support of Hypothesis 1, the vast majority (95.5 percent) of the sample reported a perceived increase in self-efficacy after the sojourn. As the current study is one of retrospection at two points in time, the reported differences in communication self-efficacy do not reflect actual change, but instead reflect participants' perceptions of their change in relation to the sojourn. There is the possibility that some participants may have undergone other mastery experiences since the sojourn, either successfully or not, that affect how they answer the now items. In addition, some participants may have exaggerated their growth to supply more profound meaning to their sojourn experience. Finally, it is possible that some leveling or sharpening may have taken place as a function of the respondent's present state.

It is also possible that the difference scores do reflect the sojourners' perceptions of their communication self-efficacy change in relation to the sojourn. Self-efficacy is concerned with one's perception of one's ability, a variable that can only be tested through self-reporting. As sojourners make sense out of their experiences in a variety of ways, one being in the very act of retrospection and attribution of self-change, the 95.5 percent of the JET alumni who reported a

perceived increase in communication self-efficacy may arguably relate their experiences during the sojourn to this perceived change.

In addressing the four participants who reported zero difference in self-efficacy, Chaffee and McDevitt (1997) are helpful, arguing that an individual who shows “a high degree of internal consistency in one’s behaviors and feelings” (p. 20) is a person who is not growing. They caution, however, that a reported consistency does not mean there has not been growth, nor that there will not be in the future, “but simply that high stability and consistency are indicators of an individual who is currently in neutral, so to speak” (p. 20). Participants who reported zero difference in their self-efficacy may have been in “neutral” during their stay in Japan, or may currently be in a neutral place in their lives where, in retrospect, they judge their growth in communication self-efficacy during their sojourn in Japan to have been minimal to nonexistent.

In addressing the five participants who reported a decrease in self-efficacy, Kim (2001) is helpful, stating that while the majority of people adapt successfully, “not all individuals are equally successful in making transitions. The maintenance and restoration of equilibrium are possible only to the extent that the individuals’ existing inner resources allow” (pp. 59-60). Kim states that some individuals may strongly resist change, thereby intensifying their stress levels to the point that they are unable to avoid a “negative adaptation cycle,” in which a regressive process of change takes the individual “in the direction of increased stress, maladaptation, and psychic degeneration” (p. 60). In addition, sojourners’ predispositions will affect sojourn outcomes. “Not all strangers come to a new environment for the same reason or with the same personal history. Nor are the responses of that environment toward them uniform” (p. 165). Kim outlined three key aspects of predisposition that have significant bearing on a sojourner’s adaptation processes: “Preparedness for change, the proximity (or distance) of their ethnicity to

(or from) that of the host environment, and their personality attributes” (p. 165). The present study did not include questions about ethnicity, preparedness for change, or personality attributes; therefore, one can only posit that predisposition may have influenced reported self-efficacy decreases. Comparisons of available demographic characteristics of the four participants who reported decreased levels of self-efficacy, the four who reported no difference, and the 193 who reported increased levels, provides little illumination onto why these participants differed.

Hypothesis 2, which posited that the more respondents rate their overseas experience as challenging, the more they will report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy, was supported; nevertheless, the amount of covariance explained by challenge in self-efficacy difference scores (2.25 percent) is negligible. Bandura (1997) states that an individual’s “value of successes and failures for judging personal efficacy will depend on the perceived difficulty of the task” (p. 82). The more difficult the task, the more its mastery conveys new efficacy information. Sojourners further exhibit this relationship when they tell stories describing in detail the hardships and challenges faced during the sojourn. These stories serve as a sort of badge of honor for many sojourners who might realize, at least at a subconscious level, that the more profoundly challenging the sojourn, the more benefit they received. Thus, the self-reported challenge of the sojourn may be equally important as a sojourner gauges whether the experience was conducive for growth.

