Foreign student adjustmentment at Iowa State University

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Foreign student adjustment at Iowa State University

by

Sandra Lee Humphrey

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Teaching English as a Second Language)

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
1990
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Each year, millions of people, residents of every country in the world, leave their homes to go abroad. Their purposes in sojourning to distant, unfamiliar places are varied. Some want to travel, some go on business, some wish to serve those in need through volunteer service, and still others hope to receive a high-quality education. Regardless of the motives behind travel, living in a foreign country, even for just a few days, affords new experiences and different, often uncomfortable, feelings about the surroundings.

Foreign students in particular have often been observed in order to assess their reactions to the new situations they encounter at their universities. Perhaps they have tended to be the focus of such study because they usually go abroad for a long period of time. Additionally, success in meeting their goals (i.e., an academic degree) is dependent on their adjustment. That is, difficulty in coping with aspects of the new environment often leads to academic trouble, and foreign students who are unable to concentrate on their required coursework may be obliged to return home without their degrees. Therefore, it appears that the exigencies of studying and other academic responsibilities make foreign students’ processes of cultural adjustment and coping critical indeed.
Language and Culture

Students beginning a university education face a myriad of problems. Most aspects of college life are new to freshmen; for many, it is their first experience away from home, family, and friends. Foreign students, like native students, must confront most of these same difficulties; however, they also have additional problems to resolve.

First, in order to study in a foreign university, these students must enter a "second language" environment. Some students are better equipped linguistically than others to do this, despite the fact that most foreign students in the U.S. must achieve a minimum score on a standardized test of English. Nevertheless, all foreign students, regardless of individual proficiency level, regularly confront such diverse activities as attending classes, socializing with local people, and shopping for groceries in a second language.

Additionally, a foreign student must confront not only a new language but a new culture as well; people in the host country simply have different ways of doing things and of looking at life. The concept of "culture" has been defined in a variety of ways; however, it may be generally defined as both tangible artifacts and non-tangible ideas which "characterize a given group of people in a given period of time" (Brown, 1987, p. 122). Another definition highlights the "systems, techniques, and tools" which make up a way of life, describing culture as composed of a combination of material artifacts, customs, and sets of beliefs and values (Saville-Troike, 1979, p. 139). Culture, then, is inherent in the particular society into which individuals are born, and they inevitably acquire a sensitivity for the way of life and world view advocated by those around them. Culture is tied to "reality," although this reality is subjective rather than absolute since it involves the perceptions of individuals who
have been exposed to a certain way of evaluating life and its experiences. Indeed, Korzenny (1981) calls culture a “way of perceiving the world” (p. 104).

Furthermore, culture plays a significant role in successful or unsuccessful adjustment to a foreign country. Sojourners following customs that are perfectly normal and acceptable in their own culture may behave in ways that are misunderstood or unacceptable in the host country. Disequilibrium may result for the sojourner when members of the host culture show disapproval, or the individual him/herself realizes that the behavior is inappropriate. These feelings, in turn, can influence the individual to perceive his/her adjustment to the target culture as more negative. Thus, the interplay between cultures has the potential to be a frustrating and even a depressing experience, as well as an enlightening one.

Foreign students, then, must cope with both these facets of the country in which they will study: language and culture. Moreover, these two concepts are not considered separate and distinct entities, acting independently of each other. Language, in fact, has been regarded by many researchers as one of the most important components of culture.

Brown (1987, p. 123) states, “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. Saville-Troike (1979) calls language a “key component of culture” (p. 139). In effect, language is the main method by which the elements of a particular culture are communicated. Children, in acquiring their native language, also acquire their native culture; by the same token, “The acquisition of a second language ...is also the acquisition of a second culture” (Brown, 1987, p. 124).
Since language is an important part of culture and culture, in turn, plays an important role in adjustment when a sojourner travels to a foreign country, it would appear that language is involved in the cultural adjustment process. Indeed, it has been claimed that second language proficiency and cultural adjustment share a kind of circular relationship: better language proficiency leads to better adjustment, which in turn encourages continued mastery of the target language. McLaughlin (1987) defines this as a “question of causality.” For this researcher, “the line of causality is bi-directional. Perceived distance [between two cultures – the main factor he considers in successful or unsuccessful adjustment] affects second language acquisition and is affected by success in second language acquisition” (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 126).

The way foreign students and anyone in a foreign country adjust to their new environment helps determine what kind of a cross-cultural experience they will have. Of particular interest to the ESL professional is the notion that cultural adjustment is a factor in shaping second language acquisition, and vice versa. If we acknowledge that foreign students arriving in the U.S. confront not only a linguistic barrier but a cultural one as well, certainly it is beneficial to have an understanding of the kinds of difficulties these students experience while undergoing the process of acculturation. But exactly how do foreign students initiate and continue this process of adjustment to a new language and society?

**Cultural Adjustment Theories**

Psychologists, sociologists, and educators have long been interested in describing the processes and systems of adjustment which sojourners experience in a new country. As noted earlier, foreign students have frequently been the focus of such
research, and various models of how and under what circumstances these students do or do not successfully adjust have been postulated. For example, Hendricks and Skinner (1975) claimed that the constraints of the legal and social status of foreign students lead to their selection of "social brokers" with whom to interact. These people, "instrumental in the student's 'strategy for coping' and in his getting through the stay in the United States," will consequently influence adjustment patterns most significantly. A different view was taken by Boehner (1982), who asserted that poor cultural adjustment can most adequately be explained by the foreign student's lack of "social skills" with which to interact appropriately in the new environment. Better adjustment is eventually seen when the student becomes more socialized in the "rules and routines of behaviour" of a particular society.

In contrast, however, many researchers have posited that the most significant factor influencing cultural adjustment is the duration of the sojourn. That is, individuals in a foreign culture will report particular acculturation patterns based on a series of emotions and difficulties experienced "chronologically" over time. The two most widely-recognized of these theories were hypothesized after observing missionaries and Fulbright scholars, but were applied even initially to the study of foreign students' experiences. These processes and the stages which comprise them will be outlined.

**Oberg's Four-Stage Theory**

Based on his observations of missionaries in Third World countries, Oberg (1954) theorized a four-stage sequence in cultural adjustment. In his view, these four stages are:
1. “Honeymoon” phase
2. Culture shock
3. Recovery
4. Adaptation/Assimilation

Adjustment is seen as a process that, while not necessarily invariable, usually progresses through these four basic steps in order, and each phase of cultural adjustment has its own unique characteristics. The “honeymoon” phase is one of excitement and euphoria, where everything about the foreign country appears fresh, new, and intriguing. Often, because there has not been enough contact with native people or simply because not enough time has passed, the new country seems very similar, at least superficially, to the sojourner’s home country. During this phase, the sojourner has a very positive attitude about the foreign country.

After a period of time (which may vary from individual to individual), “culture shock” sets in, following the realization that many cultural differences do exist, differences which had been previously hidden or ignored in favor of apparent similarities. This phase is manifested both through physical and emotional symptoms, and it results from the confusing and ambiguous situations when an individual doesn’t know how to behave appropriately in a foreign culture. A real “shock” is experienced, then, when that which seems familiar and has been taken for granted fades completely in the new environment. People who experience culture shock and who are unable to overcome their negative feelings about the foreign country will often opt to return home at this point. This can be an especially tragic decision for a foreign student whose goal is to earn an academic degree.

According to this four-stage theory, those who are able to resolve their culture shock proceed to the next stage of cultural adjustment. This is a period of gradual,
yet often vacillating “recovery,” characterized by a frustrating feeling of belonging to neither the native nor the host culture. This concept, expanded on by Lambert (1967), is termed “anomie,” and he suggests it has a special connection with second language acquisition. According to Lambert, sojourners begin to feel the onset of anomie, feeling alienated from both cultures, when their proficiency in the second language becomes quite high. That is, as soon as they are able to begin really communicating in the target language with native members of the target culture, they feel more and more removed from their own culture, while at the same time realizing that they are not full members of the target culture either.

The “culture stress” which characterizes this third stage of gradual recovery has the potential, as does the culture shock of the previous phase, to influence a sojourner’s decision to return home. Feeling their identities strongly divided, individuals in this stage may feel an obligation to “decide for” one culture or the other. Those who “choose” the native culture usually return home; those who are able to comfortably blend both the native and target cultures into their personal identities proceed into the fourth and final stage of adjustment.

Though a process as complex as cultural adjustment is never really complete, the last phase is one of adaptation or assimilation to the target culture. In essence, sojourners reaching this phase have decided not only to physically remain in the target culture but to fully assimilate themselves into the society as well. Target language proficiency at this point is, of course, no longer a problem. Individuals who arrive at this stage have often acquired more permanent reasons for assimilating into the target culture, such as marriage or work. Whatever their motives, however, sojourners who find themselves so adapting to the target culture have, according to
Oberg’s view of cultural adjustment, experienced the three stages which precede it. In the process, they have acquired not only a second language but a second culture and “identity” as well.

**Lysgaard’s “U-Curve” Theory**

Lysgaard (1955) proposed an adjustment sequence of similar content, formulated after interviewing Norwegian Fulbright Scholars whose host country was the United States. Lysgaard found that those who had been abroad for less than four or more than 18 months generally reported satisfactory adjustment, while those in the U.S. between four and 18 months typically reported unsatisfactory adjustment. This discovery led him to postulate the “U-Curve” description of cultural adjustment (see Figure 1.1). It is intuitively clear how the “U-Curve” corresponds to the four stages introduced by Oberg; the initial high point upon arrival (favorable perception) falls into a stressful, more negative period during the “middle” of the sojourn. If the sojourner remains, this is followed (in an upswing of the “U”) by better adjustment after the passage of more time and experiences. While the “four stages” theory is descriptive and includes the concept of culture shock, the clarity of the “U-Curve’s” graphic representation is not to be underestimated. Indeed, Lysgaard’s study is considered a classic and is cited in nearly all research on foreign student adjustment since that time. Both views of cultural adjustment, however, clearly affirm similar feelings and experiences as salient at particular stages in a sojourn.
Conclusion

Millions of sojourners come to the United States each year; many foreign students are among them. In adjusting to their new environment, they utilize a number of coping strategies, despite obstacles of language, subjective culture, and the difficulties of daily life in a foreign country. As language has been shown to be an inseparable part of culture and culture a major factor in adjustment, so language and adjustment also share a reciprocal relationship of mutual influence.

