Review of Literature

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What is Culture Shock

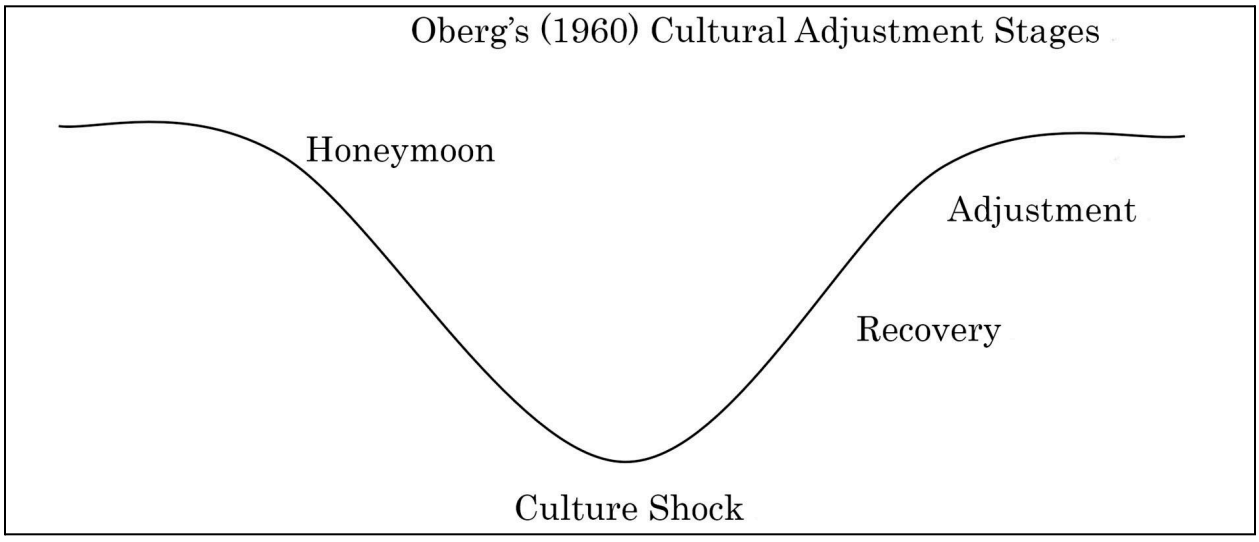
Culture shock, a well-known phenomenon today, was first conceptualized by Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960). Oberg defined culture shock as "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs and cues include the "thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life" (Oberg, 1960). He then goes on to say that when we lose these familiar signs and symbols, it is as if "a series of props have been knocked from under you." He asserts that even those who are "broadminded" and "full of good-will" should expect frustration and anxiety. (Oberg, 1960)

Many others have echoed Oberg's theories and found new ways of describing the complex experience one goes through when entering unfamiliar cultural territory. Nolan, for example, compared the phenomenon to that of a theatrical play in which one did not know his lines (Nolan 19). Hofstede, on the other hand, compared the psychological state of the immigrant to that of a child, as did Larson (1990) and Smalley (1963), because the traveler must re-learn social customs and rules (Hofstede, 2006, p.22).

Another valuable way of thinking of culture shock is to think of it in terms of programming, as Crhanová (2011) explained, deriving from Hofstede's "software of the mind" theory. She explained that the way we think, feel, and act are created as patterns in our brains, similar to the patterns on, say, a computer. These patterns are first created when we are children and then naturally become a part of our subconscious for the most part. Crhanová says that "when one wants to change the patterns/mental programs, he or she must first unlearn the old ones and absorb the new ones." As one might expect, this re-programming of the mind does not come without mental and emotional exertion.

Not only does the foreigner need to reprogram how they think, speak, and act, but they also need to handle several unfamiliar routines, places, and people. In connection with this idea, Schumann (1975) refers to Larsen and Smalley's observation that a healthy person "has a repertoire of problem-solving and coping mechanisms" to deal with unpredictable life events. However, these mechanisms no longer work in the new context. "New problems mean new demands on one's supply of energy. The new climate, the new foods, and the new people all mean that the alien must muster up every bit of energy and put it to use in new ways." (Schumann 1975).

Despite the individual complexities that each foreigner experiences, some researchers have seen patterns among recent immigrants and how they process their new surroundings. Lysgaard was the first to represent these patterns as a U-shape due to his study with 200 displaced Norwegians. Following Lysgaard's representation, Oberg went as far as to label each section of the U-shape. Although there are a few others, Oberg's model is by far the most commonly referred to representation of culture shock. There are four phases in the model.



Honeymoon

The first phase is referred to as the *honeymoon* stage. In this stage, the sojourner feels a sense of excitement and even euphoria for his new surroundings. This stage has been compared to a vacation where the tourist only experiences the good a place offers. They may still be staying in hotels and touring sites at this point. Whereas frustrations may occur later, in this phase, when the traveler "encounters inconveniences, he or she perceives them as part of the adventure" (Crhanová 2011). Typically, this phase lasts for days or weeks.