Hypothesis 3, which posited that the more respondents rate their overseas experience as a success, the more they will report a perceived increase in communication self-efficacy, was not supported. However, significant correlation between success of the sojourn and now scores of perceived self-efficacy was found, as well as significant correlation between success of the



sojourn and before scores of self-efficacy. Those JET participants who began the sojourn with a high sense of self-efficacy may be able to view their experience as a success more easily and had less room to show an increase in self-efficacy scores (this phenomenon is commonly called a ceiling effect). Further, the correlation between now self-efficacy scores and success may show that judgment of the mastery experience as a success correlates to a perceived higher sense of communication self-efficacy.

### Conclusion

Overall, the findings appear to reveal that sojourners perceive an increase in their levels of communication self-efficacy in relation to their sojourns. As the present study appears to be the first empirical exploration of communication self-efficacy and the sojourn as well as self-efficacy as a result of the sojourn, it adds to the intercultural discussion by illuminating a considerable perceived positive outcome of the sojourn and by providing a new vantage from which to view sojourner personal growth. In this final section, limitations of the present research, future research opportunities, and implications for practice are outlined.

### *Limitations of the Present Research*

First, as previously noted, the retrospective nature of the study must be highlighted as a caution about the use of the current findings. Due to the retrospective approach, the study is not intended to measure sojourners' actual change in self-efficacy, but instead to measure their perception of change. Thus, the current study is particularly beneficial to those scholars interested in sojourners' sensemaking of their experience and in their retrospective perceptions of growth. Weick (1995) points to retrospection as the most distinguishing characteristic of sensemaking. If respondents remember their self-efficacy behavior in a certain way, their memory is what guides them in terms of making sense of their process. In answering the

before and now questions of the SSEC scale, sojourners retrospect on their experiences and begin to more fully map out and make sense of their perceived changes in communication self-efficacy. For a measure of actual change in communication self-efficacy, a longitudinal investigation might be launched wherein participants are questioned previous to and after their sojourn, as opposed to one-time retrospectively. One study of sojourn outcomes that employs such a longitudinal pre- and post-test, and additionally includes a control group, is that of Hansel and Grove (1985, 1986) who found that high school exchange students showed greater increases in personal growth than those in the stay-at-home control group.

Second, the fact that both before self-efficacy and now self-efficacy scores were relatively high may point to SSEC scale item barriers and resistances not representing an appropriate level of difficulty. In the construction of a future scale, attempts would be made to identify and include items that represent more extreme levels of difficulty. Conversely, the overall high before scores may accurately reflect participants' levels of self-efficacy before the sojourn. People who choose to sojourn, a generally daunting task, may need high degrees of self-efficacy in order to make the initial decision to do so. Additionally, the high before scores may reflect that sojourners heightened their before scores due to the retrospective rating.

Third, until future studies with different types of sojourners are conducted with the SSEC scale the generalizability of the findings remains uncertain. Future studies using the SSEC scale may find that scale items show different ratings depending on the sojourner's home and host culture combination. For instance, scale items such as "When in a face to face conversation, how well can you gauge what another person wants you to communicate?" or "How well can you build consensus when you communicate?," which rated high, .71 and .69 respectively, for the JET sample, might not rate as high for sojourners from generally collectivist cultures who

sojourn in individualist host countries. Whereas “evidence indicates that efficacy beliefs have similar effects on human functioning across cultures,” cultural differences will most likely influence the goals sojourners set for themselves (Oettingen, 1995, p. 171). In addition, it is critical to differentiate types of adult sojourns, such as teaching vs. military (Bachner et al, 1993). On the other hand, participants were selected because they had finished their sojourns<sup>v</sup> and, therefore, would have endured reentry shock and further challenges to their new modes of communication. Hence, reentry shock may serve to blur the specific brand on communication behaviors left by different cultures and sojourner types and allow for more generalizability. Sojourners everywhere share certain experiences of adaptation. In this sense, and because items for the SSEC scale were formed from answers compiled from sojourners of mixed home countries, sojourn types, and destinations, it is possible that further research may find the current findings represent the general perceptions of sojourners.