Certainly a heightened awareness of foreign students' cultural adjustment experiences may be gleaned by a clearer understanding of the specific difficulties and problems they face. This is important and necessary for the ESL professional in facilitating positive interaction with foreign students in U.S. universities, as well as in better understanding the impact these experiences have on students' second language acquisition and proficiency. Therefore, the research questions to be addressed by the present study are: What specific aspects of U.S. culture prove the most troublesome for foreign students at the beginning and during later stages of their sojourns? Does the general tendency of a "U-Curve" exist in the cultural adjustment processes of foreign students at Iowa State University, or in facets of that adjustment process? What role does second language acquisition and/or proficiency play in adjustment?
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

While foreign students have been coming to study in the United States for many years, a great influx began after World War II. Since that time, researchers interested in this growing segment of the U.S. student population have implemented studies designed to test a variety of hypotheses regarding the foreign student experience. A number of recent studies have concentrated specifically on transition and adjustment, the most notable of which will be highlighted here.

Research Focusing on Difficulties Experienced

A large number of studies have been designed to elicit responses from foreign students as to the specific problems they confront during the period of cultural adjustment, or the extent to which they experience them. The majority of these have been cross-sectional, making contact with the foreign students only once during the research (although the subjects themselves had usually been in the U.S. for varied amounts of time). A smaller number of studies have claimed to take a longitudinal focus, having had contact with the subjects at least twice during the period of the research.
Cross-sectional studies

Adelegan and Parks (1985) conducted a cross-sectional study, the scope of which was to look at the effect of personal attributes and environmental conditions on academic, interpersonal, financial, psychological, food, and climatic problems experienced by African students. A sample of 33 African students who had been in the U.S. an average of 3.91 years were given a questionnaire administered orally as a personal interview. The seven items in U.S. culture identified as causing the most difficulty were getting the food, clothing, and music of their home country, adjusting to the difference in climate, getting news from home, getting around town, and developing relationships with local people. The most significant finding regarding personal variables was that older students and married students seemed to have more difficulty making the transition to the U.S.

This idea of "transition" was a key one for the study; Adelegan and Parks stressed that these students were dealing with the problem of both "separation and incorporation." They were "straddling two cultures, reluctantly relinquishing one and adaptively confronting the other." This notion of being intimately involved in the home culture while simultaneously adjusting to the host culture is significant, in that it carries the influence of native culture on subsequent adjustment one step further. It is possible that adjustment is affected not only by the "hidden dimensions" of native culture, but by an ongoing and tangible connection to it as well.

Payind (1979) carried out another cross-sectional study, focusing on students from Afghanistan and Iran. The purpose of this study was to look at academic, personal, and social problems within the context of independent variables such as country of origin, sex, age, marital status, duration of stay in the U.S., etc. A ques-
A questionnaire/checklist of foreign student problems was administered to 120 Afghan and 125 Iranian students. Both academic and social problems were assessed. The most severe academic problems were related to lack of English proficiency and to differences between the educational systems of the students' home countries and the U.S. The most troublesome social problems were reported as shyness, forming relationships with the opposite sex, and establishing satisfactory relationships with foreign student offices and with professors. Interestingly, Payind reported that "students tended to relate their social problems to differences existing between the cultures of their countries and the culture of the United States . . . ," which seems evidence for the influence of perceived "social distance" between the native and target cultures on subsequent cultural adjustment.

Additionally, Payind found that, while nationality was not a significant factor in difficulties reported, sex and age were (women reported more problems than men, and younger subjects reported more problems than older ones). Married students and graduate students reported fewer problems, while those who had been in the U.S. for a shorter period of time reported more problems (indicating possible conformity to the "U-Curve," depending on the length of time).

Sharma (1973) focused on academic, personal, and social problems in terms of difficulty level ("great," "some," "little," or "no difficulty"), and length of time needed to resolve them ("temporary," "prolonged," or "permanent difficulty"). She administered a student problem inventory to 195 non-European graduate students of various nationalities. These subjects indicated their major academic troubles to include giving oral reports, participating in class discussion, taking notes in class, understanding lectures, taking appropriate courses of study, and preparing written
reports. Significant personal difficulties were noted to be feeling homesick, finding adequate housing, having enough funds, locating enjoyable foods, and finding companionship with the opposite sex. These students also reported that their social problems tended to involve becoming used to American social customs, making personal friends with American students, being accepted by social groups, and participating in campus activities. Moreover, Sharma found that academic difficulties were the most severe of the three, and that they were consequently reported by the subjects to require a longer period of time in their resolution.

Another type of cross-sectional study has had as its objective the comparison of foreign and native students in specific troubles and intensity or frequency of these problems. One such study was conducted by Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman (1970), who compared the difficulties experienced by 61 Middle Eastern students with those of U.S. students. They administered a questionnaire consisting of the most probable areas of student maladjustment.

Their findings indicated that the greatest difference between the Middle Eastern and the U.S. students was that the foreigners tended to indicate great problems with social withdrawal. According to Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman, “Americans who enter college ... are likely to have become quite socially proficient ... the Middle Eastern student, on the other hand ... is probably overwhelmed by a feeling of being alien and finds it very difficult to function fluidly.” Besides this trouble, the Middle Eastern students in this study reported an inability to sleep well, sexual problems, and sadness. Therefore, Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman concluded that the main difficulties of these subjects stemmed from problems in social adaptation and the physical symptoms associated with the resulting unhappy situation. Their conclusion would
consequently support a "social skills" model of cultural adjustment, as posited by Bochner (1982).

Owie (1982) conducted a cross-sectional study which expanded on the results of this work done by Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman (1970), by investigating social alienation of foreign students. Based on Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman's findings that foreign students differed significantly from native students with respect to social withdrawal, Owie administered the social alienation subtest of the Dean Alienation Scale to 53 foreign students at two universities. He determined that "the level of social alienation among foreign students is higher than that expected to occur by chance." These findings corroborate those of Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman and re-emphasize the importance of social aspects in the cultural adjustment process.

In contrast, the results of a study done by Johnson (1971) point to a much different conclusion regarding the difficulties of foreign students compared to U.S. students. For this study, Johnson administered a foreign student problems questionnaire to 214 foreign students, while simultaneously polling 34 U.S. students on the same issues. This methodology was similar to that of Jarrahi-Zadeh and Eichman (1970), although Johnson added a "middle step" of asking the U.S. students not only what problems they themselves were experiencing, but what problems they believed the foreign students to be experiencing.

From the foreign students' points of view, English language proficiency and finances were most frequently mentioned as causing difficulty, but Johnson points out that 40% rated English "not a problem," and 45% said that finances were "not a problem." Based on this fact, as well as the finding that (English proficiency excluded) those items causing the most difficulty for foreign students were also the
most troublesome for U.S. students, Johnson concluded that “the foreign student needs to be studied more as a student than as a foreigner.”

Penn and Durham (1978) carried out another study implemented cross-sectionally, which attempted to isolate factors that may lead to positive cross-cultural interaction, as well as possible barriers against it. These researchers administered a questionnaire about the frequency and nature of cross-cultural interaction to 100 foreign students and 536 U.S. students. They found that informal contact occurred much more frequently than formal contact, and that all students believed increased contact would be possible through social activities and group situations. Penn and Durham found that barriers to personal interaction and friendship among foreign and U.S. students were often culturally-determined (i.e., stereotypes, preconceived views of other cultures, and different concepts of friendship), further support for the influence of perceived “social distance” on cultural adjustment. It was concluded that foreign students cannot withdraw and must interact with U.S. students if “international understanding” is to be promoted, another conclusion focusing on the importance of social issues in determining the nature of the acculturation experience.

Longitudinal research

In addition to these “one-time” studies, a piece of research which attempted to identify change in difficulties experienced over time was the last study in a series conducted by Pruitt (1978). Pruitt sought to isolate duration of sojourn as one factor in the specific difficulties which African students face in U.S. culture. She also investigated the role of other personal variables such as age, sex, level of study, country of origin, marital status, etc., in cultural adjustment, as well as examining
changes in values and perceptions.

A self-administered questionnaire designed to elicit responses about major problems confronted, degree of assimilation into U.S. society, and attitudes toward the U.S. experience was taken cross-sectionally by 296 African students studying in nine U.S. colleges and universities. Although Pruitt wanted to investigate how the troubles of these students fluctuated from their arrival to the present, her research cannot be considered truly "longitudinal." That is, the subjects were asked to report not only what they were currently feeling, but to remember what they had felt upon arrival; for some, this meant a time gap of several years. Nevertheless, according to these students' self-reports, Pruitt found that depression, tiredness, homesickness, irritability, and racial discrimination persisted over time, problems with climate, communication with Americans, loneliness, and food decreased over time, and financial difficulties increased over time.

Another interesting conclusion of this study concerned value systems. These African students criticized (what they perceived as) U.S. materialism, racial prejudice, sexual permissiveness, and competitiveness. On the other hand, they judged more positively U.S. industriousness, efficiency, informality, and the democratic ideals. These findings indicate that there were also deeper, more abstract concepts influencing their cultural adjustment, rather than just physical differences in the host culture and its way of life (although these were certainly significant).

Research Focusing on the "U-Curve" Hypothesis

Another focus of the research on foreign student cultural adjustment has been not only to identify and describe the specific difficulties experienced by these students,
but to identify those acculturation processes which might support Lysgaard's "U-Curve" hypothesis.

**Studies supporting the curve**

Several researchers have claimed that results from their studies affirm, at least tentatively, a tendency toward a "U-Curve." Mention has already been made of one of these studies where subjects who had been in the U.S. for a relatively short period of time indicated more problems than those whose sojourns had been longer (Payind, 1979).

In addition, Surdam and Collins (1984) conducted a cross-sectional study surveying foreign students who had been in the U.S. for various periods of time which resulted in concrete evidence for the "U-Curve" hypothesis. This study examined the relationship between adaptation and independent variables such as family and personal background, previous travel experience, perceived English language adequacy, length of time spent in the U.S., etc. A total sample of 101 men and 42 women from 35 countries were given a personal interview and completed an extensive questionnaire. This questionnaire asked the subjects to report biographical information, difficulties experienced in the U.S., contact with people from the U.S., and attitudes toward the U.S. Surdam and Collins found that those students who had been in the U.S. from two to four years scored lower on an assessment of adaptation than those who had been here for fewer than two or more than four years (displaying a "U-Curve" pattern). Additionally, perceived adequacy in English was positively correlated with better adaptation.
Studies not supporting the curve

Not all researchers who have had as an objective investigating the validity of the "U-Curve" have found evidence in its support. For example, Spaulding and Flack (1976) undertook a comprehensive review of all research done to that point on issues related to foreign students in the United States. Their conclusion regarding the "U-Curve" hypothesis was that the studies attempting to find evidence for this theory had been equivocal.

That is, they reported such varied conclusions as the "U-Curve" applying only to foreign students residing in "international house-type" living situations (Heath, 1970), a "U-Curve" adjustment process observable only for friendship patterns (Tanner, 1968), and a reversal of the "U-Curve" in the acculturation experiences of foreign students from semi- or underdeveloped countries (Becker, 1968). Therefore, Spaulding and Flack concluded in their review that extensive empirical research needed to be done before definite claims of any predictable cultural adjustment patterns conforming to the "U-Curve" hypothesis may be confidently made.