Culture Shock

In this stage, the initial excitement experienced in the honeymoon stage begins to wear off. Cuspa (2018) refers to this stage as "the fall," likely because students fall from their state of happiness, as is accurately depicted in Lysgaard's U-shape curve. The foreigner begins to feel hostile and aggressive towards the host country. As Oberg put it, "this hostility evidently grows out of the genuine difficulty which the visitor experiences in the process of adjustment." The sojourner also begins to see a chasm between himself and the natives of the host country. The differences he notices become obstacles, and he alienates himself from them. Referring to Nolan's studies, Crhanova states that "it is the [culture shock] phase that is typically considered to be never-ending to the sojourner." She says that the foreigner begins to make careless and frustrating mistakes in his day-to-day life. He wonders, 'what is wrong with the host people, what is wrong with himself…, what is wrong with what he..is doing.' " (Crhanová 2011) This phase is typically accompanied by confusion, disorientation, apathy, isolation, inadequacy, and loneliness.

Unfortunately, some people will remain in this stage through "flight or isolation" (Winkelman, 1994). During this stage, they may decide to return home. Alternatively, they might

"use other forms of isolation, for example, living in an ethnic enclave and avoiding substantial learning about the new culture, a typical lifetime reaction of many first-generation immigrants" (Winkleman, 1994). The goal should be for immigrants to achieve the recovery and, eventually, the adaptation stages.

Recovery

In this stage, the foreigner begins to appreciate the new culture and develop a positive attitude (Winkelman, 1994). They also begin to develop skills for coping with cultural differences. However, the challenges may not be entirely behind them. They may continue to struggle but with a more hopeful outlook. As Winkelman (1994) stated, "[recovery] is slow, involving recurrent crises and readjustments."

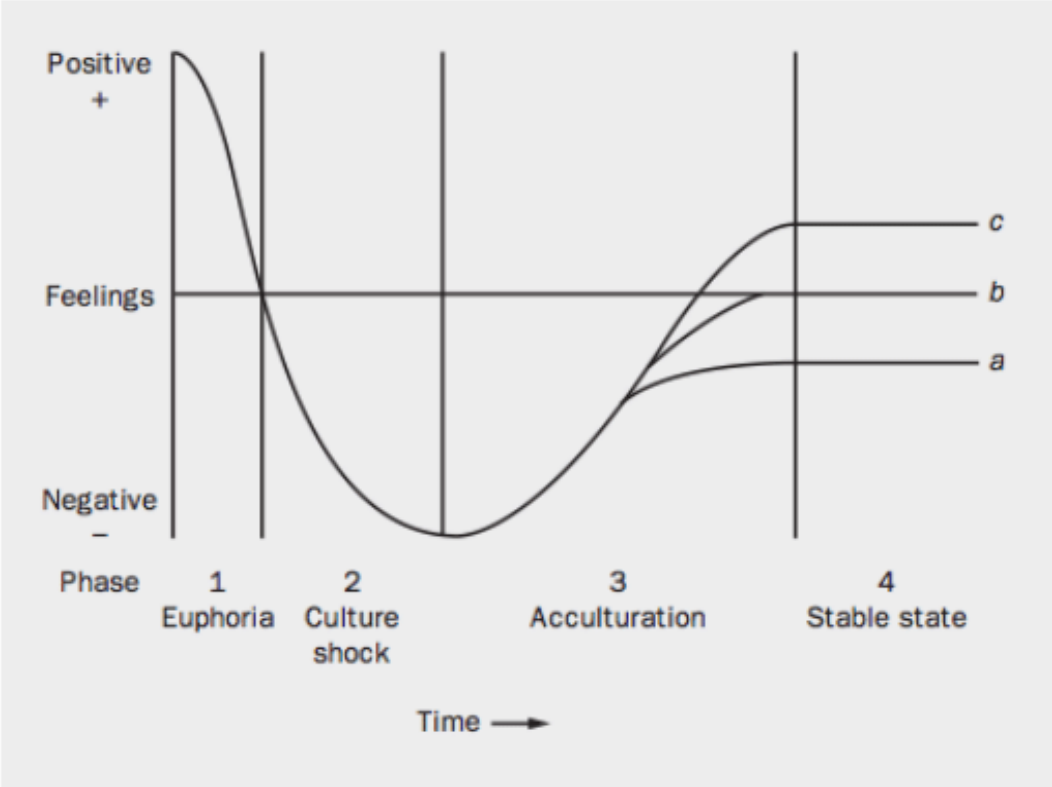
Adjustment

Finally, the immigrant reaches the adjustment period. Acceptance characterizes this stage. In fact, "with a complete adjustment [one] not only accepts the foods, drinks, habits, and customs, but actually begins to enjoy them." (Oberg, 1960) Winkelman (1994) added to this notion by claiming that for someone to completely assimilate, they must "acculturate and may undergo substantial personal change through cultural adaptation and development of bicultural identity." Naturally, this level of adaptation is rare.