### *Future Research*

Future research might look at perceived differences in self-efficacy scores of the multiple sojourner. A number of the sample respondents had sojournd before their Japan sojourn (N = 98, or 46.2%) and, while the numbers are not significant, of the 9 sojourners who reported a perceived decrease or no difference in self-efficacy all but one reported sojourning before. As this study did not gather in-depth personal information from respondents, this question is not possible to pursue with the data available, but future research of both the qualitative and quantitative variety might find this an intriguing avenue of questioning.

Future research might also look at the effect of time on perceptions of communication self-efficacy. The present study did not test whether perceived changes in self-efficacy levels after the sojourn lasted over time. The question of how long ago the sojourn took place was not

included in the survey questionnaire and should be included in future studies. Additional items might include questions about sojourner predispositions (Kim, 2001) and expectations (Martin, Bradford, & Rohrlich, 2003) that might affect sojourn outcomes and evaluations.

While the correlation between before self-efficacy scores and success is negligible, the finding does encourage an obvious direction for future study, which would be to empirically examine whether a high level of perceived domain-specific communication self-efficacy before a sojourn is related to successful adaptation and may be seen as a predictor of overseas effectiveness. Future research also might explore, with a new participant-specific communication self-efficacy scale, whether non-sojourn intercultural communication situations affect perceived self-efficacy levels. For instance, do people who live in multicultural settings and communicate interculturally daily perceive different levels of communication self-efficacy from people who live in homogeneous settings and avoid intercultural communication situations?

Future studies might also investigate the relationship of communication self-efficacy and the sojourn from a qualitative vantage. Researchers might ask participants to identify key events that led to perceived changes in self-efficacy, allowing sojourner participants and researchers to further the sensemaking process of the sojourn and its relationship to personal growth. Interestingly, a current survey of research on the impact of the sojourn found that quantitative analysis often reveals little in way of impact whereas qualitative analysis consistently demonstrates impact (Cushner & Karim, 2004).

### *Implications for Practice*

If communication self-efficacy difference scores do reflect sojourners' perceived change, then the benefits of a sojourn seem to make the hardships and challenges worthwhile. The

findings appear to confirm researchers' assertions that international exchange programs influence individuals at a profound level (Abrams, 1979; Armstrong, 1984; Bachner, Zeuschel, & Shannon, 1993; Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Cushner & Karim, 2004; Kauffmann et al, 1992; Sell, 1983), and the findings can be used to further encourage the promotion of these programs. Additionally, training for people who intend to go overseas has conventionally been limited to training about culture shock, adaptation, intercultural communication, details of specific host cultures, and other external forces the sojourner may encounter. Few training itineraries include information about the possible internal growth payoff of a sojourn and no trainings were discovered that include information about self-efficacy. Future trainings could include information about the process of mastery experiences and the possibilities for perceived increased self-efficacy, helping sojourners become more engaged with the challenging processes of internal change during the sojourn.

Trainings might also encourage sojourners to productively channel their perceived increased levels of self-efficacy in conscious and deliberate ways. Bandura (1997) relates that the current state of world and local affairs calls for individuals with a high sense of perceived self-efficacy. "Wrenching social changes are not new over the course of history, but what is new is their magnitude and accelerated pace. Rapid cycles of drastic changes require continuous personal and social renewals. These challenging realities place a premium on people's sense of efficacy to shape their future" (p. vii). The more that post-sojourn individuals perceive a high sense of communication self-efficacy, the more one might argue their communication lines will stay open and vital, allowing for interactive, proactive alternatives to the personal withdrawals or destructive reactions that might relate to a lack of efficacy in this domain. Further, Bandura

states that a strong sense of efficacy acquired in one area of functioning may transfer to other areas, thereby creating a general sense of personal efficacy.