Finally, an international, comprehensive, and large-scale study was conducted using foreign students of many nationalities studying in all parts of the world (Klineberg and Hull, 1979). Again by administering questionnaires, these researchers looked for evidence of a "U-Curve" utilizing several variables such as number of problems reported, personal depression, loneliness, homesickness, etc. They concluded, however, that there was no such support in the cross-sectional segment of their study.

Moreover, they randomly selected 20 participants in each host country for longitudinal, "case-study" research, and they again found virtually no evidence to support the "U-Curve." Many of these students began immediately with "culture shock,"
while others adjusted beautifully to their stay without much evidence of cultural difficulty. Therefore, based on the individual experiences of these foreign students interviewed throughout an academic year, the researchers concluded that the “U-Curve” represents actual cultural adjustment patterns in only a very small minority of cases.

Summary

Much research has been conducted investigating various aspects of foreign students’ acculturation processes. Some studies have focused on the nature, frequency, or intensity of difficulties experienced, while others have attempted to find evidence regarding Lysgaard’s “U-Curve” theory. Some have done both. This research has been mainly implemented cross-sectionally (i.e., a one-time questionnaire) with a fair number of students comprising one sample.

Just as the designs and methods of the many studies have been varied, so have been their conclusions. For example, some researchers have reported that foreign students experience particular adjustment difficulties within academic and social aspects of university life more acutely than their U.S. counterparts. In contrast, other studies have concluded that there exists no such significant variation, or that unique personal and/or cultural characteristics are most important in determining the acculturation process an individual will experience. Likewise, some researchers have found evidence to support the “U-Curve” hypothesis, while others have found evidence against it. Therefore, these equivocal results continue to encourage further research which might clarify the findings of some of these studies.
CHAPTER 3. RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

While there is often a lack of agreement among the researchers discussed in the previous section (as well as among many scholars not cited here), there does tend to be unanimous agreement about the need for further study and documentation in the field of foreign student adjustment. There has especially been a dearth of research conducted longitudinally, and there continues to be a need for studies characterized by more frequent and intensive contact with foreign student subjects.

Several scholars have stated their concern about the lack of longitudinal research in this area. For example, Spaulding and Flack (1976) stated in the preface to their extensive literature review that “...most of the empirical research was conducted at a given point in time and few investigators have been able to follow students through their sojourns to see how their attitudes, lifestyles, English ability, grade point average, etc., change over time as a result of the foreign study experience” (p. 22). Likewise, Schumann and Schumann (1977) noted that “social-psychological aspects of second language learning” are usually examined through cross-sectional studies, and that “what has been lacking have been in-depth longitudinal case studies” designed to investigate one individual’s experience throughout his sojourn (p. 241). Consequently, a need for research conducted over a period of time rather than as a one-time cross-sectional sample can hardly be disputed.
Additionally, there has been a clear lack of research which leads to in-depth comments on individual foreign students’ processes of cultural adjustment and the specific difficulties experienced by them during that time. Most of the studies have been conducted utilizing a large sample of foreign students, a number which in the literature review of the present study ranged from about 33 to 955. There has been very little research conducted utilizing a case-study approach, a method which has the potential to yield more profound insights into the feelings and experiences of one unique individual.

As a result, a small number of subjects were chosen for the present research, implemented as a longitudinal case study. The methodology was designed in such a way as to focus most heavily on the attitudes and experiences of the individual students at particular points in time, rather than to elicit responses on their cumulative experiences or feelings. That is, each month the questionnaire was administered and the oral interview conducted with specific instructions to the subjects to respond with their most immediate emotions, as they were feeling on that day. Consequently, the objective was to extract a clearer picture of the unique cultural adjustment processes as they unfolded month by month.

As noted in the literature review, one of the largest studies ever designed and implemented was also one of the only pieces of research to contain case studies (Klineberg and Hull, 1979). The design of the present study, including the focus on difficulties encountered and the coping process, is such that its method and goals seem to be very similar to those of Klineberg and Hull’s research. However, several differences should be highlighted.

While both studies utilized a questionnaire and personal interview as instru-
ments of data collection, administrators of the Klineberg and Hull study gave the questionnaire to the subjects only once in the period of the study, at a point mid-year. The present study, on the other hand, was conducted administering the student problem questionnaire at each meeting with the subjects.

There were also two differences in the perspective from which the difficulties or problems experienced were reported. First, in the Klineberg and Hull questionnaire, subjects indicated only "yes" or "no" if they had experienced a particular difficulty at any point up to that time. The present study, in contrast, asked subjects to indicate the amount of difficulty they were experiencing at that particular time, selecting from a continuum of responses ranging from "very much difficulty" to "no difficulty." Second, the framework for reporting difficulties encountered in the Klineberg and Hull study was divided into two areas: 1) the university itself, and 2) society and culture in general. In contrast, the present study assessed difficulties with cultural adjustment as experienced within four different facets of this total adjustment, namely, language, academic, lifestyle, and social adjustment. Further details of the specific methodology utilized in the present research will be outlined in the following section.
CHAPTER 4. METHOD

Subjects

The present study was initiated by selecting subjects from a pool of approximately 65 foreign students who took the ESL placement test at Iowa State University on June 9, 1989. The criteria for selection included: 1) students should be of undergraduate status, 2) students should never have lived abroad previously, and 3) students should have been in the U.S. for two weeks or less on the date of the placement test.

These criteria were followed in order to choose subjects for the research who had had no experience with the cultural adjustment experiences of the transition period they were beginning. Graduate students were eliminated since their academic sojourns in the U.S. have been often documented to foster more positive adjustment (i.e., Payind, 1979). Indeed, Lee et al. (1981) reported in their research review that the findings of studies involving both undergraduate and graduate students indicated "an inverse relationship between academic level and the total number of problems" (p. 14). Thus, undergraduates would tend to report more difficulties, while graduate students would generally indicate fewer of them.

From these approximately 65 foreign students who took the June placement test, nine met the three criteria for inclusion previously discussed. Five of these agreed to
participate. These included two males from Pakistan, here referred to as “Paul” and “Matt,” two males from Malaysia, here called “Mike” and “Larry,” and a male from Singapore, here named “Sam.” A brief description of each of the subjects, as well as a summary of the “quality” of data received from each one, will be outlined later.

Procedure

The research was carried out by meeting with the subjects approximately once every six weeks from June, 1989, until January, 1990. Each meeting consisted of two parts: a questionnaire indicating the amount of difficulty experienced with specific facets of U.S. culture (see appendix), and a 20-minute recorded oral interview conducted individually with each student.

During these interviews, the subjects were given the opportunity to clarify and expand on problematic issues or feelings which the questionnaire responses had elicited. That is, each interview began initially with a discussion of the questionnaire statements and ideas which the student had evaluated as causing the most relative difficulty in his own life situation. Facets of U.S. culture from the questionnaire assessed as causing less difficulty were also addressed, followed by an open question to the student as to whether there was anything weighing heavily on his mind that he wanted to discuss.

Finally, the interviews were concluded by asking each subject what aspect of living in Ames or attending Iowa State University was giving him the most trouble at the present moment. Time was also given for students to talk about “non-tangible” facets of culture, such as values, attitudes, the role of friendships and relationships, etc. All of these interviews were then transcribed for use in analysis of the data.
Instrumentation

The 40-item questionnaire administered at the beginning of each meeting was designed to focus on four specific facets of cultural adjustment and transition which have been cited in much of the literature as tending to cause difficulty: language, academics, lifestyle and personal issues, and social behavior and attitudes. This conception of acculturation was adapted from Yao (1983), who posited four main areas of adjustment for Chinese students making the transition “from east to west”: language, schooling, lifestyle, and value system. This last notion of values and belief systems was not addressed directly in the questionnaire of the present study but through the interviews, as already noted, so that the questionnaire statements dealt with more directly observable facets of U.S. culture. (See Appendix for the 40 questionnaire statements and the adjustment facet category in which each was included.)

For the purposes of analyzing the questionnaire responses, six statements were eliminated from inclusion in the quantification process, as they did not elicit the anticipated information. Item #27, “Understanding U.S. humor,” was omitted from the language section since this difficulty was often attributed to not being familiar with cultural referents rather than trouble with English per se. Item #20, “Finding a good place to study,” and item #36, “Dealing with the university administration,” were deleted from the academics section since these difficulties, while within the broad realm of academics, often stemmed from other problems such as laziness or bureaucracy rather than being more directly related to schooling.

Finally, three statements were eliminated from the lifestyle section: item #23, “Homesickness,” and item #31, “Personal depression,” were assessed as being very general indicators of the students’ overall acculturation and to be more representative
of this rather than of the singular aspect of "lifestyle adjustment." Likewise, item #16, "Finding personal counseling," was deleted from this section since the statement proved to be ambiguous and was often interpreted by the subjects in an educational sense, especially in reference to academic advisors.

The remaining 34 statements on the questionnaire included nine in each of the four adjustment facets, with the exception of language, in which there were only seven. The responses to these statements for all six administrations of the questionnaire were tabulated for each subject by assigning a score of 1 for an answer of "very much difficulty," 2 for "much difficulty," 3 for "some difficulty," 4 for "little difficulty," and 5 for "no difficulty." In this way, better cultural adjustment as perceived by a subject was indicated by a higher adjustment score. The sixth and final response choice, "can't answer," selected when a subject had had no previous experience with the aspect of U.S. culture the statement described, was not counted in the total score. The scores were then added up for each month, yielding a score for each of the four specific facets of acculturation as well as an overall adjustment score.

Several mathematical adjustments were made when calculating these various scores. First, as noted earlier, the language scores were derived from only seven questions rather than nine. Consequently, they were multiplied by an adjustment factor of $9/7$ in order to directly compare them with scores for the other three facets, derived from nine questions each. Additionally, in cases where subjects chose the sixth response, "can't answer," that item was omitted, the remaining statements tabulated, and the score consequently adjusted in the same manner as described for the language score.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS

Description of Data From Each Subject

Mike

“Mike,” a 19-year-old electrical engineering major from Malaysia who had placed into English 101C, was exceptionally fluent in English. He usually spoke very rapidly, although he was somewhat lacking in the skills of pronunciation and grammar. He had come to the U.S. highly integratively motivated, hoping to find a job here after his graduation and perhaps eventually to settle permanently. Mike had much to share during the interviews regarding his feelings and the difficulties of cultural adjustment, although he tended to diverge to other subjects when commenting on a specific experience. He was, however, able to articulate many ideas regarding the process of acculturation to the U.S. that he was experiencing.

Paul

“Paul” was a 20-year-old Pakistani who had received most of his education in schools which had English as the medium of instruction. As a result, his English language proficiency was native-like (he had, in fact, passed out of English 104), and he had no trouble expressing his thoughts and ideas. Paul, a computer science major, was generally pleased with his U.S. education, but he missed his home very much
and often expressed his desire to be able to receive the same quality of education in Pakistan and be nearer his parents.