Bandura (1995) cautions that a strong sense of efficacy in socially valued pursuits, such as communication, is conducive to human attainment and well being, but is not entirely an unmixed blessing. “The impact of personal efficacy on the nature and quality of life depends, of course, on the purposes to which it is put” (p. 1). A strong sense of self-efficacy can be particularly problematic where and when the “voracious pursuit of self-interest” produces effects that are collectively detrimental. Accordingly, enhanced communication self-efficacy – whether developed as a byproduct of sojourning or another mastery experience – cannot be taken uncritically as an absolute good. Rather, in order to avoid what Bandura has identified as the type of “special-interest gridlock that immobilizes efforts to solve socially the broader problems of society” (p. 2), such self-efficacy must be consciously situated within a broader ethical context, one that fosters the pursuit of collectively beneficial societal transformation and renewal.

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Table 1: Factor Analysis of the 42 items that pared down to the 27-item Sojourner Self-Efficacy in Communication (SSEC) Scale (N=202).\*

Scale Items	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
1. How well are you able to adapt to frequent topic changes in an interaction?	.51	-.11	.13
2. How well can you introduce new or different ways of solving a problem in an interaction?	<u>.58</u>	.13	.02
3. How well can you ask questions to get what you need?	<u>.54</u>	.15	-.03
4. How well can you infer or guess at the meaning of messages in an interaction?	<u>.58</u>	-.29	-.09
5. How well can you communicate with strangers on public transit?	.49	.08	.02
6. How well can you inspire others to gain new insight when you communicate with them?	<u>.67</u>	-.10	-.03
7. How well can you invent new words or Phrases to illustrate unique circumstances?	.56	-.11	.04
8. How well can you stand up in a group of People and give your opinion?	.55	-.16	-.10
9. How well can you think possible outcomes through before you speak?	<u>.65</u>	.16	-.23
10. How well are you able to adapt to an interaction in which the topic changes from familiar to unfamiliar territory?	<u>.68</u>	-.20	-.09
11. How well can you communicate with people who do not share your language?	.56	-.51	-.05
12. How well can you explain abstract concepts?	<u>.61</u>	-.08	-.20
13. How well can you communicate with people who are in positions of authority?	<u>.58</u>	-.11	-.13
14. How well can you assert your opinion when you communicate?	.54	.26	.07
15. How well can you communicate when people are trying to intimidate you?	.59	.40	-.39
16. When in a face to face conversation, how well can you gauge what another person wants you to communicate?	<u>.73</u>	-.11	-.04
17. How well can you recognize subtle shades of meaning in an interaction?	<u>.70</u>	-.17	-.08
18. How well can you communicate in a discussion criticizing your own culture?	<u>.56</u>	-.03	-.05

\* Scale items that loaded cleanly on Factor I have their factor loadings underlined and constitute the 27-item SSEC Scale. Items that appear to load cleanly, but are not underlined, are not .2 greater than their loadings on Factors II through X and, therefore, are not included in Factor I.

Table 1 (continued)

Items	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
19. How well can you communicate with people from different cultures within your own country?	<u>.61</u>	-.29	-.26
20. How well can you gauge the appropriate manner in which you are expected to communicate in an interaction (for instance, in a job interview)?	<u>.56</u>	-.16	.26
21. How well can you shift your communication between words and body language to get your point across?	<u>.61</u>	-.20	.39
22. How well can you predict what another person will say in an interaction?	<u>.67</u>	-.03	.30
23. How well can you listen when you are in a communication situation?	<u>.58</u>	.14	.24
24. How well can you communicate in a discussion bringing up international issues?	.51	-.03	-.52
25. How well can you communicate in impromptu situations?	<u>.68</u>	-.06	-.27
26. How well can you communicate with people from different countries?	.57	-.40	-.32
27. How well can you recognize whether it is appropriate to engage in confrontation?	<u>.63</u>	.16	.02
28. How well can you approach someone to whom you are attracted?	.49	.40	.12
29. How well can you see things from another person's point of view in an interaction?	<u>.60</u>	.12	.04
30. How well can you shift between or among languages when you communicate?	.45	-.02	-.08
31. How well can you take criticism?	<u>.59</u>	.39	.06
32. How well can you communicate your agreement or disagreement in an argument?	<u>.62</u>	.33	-.08
33. How well can you communicate with people with disabilities?	<u>.53</u>	.14	.28
34. How well can you communicate your emotions?	.48	-.11	.35
35. How well can you accept silence or a long pause in an interaction?	.45	.13	.12
36. How well can you communicate with people who are of a significantly different age than you?	.57	-.10	.48
37. How well can you use humor in your communication?	.59	-.05	-.02