Paul was introspective, insightful, and very verbal, and he often seemed to be “thinking out loud” during the interviews. He commented on the fact that he took very seriously the responsibility of examining his own behavior and feelings and then trying to articulate possible motives for his actions or evaluations of his emotions. Paul seemed honest with the interviewer and with himself in his comments, even when he said he felt he should remain silent.

**Matt**

“Matt,” also from Pakistan, was a 20-year-old business administration major who had placed into English 104. Although his English language proficiency was basically good, he had quite a strong accent (though it improved greatly over the course of the eight months), making him difficult to understand at times. Matt was more reserved than Paul, initiating fewer responses or elaborative comments on his own. He appeared to be less involved in U.S. society or culture in general, building his world almost exclusively around his Pakistani roommates and other friends. Although he perhaps did not think any less about his cultural adjustment experience than did Paul, he was generally not as eloquent or as concise in expressing his feelings, emotions, or possible reasons behind the difficulties he was having.

**Sam**

“Sam,” a 22-year-old computer science major from Singapore who had also placed into English 104, spoke English with a native-like proficiency. In fact, he
referred to English as his native language, having used it frequently at home and having gone through English-language schools in Singapore. Although Sam’s language skills would have allowed him to articulate any thoughts or feelings behind his experiences, it appeared that he did not really contemplate his cultural adjustment in more than a superficial way. He rarely indicated problems with either the physical or the attitudinal facets of U.S. culture represented on the questionnaire, and even when prompted, he found it difficult to identify issues which disturbed him.

This may have been, at least in part, due to his almost exclusive association with other students from Singapore. By his own admission, he didn’t have any U.S. friends or even any interaction with U.S. students. The one difficulty which continually plagued Sam throughout the eight months was a financial one. This problem became even more acute after Christmas, at which time he had gone home to learn that the brother who had been providing his chief support had died. Although there was only one subsequent interview, Sam gave the outward appearance of coping sufficiently.

Larry

The other Chinese Malaysian, “Larry,” was a very reticent, withdrawn individual who had placed into English 101C. Although he met regularly with the interviewer and completed the questionnaire each time, Larry never initiated a comment during the interviews, responded “can’t answer” to many of the questionnaire statements, and spoke only when agreeing with the interviewer’s prompting. Because of the lack of information obtained from Larry, he will not be included in the results of this study.
Conformity to the “U-Curve” Hypothesis

Although the “U-Curve” has for many years been set forth as one of the foremost theories of cultural adjustment, a number of recent studies have found little or no evidence for this pattern in the acculturation experiences of foreign students in the U.S. (for example, Klineberg & Hull, 1979, or Spaulding & Flack, 1976). Similar results were found with the albeit small number of subjects in the present study. That is, each individual displayed a different progression of adjustment to U.S. culture, manifested by unique difficulties as well as mechanisms for coping.

One of the most significant conclusions of the present study is that all the subjects did adjust over time, their scores after eight months being higher than when they began their sojourns. Although all of the subjects displayed at one time or another physical symptoms associated with “culture shock,” they did not generally manifest the absolute chronological tendency suggested by the classic “U-curve” theory. That is, none of the subjects began their foreign sojourn on a high note, falling into a less well-adjusted period after some time, and then gradually adapting to a point of comfort roughly equivalent to the initial perceived adjustment or “honeymoon phase.”

The Subjects’ Experiences and Trends Within Individuals

In this section, the data will be discussed as they relate to each subject, with an attempt to describe and categorize trends within individuals. That is, what are the main points to note about a particular student’s acculturation process, and what are some possible reasons for this having unfolded the way it did? What did the student
himself have to say about this? How did he respond to the relevant questionnaire statements? How did he elaborate orally during the interviews?

**Mike**

“Mike,” who was Chinese Malaysian, began his sojourn in the U.S. at a lower overall level of perceived adjustment than any of the other three subjects, as Figure 5.1 shows. However, he did make great strides in his perception of more successful acculturation as time passed. Mike was one of the subjects who was very fluent in the expression of his feelings and experiences, and his adjustment pattern showed a number of interesting trends which will be highlighted in some detail.

Perhaps the most apparent of these patterns was the fact that Mike’s perceived difficulty with the English language remained consistently greater than any other facet of his cultural adjustment. As Figure 5.2 shows, Mike began his sojourn in June indicating that his language proficiency caused him the most relative trouble, and he still felt that way in January. (He had, however, adjusted positively overall during those months, in that he perceived all facets as giving him less difficulty than they had originally.)

A second related trend noticeable in Mike’s graphed adjustment process concerned the other three facets: academic, lifestyle, and social adjustment. As noted before, these three facets were perceived by Mike as causing him consistently less difficulty than language. The interesting thing, however, is that Mike did not in general judge any one of these three facets to be giving him a great deal more trouble than the others at any time from June to January. His academic, lifestyle, and social adjustment were perceived more or less equally from month to month. This, in turn,
Figure 5.2: Mike's Cultural Adjustment Divided by Facet
reinforced Mike's perception of his language ability as being consistently so much more troublesome than everything else.

Another noteworthy pattern clearly emerges upon examination of the data analyzed in a slightly different manner. As shown in Figure 5.3, the highs and lows of the score indicating Mike's perceived language adjustment run almost exactly parallel to the score representing perceived cultural adjustment for other facets combined (academic, lifestyle, and social) over the course of the eight months. That is, it appears that during the months that Mike felt he was, for whatever reasons, adjusting more effectively to the demands of using the English language, he also felt more positive about everything else. Conversely, when he assessed the academic, lifestyle, and social issues in his life more negatively (as in October), he also judged his language adjustment more negatively.

Although there was a definite close relationship between language and other areas of adjustment, a causal relationship cannot be established; the evidence merely indicates that, in Mike's case, "language" and "all other life facets" follow a very similar pattern of ups and downs throughout the months. In fact, Mike himself indicated only rarely through his verbal comments in the interviews that he perceived many of his adjustment problems to be caused by language problems. He did sometimes mention the possibility, however, and he occasionally contradicted himself in his assessment of the importance of language in successfully adapting to all other facets of life in the U.S.

That is, according to Mike, at times it's very important to speak well because proficiency in English is important for adjustment. At other times, there are other factors more salient to consider when looking at how an individual does or does not
Figure 5.3: Mike's Language Adjustment vs. Adjustment in Other Areas
fit in with the people and societal groups of a new culture. Mike also talked about particular places in his environment in the university and in Ames in general where he felt he could get along better linguistically than in other places; this will be addressed in more detail later.

Overall, however, the majority of what Mike said indicated that the difficulties he was experiencing were, in his estimation, influenced by factors other than language. For example, in July, Mike attributed academic trouble he was experiencing with several of his teaching assistants to a different educational system and teaching method. In October, he felt that difficulty he was having in writing English papers was related not to the language per se, but to problems locating sources in the library; other academic troubles during that month he felt were related to a lack of adequate educational preparation from his home country, Malaysia.

In December, Mike indicated that difficulty he was having understanding jokes was related to the fact that they were culturally-bound, rather than to his not understanding the words themselves. And in January, he expressed frustration understanding lectures for the simple reason that his classes were so big and held in large lecture halls, not that he had trouble with the language. At that time, he indicated that language didn’t even come into his head as a potential source of difficulty.

On the whole, then, while Mike tended to note each month that he felt his language proficiency was by no means perfect or perhaps even adequate, he still did not tend to see a causal relationship between that and other difficulties he was experiencing. In Mike’s estimation, language could be a problem but did not usually influence adjustment in other areas of his life to a great degree.

Another interesting phenomenon gleaned from Mike’s verbal elaboration of his
response to the questionnaire statement “having adequate English language proficiency for living successfully in Ames” gives possible further insight into the perception of language learning and development. Mike noted that he felt he sometimes had to cope linguistically with “two different worlds,” reporting these worlds to be an academic and a non-academic setting (more specifically, that of the university and that of Ames in general).

That is, Mike felt strongly that he had no trouble communicating with his professors or classmates because they were used to listening to foreigners. Once he stepped outside of his “academic” world, however, trying to do personal business at Kinko’s copy shop or Pizza Hut, he felt he wasn’t understood by those around him. “You see, when I speak English with my classmate or my professor, they might understand what I say … they’re used to a foreigner’s slang, but when I go off campus … when I talk to them in English, it seems like I have to repeat at least two time or three time ….” He labeled the off-campus setting “a real-life situation,” one in which he didn’t feel he could successfully cope with his current English, but, in contrast, he did feel confident about his ability to communicate successfully within the academic environment.

Speculation about a theoretical framework for explaining these linguistic perceptions and experiences incorporates Selinker and Douglas’ (1985) notion of “discourse domains.” According to this theory, a distinction is to be made between “external features of context” and the “internal perceptions of them in the learner.” The cognitive construct of a discourse domain is related to interlanguage development and helps explain how language users interpret context and engage their language skills in light of that interpretation. A discourse domain is seen as a mediator between the
salient features of a particular context and the features of the interlanguage which are subsequently chosen by the language user for that situation. Discourse domains are dynamic, because perception is constantly being adjusted, and of course, they also vary from person to person.

Therefore, Mike perceived certain discourse domains within which he simply didn’t feel as comfortable linguistically, at least in part due to the responses he received from other interlocutors. Mike didn’t perceive his language proficiency as static; rather, there were some linguistic situations, or discourse domains, within which he simply felt better prepared or within which he perceived his English as being more adequate.

At this point, an interesting question can be raised: Did Mike employ his usual interlanguage when speaking to people in these different “worlds?” Since he perceived himself as not knowing how to respond appropriately in certain situations, in this case non-academic settings, perhaps he actually engaged his interlanguage differently at these times than he normally would have. This certainly raises questions and issues which comprise a fruitful area for future research.

While it will be shown that many of the patterns described in the previous paragraphs were seen not only in Mike’s situation but in the adjustment processes of other subjects as well, there are also several notable occurrences unique to his personal acculturation experience. These include the fact that Mike’s perceived positive adjustment in all four facets increased to a high point in September from which it then fell dramatically in October. During this time, Mike continued to perceive language as giving him the most relative difficulty and academics the least, but all four facets suffered.
October was a bad month for Mike, a possible dip into the bottom of the "U-Curve," and some of his verbal comments shed light on possible explanations for this downswing. Although the tone of Mike's comments was not completely negative, the October interview was replete with mention of little things that were not going very well. For example, "...I find that I'm very lazy these few days ... I don't know why ...." He had received several bad grades on examinations, and admitted that it was these particular experiences that made him feel the most depressed. Also at this time, he was fully immersed in his academics and finding that he was not adequately prepared for some of his more difficult courses: "... maybe because I, in my country ... I don't have a strong basic course especially in physics and math ...."