Table 1 (continued)

Items	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III
38. How quickly can you find common ground with others when you communicate?	<u>.64</u>	-.06	.21
39. How well can you communicate with people you strongly disagree with?	<u>.54</u>	.30	-.04
40. How well can you communicate without using words (i.e., facial expressions, hand gestures, drawing, etc.)?	<u>.51</u>	-.24	.21
41. How well can you build consensus when you communicate?	<u>.70</u>	.25	-.04
42. How well can you communicate with people you don't like?	<u>.61</u>	.19	.01

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> A sojourn, as defined here, involves individuals living within a location and culture different from their own for a period of six months to five years with the intention to return home (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

<sup>ii</sup> The scale used to measure self-efficacy in the present study focuses specifically on the mastery experience as enacted in the sojourn. The other sources of self-efficacy information are vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. While all four sources can feed an individual's sense of self-efficacy, "enactive mastery produces stronger and more generalized efficacy beliefs than do modes of influence relying solely on vicarious experiences, cognitive simulations, or verbal instruction" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80).

<sup>iii</sup> Bandura cautions that efficacy scales must be domain specific, as each scale is appropriate only to specific study respondents and a specific domain of self-efficacy. In the case of the present study, the domain of self-efficacy is communication and the respondents are sojourners. He argues that general self-efficacy scales lead to meaningless data that, when correlated with other variables, provide meaningless correlations. In order to ensure face validity, items for the SSEC Scale were based on responses to open-ended questionnaires from a convenient sample of 17 graduate and undergraduate students. Respondents were 14 females and 3 males of diverse nationalities (United States = 10, Japan = 4, Germany = 1, Chile = 1, Canada = 1) ranging in age from 21 to 62 years ( $M = 32.5$ ,  $SD = .13$ ) who had completed sojourns to various destinations. Following Bandura's (1999) suggestions, participants were asked about barriers and resistances to the specific domain of self-efficacy being studied, communication self-efficacy. Following Bandura's example of scale questions, each statement in the SSEC Scale began with "How well can you..." in order to measure perceived ability to overcome barriers one might face when communicating. In order to ensure construct validity, creation of the SSEC Scale included cross-validation with three existing scales: the Unwillingness to Communicate Scale (Burgoon, 1976), which showed significant negative correlation with the SSEC scores; the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen & Starosta, 2000), which showed significant positive correlation; and the Television Affinity Scale (Rubin, 1982), which showed no correlation.

<sup>iv</sup> Neither of the two items, however, were at least .2 greater than any potential secondary factor, seeming to further indicate a unidimensional factor. Item 24 had its highest loading (-.52) on Factor III. Item 30 had its highest loading (.48) on Factor IX.

<sup>v</sup> Effort was taken to ensure members of the sample no longer lived in Japan. The majority of participants (more than 75 percent) were contacted individually, and only if they had an address outside of Japan. Some participants contacted by alumni groups may have answered the survey questionnaire while permanently living in Japan, making them not true sojourners, but instead migrants or expatriates. The scale, regrettably, did not ask where participants currently lived.