Additionally, several new difficulties surfaced during this month, including sleeping problems and financial concerns. Mike found during this period that he could not sleep at night, but upon arrival in class he felt very sleepy. Financially, Mike had spent too much money during the summer session on interesting U.S. products he had never had the opportunity to purchase in Malaysia, such as computer books and magazines. As a result, he had literally depleted his funds, and had had to not only send for money from his family, but get a loan from a bank as well. These troubles appeared to weigh quite heavily on his mind during this month.

After the drop in perceived positive adjustment in October, however, Mike's adjustment during the following months eventually climbed by January to a peak higher than that of September. As noted earlier, Mike seemed to be highly integratively motivated, expressing very positive feelings and attitudes towards the culture and people of the United States. This attitude was reflected from even the preliminary stages of his sojourn; one of his first comments during the initial interview in June was that
he desired "first-hand experience with U.S. students." So although he did not ignore or deny difficulties he had in proceeding through the cultural adjustment process, Mike was nevertheless very positive in his attitude toward life in the U.S. and the transitions he was making.

This attitude, in turn, influenced his positive image of the English language and the efforts he made in attempting to improve his proficiency as much as possible. He even indicated in January that he always tried to speak in English, even with friends who spoke his native language of Chinese, because "I feel that I have to do this ... if I want to stay in the United States ...." According to Mike, his purpose for coming to the U.S. was not only to study in his "major course," but also to learn about U.S. culture and the English language. By January, Mike's plan was to stay in the United States after graduation.

Mike's determination to be as much a full member of U.S. society as possible is reflected in his January comments regarding social activities. He felt that he wanted to be more involved than he was, and he had consciously designed a plan for making new friends: "...from this semester onwards, I try to make myself free on Friday, every week ...I try to call ...one or two of my classmates to go out ...because I find that this is the way I can learn from them ...English ...." Due at least in part to these attitudes, Mike's overall adjustment soared in the months before the final interview. His parting comments indicated that "...seems like everything is better for me ...I try to make use in the United States ...culture, and things like getting involved, so seems like not much problem ...."

So again, while Mike indicated that language was often a problem, it can be speculated that perhaps his exceptionally positive attitude and high integrative mo-
tivation offset the negative influence that his perception of his proficiency could have had on other life and acculturation issues.

Paul

The other subject to be focused on in depth as a result of his honest insights and fluency in relating his experiences is Paul, the computer science major from Pakistan. As shown in Figure 5.4, the first interesting trend that can be noted regarding Paul’s process of acculturation is that his perceived language adjustment remained high over the eight months when compared with other facets of adjusting to U.S. culture. This was not surprising given the exceptionally proficient language skills he possessed, gleaned from education in schools where English was the language of instruction; Paul’s English contained virtually no grammatical errors and was accent-free. The notable dip in perceived language adjustment in January will be discussed in detail later.

The second pattern seen upon examination of the highs and lows of each of the four facets of Paul’s adjustment is that there was a good deal of variability throughout the eight months, particularly in terms of lifestyle and social issues. In the realm of lifestyle, this change in perception tended to center around aspects of cultural transition which varied from month to month.

These issues often included various religious concerns which arose from time to time, such as finding a place on campus to do personal prayers or the acquisition of allowable foods. This latter concern was originally a great problem; it was resolved during the first several months, but then it resurfaced again in October after the discovery of a religiously unpermissible additive in many kinds of food Paul had
grown accustomed to eating here.

Also variable was Paul's response to the Iowa weather (which changed drastically in itself throughout the months), as well as his physical health and ease of sleeping. These were perceived as more troublesome at the beginning of Paul's sojourn, in part due to the time difference between the U.S. and Pakistan, as well as to jet lag. While these issues were apparently resolved over the summer and early fall, they were again mentioned as causing difficulty due to problems Paul experienced in dividing his time among the many activities expected of a university student in U.S. society. In January, Paul noted that, "...I'm having difficulty kind of dividing my time...since I've come to the States I've been wanting to, you know, participate in some sport...on a regular basis...my physical health doesn't mean that I'm sick or anything, it's just that, uh, I'm getting soft, you know...it wasn't like that in Pakistan..."

Variability in the social aspects of Paul's acculturation was especially manifested in his perception of his ability to cope adequately with U.S. social customs and situations and relationships with the opposite sex, and to form and maintain meaningful and satisfactory friendships with people from the U.S.

Paul was an introspective individual who thought deeply about many areas of his life and the assimilation of his personality and social and cultural identity into his U.S. experience. As noted before, he was adept at expressing this in a sincere and genuine manner, and as he did so, he often raised questions about what it means to adhere to a social custom or to have a meaningful and satisfactory friendship in Pakistani culture and in U.S. culture. That is, Paul gradually became aware of the impact that culture has on personal and social identity. In October, he explained, "...the uncomfortable part is that it's probably o.k. what you people do and it's probably
o.k. what we people do, but it's only the difference that makes me uncomfortable ...

So while Paul initially felt uncomfortable with many of the social issues he encountered with which he was unfamiliar (i.e., dancing and going to bars, "Dutch treat," and the notion of sacrificing one's personal needs for the sake of a friendship), he eventually knew what to expect, although he emphasized a difference between knowing what to expect socially and feeling comfortable with that expectation. During the final months of the interviews, however, Paul realized that concepts such as a meaningful friendship are defined differently according to culture; it appeared to be these kinds of realizations that triggered the perception that he was not as well-adjusted socially as he had originally believed.

A final source of great variability in the realm of social behavior was related to Paul's involvement with members of the opposite sex. Never having had any such previous experience in Pakistan, this understandably became an area of confusion and struggle. Several relationships that were not appropriate when measured against his expectations and which consequently did not work out led to great variation in Paul's perception of his adequacy in this sphere.

Other patterns which can be extracted from the data (and which have already been discussed as they related to the acculturation of Mike) include the fact that there existed a close relationship between Paul's perceived language adjustment and the score representing the other three facets of adjustment combined (see Figure 5.5). Although Paul's language ability was consistently relatively high, it is interesting to note that from July on, perceived language adequacy did parallel, either up or down, adjustment in the combined areas of academic, lifestyle, and social.
Figure 5.5: Paul's Language Adjustment vs. Adjustment in Other Areas
In January, there was a notable fall in both lines, at which point Paul indicated some trouble with English as it related to understanding humor on television programs and communicating exactly what he wanted to say in English. This will be discussed in detail later; what is important to note at this point is that both adjustment scores (language and the other three facets combined) took a dip at this time.

Paul's level of language proficiency was much higher than that of Mike, and his lack of perception of a causal influence of language on other areas of his life was similar to Mike's. That is, Paul never indicated through his verbal comments in the interviews that he perceived his adjustment troubles as related to language. (Indeed, this would have been difficult to do, since his English proficiency was native-like.) Rather, Paul often blamed personal laziness for troubles with academic and lifestyle issues or a lack of understanding of societal/cultural norms or values regarding interpersonal relationships in the U.S. in the case of social difficulties.

For example, Paul indicated in July that academic troubles he was experiencing were related to differences in the educational systems of the U.S. and Pakistan. In September, he felt that difficulty “knowing what to expect in social situations” related to “a difference in values.” Problems meeting people from the U.S. or spending time with them were influenced, in Paul's assessment, by his own lack of initiative as well as a desire to be in control socially once he did make friends. In December, he attributed academic difficulties to problems distributing his time, and discomfort with social situations to a “different idea of fun.” Therefore, as was also the case with Mike, Paul himself did not attach much significance to the fact that his perceived language adjustment appeared to be related to adjustment in other areas of his life.
Paul also experienced the psychological reality of "discourse domains" as seen previously in the case of Mike. However, Paul's perception of his "two worlds," to use Mike's terminology, and what kind of English was required to survive in them, was very different. Paul never made any reference to trouble with language in any of the first five interviews, but in January he did mention linguistic difficulty in two areas. The first was in understanding cultural humor (usually references to names of people) on television. The other was in communicating exactly what he wanted to say when he was talking to people whom he perceived to be either better or less educated than he was; he indicated difficulties adjusting his use of register, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions.

Therefore, although Paul did not specifically talk about different "worlds," as Mike did, he clearly demonstrated an awareness of various "levels" of communication in English, some of which he realized he was more proficient in than others. Again, this dynamic conception of interlanguage could be interpreted within a theory of "discourse domains." It is also interesting to note that this was a linguistic problem of which Paul only became aware after many months of linguistic experience in the culture of his second language.

In summing up Paul's acculturation experience over the first eight months of his sojourn in the U.S., there are many miscellaneous notes regarding his unique situation which should be taken into consideration. Perhaps one of the most significant is that Paul displayed a pronounced "lifestyle gap" between the way he had been living in Pakistan and the lifestyle he found himself adjusting to in the U.S. Paul made numerous references to being a lazy person, being used to taking it easy, not having had many things to do in Pakistan, and not having had to study hard to get good
grades.

Coming from a wealthy family, Paul had always had any convenience he needed to make his life easy. He was used to sitting around, talking with friends, and in his own words, "...life has always been kind of easy, and I've always taken it easy, and I guess that's it ... I'm slow ... I take things too easy ... life is tough in the States, and it's not that way in Pakistan, or maybe my life was not that way in Pakistan ... I know, all the automated teller machines and all that, that's fine ... you don't have to spend a lot of time standing in queues in the banks ... but, I didn't do my cooking in Pakistan. I had all the time in the world, so it was o.k. if I went and stood in a queue or something ...."

It appeared to be difficult for Paul to give up the Pakistani lifestyle he was accustomed to, and to be "motivated" to accomplish the things he simply needed to get done in the U.S., both academic and otherwise. This gap in lifestyle may have somewhat hindered his cultural adjustment or his personal assimilation into what he perceived to be the systems of U.S. society.

Matt

The other student from Pakistan, Matt, had come to Iowa State University to earn a bachelor's degree in business administration. He and Paul were not only roommates in the U.S., but they had been close friends in Pakistan for 10 years as well. Therefore, they talked together about many of their experiences and expressed similar attitudes and emotions regarding a number of issues. Although Matt seemed to be pondering many aspects of his acculturation process, he was not as fluent or insightful in outwardly communicating those thoughts as was Paul. Matt's patterns
of cultural adjustment will be outlined with particular emphasis on those trends which appeared to be unique to his experience.

Of the four facets which comprise cultural adjustment as defined by this study, it was the social aspect of Matt’s experience which remained the highest and most constant in terms of positive adjustment over the course of the eight months, as seen in Figure 5.6. The drop in January was found to be chiefly related to difficulties understanding social customs and knowing what to expect and how to behave in social situations with people from the U.S. That is, during the final few months of the research, Matt perceived himself as not always meeting people’s expectations of him, in his view because he was not familiar enough with, or had not spent enough time in, the U.S. culture.

He cited an example of this that had been particularly upsetting to him. After playing basketball with some Americans he had never met before, one of the young men extended his hand to Matt. Not knowing what to do, Matt did not take it, but he realized later that shaking hands at the end was expected. Consequently, he felt bad about his lack of appropriate social response in this situation. As noted earlier in Paul’s case, it took a few months in the U.S. for Matt to identify some of these cultural intricacies and societal expectations, as well as to recognize that he was not always adept at meeting them.

It can also be determined from examination of the data in Figure 5.6 that Matt’s adjustment process displayed variability regarding academic and lifestyle issues. Academic difficulties experienced with varying degrees of intensity included problems with studying effectively, taking examinations, understanding the systems of grading, and clearly defining academic goals.
Figure 5.6: Matt's Cultural Adjustment Divided by Facet
It was this last area, however, which probably influenced Matt's academic variability to the greatest extent. He had a difficult time from the beginning of his sojourn defining exactly what he needed and wanted to do academically. At the end of the June interview, in fact, he indicated his biggest trouble to be determining his academic goals. This continued to be a recurring issue for Matt, one which included diverse potential majors from business administration to film-making.

For Matt, particular problem areas which affected variability in lifestyle issues included trouble in finding religiously-permissible foods, maintaining his physical health, negotiating with his apartment rental company, and, as noted earlier for other subjects, adjusting to the changing Iowa weather.

While the lines representing the scores for Matt's perceived language adjustment and his perceived composite of academic, lifestyle, and social adjustment do not run exactly parallel, they appear to be nevertheless related. As Figure 5.7 shows, they do follow each other in a general way. As with the other subjects, however, Matt's perception of this relationship did not usually include a cause and effect influence. That is, Matt tended to attribute difficulties encountered in his acculturation process to factors other than inadequate language proficiency.

For example, in September, Matt indicated that trouble he had understanding lectures did not have to do with English per se, but rather that he had a teacher who used many technical terms he wasn't familiar with and who consequently talked "less English and more accounting." During that same month, the fact that he didn't have any friends from the U.S. was not attributed to language troubles he might have in communicating with them, but rather that he is not the type of person to seek out friends, tending instead to wait for other people to approach him.
Figure 5.7: Matt’s Language Adjustment vs. Adjustment in Other Areas
In October, he attributed difficulty that he had making friends to not knowing how to approach potential friends, as well as to the fact that he felt unsure of their expectations. In this interview, he did admit that trouble he was experiencing in writing papers for his freshman English class was related to language, in that he was not used to concentrating on how he writes rather than what he writes. (This was a reference to the policy of counting major errors in English 104/105.)

But then in December, Matt perceived problems with studying as being caused by the weather being too cold to go to the library rather than to any deficiency in the language. And in January, it was unfamiliarity with cultural references which Matt felt led to his difficulty in understanding some aspects of U.S. humor in the classroom.

Matt also experienced his own reality of “discourse domains,” in that he spoke about his confusion in not being able to express himself precisely enough when getting a haircut. He described his experience: “...I don’t have any problem speaking in English...I can communicate what I want to say, but some of the times...yesterday I went for the haircut...in Pakistan you go and say I want to have lesser hair...here you see all kind of haircuts...so you have to tell them every detail...so I kind of get uncomfortable trying to tell them...” Therefore, perhaps the “world” in which he seemed to feel less adequately or appropriately prepared was a linguistic setting in which he had to search for specific English vocabulary.

Overall, Matt appeared to spend most all of his time outside the classroom with fellow Pakistanis, although he indicated a number of times he would have enjoyed having some friends from the U.S. Interestingly, Matt did not feel that he had any choice in this matter. He felt that he really had “no time for Americans” and that
his personality was such that he was simply not good at going out and meeting new people. He mentioned that, “I’m very bad at socializing, even in Pakistan . . .," and he felt even more isolated in the context of U.S. society where he had even less self-confidence in initiating and maintaining relationships. Matt seemed to build his own “Pakistani environment” around him for security and cultural identity throughout the eight months, without attempting to make much of a social transition into Ames or Iowa State University at all.

Sam

The final subject was Sam, a 22-year-old computer science major from Singapore. His experience appeared to be different from any of the other subjects due to his severe financial problems and his native-like English proficiency. In fact, he considered English to be his native language and dialects of Mandarin Chinese to be his second language.

Sam’s exceptionally high skill level in English is reflected in Figure 5.8, which represents the progression of each of the four facets of cultural adjustment. Sam’s pronunciation was accent-free and his grammar was nearly perfect, although he was outwardly modest about acknowledging his excellent language proficiency. However, this perception of his English capability was reflected in his questionnaire responses, since he almost exclusively indicated “no difficulty” for the language-related items. The only deviation from this was in July, when he indicated having “little difficulty” with writing papers.

Also in July, a rather misleading response indicated that Sam was experiencing difficulty “understanding lectures or other dialogue in the classroom;” in reality, this
Figure 5.8: Sam's Cultural Adjustment Divided by Facet
involved the accent and English proficiency of one of his foreign professors, rather than any lack of comprehension ability on Sam’s part. The dip in the language line resulting from these responses appears substantial on Sam’s adjustment graph, but this should not be interpreted as a difficulty with English proficiency for Sam. Elimination of this particular response leaves a nearly perfect language line straight across the top of the graph, a representation more consistent with the fact that Sam never mentioned any kind of trouble he was having with his English in comprehension or production, outside of a few vocabulary words.

In contrast, however, it is apparent there was great variability among the other three adjustment facets of academics, lifestyle, and social, beginning in June and continuing until September, at which point leveling-off occurred. This may be partially explained due to the fact that Sam was unavailable for the regular interview during the month of December; thus, the adjustment scores were estimated as midway between those in October and January for the purposes of charting the graph. The variability in the early months, however, may have been influenced by a number of more definite factors.

In the realm of academics, varying degrees of difficulty in feeling adequately prepared educationally and understanding the grading systems were salient. In the June interview, Sam also responded “can’t answer” to several of the statements, thereby requiring some mathematical adjustments in the quantification of scores, which may not have been truly representative of Sam’s initial adjustment starting point.

Problems with such issues as foods, housing, public transportation, weather, and sleeping contributed to changing amounts of difficulty in the lifestyle facet of Sam’s
acculturation. The principal issue, however, was a financial one. As tuition and other monetary arrangements were exceptionally important in Sam’s situation, the changing attitudes he experienced regarding finances ranged from initial trouble and worry, to feeling optimistic about budgeting in July and August, to being frustrated and depressed about not receiving an appointment for an on-campus job in September and October.

And although Sam did not mention many social issues during the interviews that were causing him difficulty, the questionnaire responses nevertheless indicated perceived problems in being involved in extracurricular activities, feeling accepted by those around him, forming meaningful and satisfactory friendships with U.S. students, and knowing what to expect in U.S. social situations.

With respect to Sam’s perceived language adjustment versus his perceived adjustment in the composite area consisting of academic, lifestyle, and social (see Figure 5.9), if the language dip in July is eliminated as noted previously, there remains a clear relationship between the two scores of language and other adjustment, as viewed in the other three subjects’ data.

Also similar to the experiences of the other subjects, Sam’s perceptions of the causes of the cultural difficulties that he did find himself experiencing never included troubles with language. For example, in July, he attributed difficulties in studying effectively to the fact that he was easily distracted and tended to daydream. In September, he specifically mentioned that language gave him absolutely no trouble for lectures, reading, or writing, and that the depression he was feeling was closely intertwined with his financial situation. This was, in turn, influencing the responsibility he felt towards his academics.
Figure 5.9: Sam's Language Adjustment vs. Adjustment in Other Areas
In October it was, in Sam’s estimation, a lack of educational preparation from schools in Singapore, as well as a different system and method of teaching and learning, which most influenced his academic difficulties. And in January, these same causes were reflected in problems he experienced in taking examinations. Therefore, with the exception of a few vocabulary words, a lack of English language proficiency was never a problem which Sam experienced (as was expected).

To sum up, it appeared that Sam’s financial and familial situations were highly influential in the feelings he had and responses he made to his experience of sociocultural transition. Monetary problems led to guilt that people at home were putting faith in him and supporting him. This led, in turn, to academic pressure, which led to more guilt, which led to depression, and so forth. Sam stated that he was depressed throughout most of the eight months, at times to a greater extent than others.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Sam was dealt a crushing personal blow when he returned home in December only to discover that the brother who had been providing the most financial support for his U.S. education had died. Although this did not appear to be directly reflected in his responses to the January questionnaire, Sam was undoubtedly spending much time pondering his feelings and emotions. Even during the previous summer and fall, he had not seemed to have much time or energy to think about values, social norms, and friendships with U.S. students, etc., due to his family situation, financial worries, and subsequent personal pressures.

The Data “By Facet” and Trends Among Individuals

While the four subjects’ questionnaire responses and interview comments have been extensively examined in order to provide insights into the unique patterns and
processes experienced by each individual, another potentially useful approach to analyzing the more quantifiable part of the data is by cultural facet. That is, what kinds of patterns did the four subjects display as a group within each of the four facets? Whereas the previous section sought to identify trends within individual subjects, the present section will attempt to extract trends across subjects. Identification of such patterns might then lead to generalizations regarding issues in the acculturation process for each of the four cultural facets of language, academics, lifestyle, and social.

Upon examination of the individual monthly scores for each cultural facet, it is notable that, for the most part, the subjects did adjust in a generally positive manner over the eight-month period. That is, perceived adjustment scores were basically higher in January at the final interview than in June at the initial one. (As seen earlier in the individual adjustment graphs, however, this overall adjustment was not necessarily a smooth one, and it often contained a number of ups and downs before finally arriving at a higher score, indicating better cultural adjustment, by January.)

The only exception to this pattern was found in the perceived language adjustment of Paul and in the perceived social adjustment of Matt, both from Pakistan. Possible reasons for this deviation have already been highlighted in discussion of the previous section, and even in these two cases, the January scores were not a great deal lower than the initial June scores.

In general, then, the four subjects began their U.S. sojourns in June feeling less positive about all aspects of adjusting to U.S. culture than they eventually did after their experiences throughout the eight-month period. All of the four subjects had
considerable success in achieving a comfortable holistic level of acculturation to the U.S. Further observations may be made upon examination of the scores for each of the four subjects plotted together on graphs representing each of the four distinct cultural facets, namely, language, academics, lifestyle, and social.

**Language**

The language adjustment of the four subjects displayed a pattern, seen in Figure 5.10, which would be expected given the English language proficiency levels of the individual subjects. The language adjustment lines of Paul, Matt, and Sam clustered around the top of the graph, indicating relatively consistently high adjustment scores in this area, which is not surprising for three individuals who had spent many of their educational years in English-language schools.

Mike, on the other hand, who began his sojourn at a more “typical” level of English skill for a foreign student, experienced a language adjustment process which swung up and down over the course of time. As was corroborated through his interview comments and has already been noted, Mike’s perceived language ability was considerably higher at the end of the eight-month period than at the beginning.

Although from the data presented here there appears to be a general trend, with the exception of Mike, toward high language proficiency over the course of the sojourn, this should not necessarily be interpreted as a generalizeable result. The three subjects who showed such a trend should not be considered to have the typical language skills of a foreign student, especially upon first arriving in the foreign country.
Figure 5.10: Language Adjustment of the Four Subjects


**Academics**

Academic adjustment of the four subjects, on the other hand, can be seen in Figure 5.11 to be less stable or consistent; there is great variability among the scores not only among individuals but, at certain points, within each individual. Possible reasons for this individual variability have already been posited in the previous section. What is significant to comment on at this point, however, is a possible explanation as to why the four subjects, regardless of the patterns of their individual differences, all experienced academic variability over the course of the eight months.

For instance, it can be noted that the months of September, October, and January, were “peak months” academically for different subjects. That is, Paul and Sam felt best adjusted academically in September, Matt in October, and Mike not until January. It can be postulated from these data that foreign students’ academic adjustment may be unique to their individual experiences, highly influenced by a variety of “outside” variables which change from situation to situation.

That is, it could be argued that academic adjustment may be rather unpredictable, even taking into consideration a foreign student’s language proficiency and previous educational background. Perceived positive or negative academic adjustment may in fact be more closely linked to a student’s choice of courses, the systems of taking examinations therein, and the teaching style and personality of the instructor, rather than any cluster of specific characteristics on the part of the student. Such a hypothesis would in fact lead to variable and fluctuating academic adjustment scores, as are seen for the present four subjects.
Figure 5.11: Academic Adjustment of the Four Subjects
Lifestyle

In contrast, however, there appears in Figure 5.12 more of a trend among the four subjects for the scores representing lifestyle adjustment. This relative consistency was manifested in the fact that, while all four subjects began their U.S. sojourn in June with a rather low perceived level of lifestyle adjustment, these issues gradually became less and less problematic over the following three months (until September), at which point levelling-off generally occurred. The obvious exception to this was Mike, who clearly experienced a bad month in October (explanations for his downswing in all four cultural facets have already been posited in the previous section).

One possible explanation for this apparent trend in lifestyle adjustment of the subjects (especially as compared to academic adjustment) may be found upon closer examination of the questionnaire statements designed to elicit responses about the area of personal lifestyle. Issues regarding food, physical health, housing, religion, transportation, weather, and sleeping, etc., appear to be experienced by the subjects as more personal issues, the positive adjustment to which appears to be less influenced by “outside variables.” (One clear exception to this was adjusting to the weather, particularly when it became bitterly cold during the middle of the eight-month period.)

The subjects tended to identify on a more personal level with these lifestyle problems, and they tended to view them as difficulties they could best cope with through their own devices. Unlike the realm of academics, they usually were not dependent on other people or events to achieve a more comfortable lifestyle. Appropriate solutions to difficulties in finding food and housing, using public transportation, or sleeping well were gradually worked out and, in general, these problem areas did not resur-
Figure 5.12: Lifestyle Adjustment of the Four Subjects
face without the direct influence of some outside force (although this occasionally happened, as with the religious issue relating to foods discussed earlier).

**Social**

Finally, as shown in Figure 5.13, the scores representing the social adjustment of the four subjects were distinctly spread apart from one another and somewhat variable within individuals, although not to the extent of the academic facet. Possible reasons for the individual variation in social adjustment patterns have already been set forth in the previous section. With respect to more general social variability, one possible explanation might be that social issues, by their very nature, are influenced to a great extent by people, events, and attitudes usually outside the realm of an individual’s control.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the one subject who displayed a rather consistent social adjustment line throughout the eight months, Matt from Pakistan, was also the individual who appeared to create his own comfortable social environment by surrounding himself for the most part with Pakistani friends and culture, as noted previously. That is, the fact that he allowed very few, if any, U.S. influences to directly affect his social environment meant that he was never really confronted with the experience of social adjustment at all. Thus, both his social situation and the scores representing it did not undergo much variability, evidence in support of the idea that variable perceptions of social issues are most affected by “outside forces.” Matt rarely had to deal with these kinds of influences in his exclusively Pakistani environment, a factor which undoubtedly contributed to his consistent social scores over time.
Figure 5.13: Social Adjustment of the Four Subjects
Generalizations

It is particularly difficult to attempt generalizations across a small number of subjects, and it should be emphasized that each individual’s process of acculturation in the present study was unique. That is, these students generally perceived the four cultural facets as problematic in different ways in relation to their adjustment as a whole. Several “trends” did appear, however, in that some subjects reported experiencing similar levels of difficulty for one particular cultural facet.

For example, several of the students displayed many problems within one specific cultural facet: Paul, Matt, and Sam usually indicated a great deal of difficulty with lifestyle issues. For the two Pakistanis, this was most likely due to religious concerns they had to confront which extensively influenced this area of their cultural adjustment. For Sam, on the other hand, problems in lifestyle appeared to be most heavily influenced by worries over his financial situation.

These same three subjects also reported feeling quite well-adjusted within several cultural facets. First, they all displayed high English ability, and consequently they seldom mentioned experiencing problems within the realm of language. Second, they all indicated relatively consistent successful adjustment regarding social issues. As noted earlier in the case of Matt, however, this seemed to be more a result of staying closely within their own national groups rather than participating in and feeling comfortable with U.S. social systems. In fact, Paul, Matt, and Sam all admitted rarely venturing out to involve themselves in social situations with people from the U.S.; they all indicated they simply did not have U.S. friends or much social contact with local people.

Therefore, although generalizations about level of difficulty within one cultural
facet may be made across the subjects, these similarities seem to be mostly explainable based on the unique experiences, attitudes, and personal characteristics of this particular sample of foreign students. Further implications of the influence these individual factors had in the present study, and may have in general, in shaping cultural adjustment will be outlined in the concluding section.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Major Findings

Major results of the present study included trends both within and among the subjects. On the whole, however, the cultural adjustment processes of these four individuals were each found to be unique; therefore, it appears difficult to generalize about the acculturation experiences of foreign students as a group. This finding emphasizes the importance of looking at individuals rather than large cross-sectional samples.

Additionally, little support was found for the original “U-Curve” hypothesis as posited by Lysgaard (1955). That is, there was no clear evidence that the subjects felt well-adjusted at the beginning, less well-adjusted in the middle, and well-adjusted again at the end of the study. However, in the research conducted since that of Lysgaard, the time period within which the “U-Curve” has been claimed to occur is vague at best. Indeed, scholars have cited “U-Curve” processes as requiring anywhere from an academic year to more than four years to unfold. All of the students in the present study reported, at one time or another, physical symptoms associated with stress and culture shock, and one subject’s adjustment pattern actually displayed a “U-Curve” beginning in the fourth month of the study. Due to these results, therefore, as well as to the lack of clarity regarding a time frame for the curve, it
cannot be definitively concluded that these students did not experience any aspects of adjustment to U.S. culture in a process resembling Lysgaard’s “U.”

Furthermore, a relationship was observed between two scores as measured by the subjects’ responses to questionnaire statements: 1) the score representing perceived language adjustment, and 2) the score representing perceived adjustment in a “composite” area comprising academic, lifestyle, and social issues. Although such a relationship was identified, the subjects themselves did not tend to verbalize their perceptions of a cause and effect relationship in the interviews. In general, the four subjects seldom attributed the cause of cultural difficulties they were experiencing to language problems, and this appeared to be true regardless of language proficiency, perceived or actual.

Another finding also related to the influence of perceived language adjustment on acculturation was the existence of linguistic “worlds,” or “discourse domains,” for several of the subjects. That is, these students felt there were spheres of U.S. culture within which they could more successfully engage their language skills than in others. Additionally, the linguistic environments in which the subjects perceived these discourse domains to exist varied from individual to individual.

When examining the data grouped by cultural facet, several patterns emerged. First, a great deal of variability was found over the months within the realms of academic and social issues. A possible explanation was posited: these aspects of acculturation tend to be more heavily influenced by outside factors and thus more subject to “random” ups and downs. Second, lifestyle issues tended to begin at a low perceived level of adjustment, to steadily improve, and then to level off after several months. Deviations from this trend were noted, however, and possible explanations
consistent with the individual subjects of this study were offered.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Reflections on instruments of data collection**

While the instruments utilized in the data collection of the present study were generally found to elicit the types and frequency of desired responses, several problems were nevertheless observed throughout the course of the eight-month study. First, there were a few occasions when subjects demonstrated a marked difference between what they indicated on the questionnaire and what they subsequently reported in the interview. A possible reason for this may have been that administering the same questionnaire at each meeting encouraged the subjects to choose their responses in a hurried fashion, as they believed themselves to be familiar with the content of the statements. The oral interviews, on the other hand, while utilizing the same basic format each month, always contained different content. Therefore, while this methodology may have led the subjects to proceed quickly through the questionnaire, elaboration during the verbal interviews may have encouraged them to think more deeply about the same issues.

Another problem with the instruments of data collection related to how the questionnaire and the verbal interviews affected the “quality” of the subjects’ responses. That is, the instruments used (particularly the oral interview) lent themselves more readily to a verbal, outgoing, articulate person; individuals who were unable to appropriately express relevant thoughts, ideas, and opinions provided less useful data. A prime example of this was the fifth subject, Larry from Malaysia, who was unsuccessful at initiating even a simple comment during the verbal interviews. (Interestingly,
this individual was said to have the same trouble communicating in his native lan-
guage, Chinese.) It should be noted, however, that there was an attempt to control
for this methodological problem in the design and implementation of two separate
instruments, the personal interview and the written questionnaire, one of which re-
quired oral expression in English and the other of which did not.

Finally, a point of confusion was found in the wording of the questionnaire cate-
gories used to indicate intensity or level of difficulty with aspects of U.S. culture (i.e.,
"very much difficulty," "much difficulty," "some difficulty," "little difficulty," and "no
difficulty"). One of the subjects suggested that there is a distinction between "dif-
ficulty" and "troublesomeness," in that an encountered difficulty is not necessarily
perceived as troublesome. That is, when one goes to live in a foreign culture, diffi-
culties are often anticipated. When they are eventually confronted, therefore, they
are not perceived as difficulties at all but are experienced as a natural and expected
consequence of sociocultural transition. This distinction, then, involves expectations
of difficulty and, as Klineberg and Hull (1979) noted, perhaps the importance of any
"difficulty encountered" may be most adequately measured by taking into consider-
ation not only the frequency of the difficulty but also its perceived troublesomeness
for the individual.

**Reflections on methodology**

Several limitations in the way the study was actually carried out as well as in the
sample should be addressed at this point. First, four subjects comprise an extremely
small sample, and the patterns which emerged from the experiences of these subjects
may not necessarily be generalizeable to other samples.
Additionally, the present study was conducted over a period of eight months, a summer and fall semester. As noted earlier, a definite time frame within which the acculturation process takes place for all individuals does not exist. Therefore, perhaps an academic year or other time period would have been more suitable for the elicitation of more representative cultural adjustment patterns and processes.

Finally, the question arises as to whether or not the present sample of foreign students could be considered a typical or average sample of those who begin educational programs in the United States each year. This concern should be raised especially as it relates to language proficiency, given that three of the four subjects in the present study had native-like or near native-like English language skills. One of the problems of selecting subjects was the relatively small number of foreign students entering the university in June from which to identify possible participants in the research.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Several ideas for future research based on the results of the present study may be suggested. First, while the interrelated acculturation theories of Oberg (1954) and Lysgaard (1955) have been significant in studying the processes of cultural adjustment, other theories have also been proposed which de-emphasize the importance of “duration of sojourn” as an influential factor in why and when foreign students successfully adjust to their new environment. Research specifically investigating whether acculturation experiences conform more closely to one type of theory than another is needed in order to better determine the validity of the various views of the cultural adjustment process hypothesized to this point.
Second, the area of "discourse domains" is an interesting and potentially fruitful one. As mentioned in the results, one question might be to investigate whether foreign students experience different linguistic "worlds" due to a psychological reality on their part or to an actual variation in linguistic setting. It would be interesting to see if students alter their interlanguage from situation to situation based on the responses or perceived responses of interlocutors in a particular linguistic environment.

Third, the concept of "anomie" would be interesting to investigate further. Anomie generally occurs when students of a second language become proficient enough in that language to truly communicate with native speakers; it is then that they "drift" between the native and target cultures, feeling a full member of neither one. In the present study, however, although three of the subjects had excellent language skills upon arrival, they displayed no signs of "losing touch" with their native cultures. On the contrary, they made virtually no attempt to interact with U.S. culture, even though they had more than adequate English proficiency to do so. Therefore, the relationship between anomie and cultural adjustment could be investigated, as well as variations among students who enter the target culture with target language skills already intact versus those who acquire that language while in the target culture.

Fourth, the experiences of several of the subjects in the present study pointed to a relationship between motivation and successful adjustment to the target culture. That is, the student who expressed a desire to learn about U.S. culture and to remain in the society after graduation generally reported the most successful involvement with local people and culture. In contrast, the students who had only come to the U.S. because they couldn't receive a quality education in their native countries reported less satisfactory adjustment within U.S. cultural systems. On the whole, these latter
subjects were content socially, but their social environment was composed exclusively of co-nationals.

While the effect of motivation on second language acquisition has already been investigated, the extent of its influence on cultural adjustment has not yet been addressed. That is, Gardner and Lambert (1972) claimed that students learning a second language are "integratively" motivated when they wish to learn about another cultural community and eventually to be accepted as a member of that group. In contrast, students are "instrumentally" motivated when "the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement." In the same vein, therefore, it would be interesting to pursue motivational effects on the acculturation of foreign students, particularly with regard to social issues. Taking into consideration the sample of the present study, it might also be enlightening to probe this question further with students who are already highly proficient in English, so as to specifically focus on the effect of motivation on their subsequent cultural adjustment.

Finally, it would be helpful to be able to generalize more confidently regarding the patterns seen in each of the four cultural facets in the present study. That is, do the trends displayed in academic, lifestyle, and social issues across the four subjects tend to occur in the acculturation experiences of other foreign students? There is consequently a need for future qualitative, longitudinal research investigating cultural adjustment composed of separate facets to validate the results of the present study.

Significance and Implications

Foreign students in this country encounter a myriad of adjustment difficulties as they make the transition from their native countries to U.S. universities; these include
problems with language, academics, personal lifestyle issues, and social concerns. Researchers have attempted to describe the nature of such adjustment processes in various ways, including the four-stage theory (Oberg, 1954) and the “U-Curve” theory (Lysgaard, 1955).

As a means of seeking empirical evidence for these claims, many large-scale studies have been implemented, yet results about foreign students’ acculturation patterns, including the role of language therein, have so far been equivocal. The majority of such studies have been cross-sectional, sampling foreign students’ impressions of their cross-cultural experiences at one or two points during their sojourns. However, they have often failed to capture the nuances of individual variation or to trace more carefully the processes of cultural adjustment over time.

The present study has consequently added to this research by intensively investigating the acculturation processes and specific difficulties of a small number of foreign students in transition, including the linguistic facets of such adjustment. While one of the main objectives of the study was to seek evidence in support of the “U-Curve” hypothesis, each foreign student’s experience of cultural adjustment was unique.

The results reported here suggest numerous implications for the ESL professional, and these practical issues may involve interaction with the foreign student in the community as well as in the classroom. For example, the notion of motivation and its influence on positive adjustment to the target culture was briefly addressed. It should be kept in mind that students with a high integrative motivation may not only learn the language more successfully, but may make a smoother and more effective transition into the society as well. Those with an instrumental motivation, on the other hand, may perceive themselves to be well-adjusted, especially if they have
good language skills. In actuality, however, they may be isolated from the target culture and social systems. Those persons working with foreign students who appear to be motivated by specific desires and/or goals should be aware of their students' attitudes toward living and studying in the target culture. This awareness may then aid them in addressing the students' needs, or in encouraging them to take action to help them meet their needs on their own.

Another finding of the present study suggests that, even with excellent language proficiency, it appears easy and perhaps even comfortable to enter a new culture without ever becoming involved with its people, customs, attitudes, or values. While foreign students do not necessarily have to agree with or adopt these ideas and cultural norms, they should at least give themselves the opportunity to experience these aspects of the society in which they have chosen to receive their higher education.

It is not always easy for foreign students to find chances to participate socially, especially since they must often make the first move to get involved. However, those who choose to stay within their own national groups, never making local friends or experiencing social aspects of the target culture, risk returning home with only very vague impressions of their host country. In summing up the difficulties he was having in becoming socially involved (or even wanting to become involved) in the U.S., Paul (of the present study) lamented, "... when I go back [to Pakistan] I should be able to tell people that I have friends in America, you know, or maybe when I come back to America what am I going to think about myself ... I don't have any friends here; I spent five years of my life here and I don't know anyone?" Therefore, this type of "social withdrawal" from the target society can influence not only the time actually spent abroad, but may also be detrimental to positive perceptions of the
overall cross-cultural experience once students have returned home.

Finally, the evaluations of the subjects in the present study about their language skills in relation to their total acculturation experiences may lead to further insights into the organization of foreign students’ academic programs. While basic language skills must comprise the core of the ESL classroom curriculum, perhaps instructors and advisors would do well to allocate enough time to emphasize other study skills, disseminate cultural information, etc., as part of their work with foreign students. It may frequently be too easy to explain any of a wide variety of problems foreign students experience by making reference to their language proficiency, when in fact, students may not perceive language to have a great influence on their difficulties at all. In the present study, even the subject who had the lowest English proficiency seldom felt that his language was hindering his successful cultural adjustment. In the long run, it is only by taking into consideration foreign students’ personal assessments of their own difficulties in the acculturation experience that we, as ESL professionals, may seize our best chance for facilitating positive interaction with these individuals.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX
FOREIGN STUDENT ADJUSTMENT AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Directions: Read each item carefully, and circle the response which corresponds to the amount of difficulty you are experiencing with it at the present time.

VM M S L N CA
Very Much Much Some Little No Can't Difficulty Difficulty Difficulty Difficulty Difficulty Difficulty Answer

EXAMPLE: Finding facilities for recreation and sports.

VM M S L N CA

1. Having adequate English language proficiency for living successfully in Ames. (lang) VM M S L N CA

2. Having adequate educational preparation from my home country to begin studies at Iowa State University. (ac) VM M S L N CA

3. Finding foods, either in restaurants or grocery stores, which I enjoy eating. (life) VM M S L N CA

4. Having enough good friends here (of any nationality). (soc) VM M S L N CA

5. Maintaining my physical health. (life) VM M S L N CA

6. Understanding lectures or other dialogue in the classroom. (lang) VM M S L N CA

7. Getting along well with my professors. (ac) VM M S L N CA

8. Finding suitable housing. (life) VM M S L N CA
9. Having enough contact here with people from my home country. (soc) VM M S L N CA
10. Problems related to religion. (life) VM M S L N CA
11. Feeling comfortable if I must speak in English to another foreigner. (lang) VM M S L N CA
12. Feeling comfortable if I must speak in English to someone from the U.S. (lang) VM M S L N CA
13. Participating in class along with U.S. students. (ac) VM M S L N CA
14. Getting along with my dormitory resident advisor or landlord (person I rent from). (life) VM M S L N CA
15. Participating in extracurricular school activities with U.S. students. (soc) VM M S L N CA
16. Finding personal counseling. (life) VM M S L N CA
17. Feeling confident that I made the right choice in coming to study at Iowa State University. (ac) VM M S L N CA
18. Understanding and using the routes of public transportation here. (life) VM M S L N CA
19. Feeling accepted by people around me. (soc) VM M S L N CA
20. Finding a good place to study. (ac) VM M S L N CA
21. Being able to verbally communicate exactly what I want to say in English. (lang) VM M S L N CA
22. Studying effectively. (ac) VM M S L N CA
23. Homesickness. (life) VM M S L N CA
24. Feeling comfortable with U.S. social customs. (soc) VM M S L N CA
25. Racial or religious discrimination. (soc) VM M S L N CA
26. Taking examinations. (ac) VM M S L N CA
27. Understanding U.S. humor. (lang) VM M S L N CA
28. Clearly defining my academic goals. (ac) VM M S L N CA
29. Adjusting to the climate/weather here. (life) VM M S L N CA
30. Forming relationships with the opposite sex. (soc) VM M S L N CA
31. Personal depression. (life) VM M S L N CA
32. Understanding what is said on the television and the radio. (lang) VM M S L N CA
33. Understanding the methods of teaching and learning in the U.S. educational system. (ac) VM M S L N CA
34. Financial problems. (life) VM M S L N CA
35. Knowing what to expect in social situations with people from the U.S. (soc) VM M S L N CA
36. Dealing with the university administration. (ac) VM M S L N CA
37. Writing academic papers or essays. (lang) VM M S L N CA
38. Understanding the grading systems at Iowa State University. (ac) VM M S L N CA
39. Sleeping well.  (life)  VM  M  S  L  N  CA

40. Forming meaningful and satisfactory friendships with U.S. students.  (soc)  VM  M  S  L  N  CA

(Questions 5, 10, 15, 20, 26, 31, and 36 adapted from Klineberg and Hull, 1979).