Hofstede's Model

Furthermore, Oberg argued some people do not stay past the second stage and return home, but those who stay will eventually adjust to their new surroundings (Oberg 1979). However, Hofstede argues with his model that one can go through all four stages of the culture shock curve and still reach a stable state of dissatisfaction with the host country.

Hoffstede added to Oberg's four-stage model by delineating three alternatives where culture shock may result once the stable state is reached. The first alternative of this state is the negative emotions that "the visitor continues to feel alienated and discriminated against." The second alternative is that of neutral feelings when the "visitor can be considered to be bi-culturally adapted." Finally, the third alternative is that the visitor has positive feelings and has "gone native," as Hofstede terms it.



The Acculturation Curve Source: Hofstede, Hofstede (2005,324)

Consequences of Culture Shock

The effects of culture shock may be fleeting or "mildly irritating" (Damen 1987) for some and yet "cause deep psychological panic and crisis (Brown, 1986, 2007) for others. Oberg (1960) expressed that culture shock varies significantly in its impact on individuals.

However, for those impacted significantly, it is an actual condition they go through. The psychoanalytic tradition goes as far as to say that culture shock is a loss that must be grieved (Zhou et al. 2008). Sometimes, the effects of culture shock can be profound and long-lasting. Culture stress can accompany culture shock. According to Larsen and Smalley, culture stress centers on the loss of identity that the immigrant feels. In their native country, they may play specific roles such as socioeconomic status, job titles, community roles, etc. However, they do not fulfill any of these roles in their new surroundings. This can conflict with the person's sense of identity.

Apart from identity loss, Oberg (1979) reported that those suffering from culture shock might excessively wash their hands, worry about water, food, and bedding, be absent-minded, become angry over minor frustrations, worry over minor aches and pains, or feel a longing for home. Other common, yet not exhaustive, symptoms are fatigue, anxiety, stress, depression, loneliness, and self-doubt (Ralston 1994). The symptoms are extensive and relatively unique to the individual.

Language Barriers and Culture Shock

One cannot think about culture without also thinking about language. As Brown said, "The two are intricately interwoven" (pp. 189-190). Many immigrants to a new country not only lack knowledge of social customs but also of the language. This creates a natural isolation as they struggle to communicate. Adler (1972) claims that "The shock is the shock of isolation and the loss of the familiar" (p.10). Oberg (1960) claimed that the best way to overcome this shock is to "get to know the people of the host country. But this you cannot do with any success without knowing the language. For language is the principal symbol system of communication." Larsen and Smalley say that "what the learner needs is a small community of sympathetic people

who will help him in the difficult period when he is a linguistic and cultural child-adult. He needs a new family to help him grow up (46).” As Schumann puts it, “The new family gives the alien a place to start” (1975). While in theory, this would work well, the language often causes a barrier, both perceived and actual. Larsen and Smalley concede that the “primary problem in living abroad is cultural alienation and that learning the local language is a major factor in adjustment to the new surroundings” (viii).

A problem emerges. The foreigner needs a community to overcome culture shock, and yet his language proficiency creates barriers to this community. Li (1999) claims that “language difficulties may cause partial culture shock among ESL students.” Thus, low language proficiency may induce more tremendous culture shock.

The Perpetual Cycle of Culture and Language Proficiency

There are numerous impacts that culture shock can have on the cognitive, physiological, affective, and social well-being of an individual. In her study of the impact of culture shock on ESL acquisition of international students, Cauchon (1994) observes, "The first problem faced by international students is that of language acquisition when so many other negative stimuli are affecting their life.” Thus, students need to learn the language to overcome culture shock, but their culture shock often inhibits their ability to learn the language. What a vicious cycle.

Schuman (1975) stated a similar idea. In his theory, he said that language is needed to overcome culture stress, “but as Smalley (1963) pointed out, culture shock can induce a whole syndrome of rejection which diverts attention and energy from learning the second language (18-19).” The cognitive capacity of students may not be able to carry the weight of both culture shock and language learning, and thus language learning is impacted. Harrison, Chadwick, and Scales (1996) stated that immigrants face a cognitive overload as “the new culture requires

[them] to consciously think about things that natives are unconsciously aware of." Again, This cognitive overload diverts the student's attention so that they cannot acquire the language as well. Then, because they cannot acquire the language, they may remain in a state of culture shock. "The combined frustration stemming from Culture Shock and undeveloped language skills can further perpetuate a cycle of feelings of isolation and unhappiness." (Abbey, 2021). Thus, we must wonder: how do we break the cycle? Referring to this cycle, Smalley stated, "At some point, the circle must be broken, and how this is to be done becomes the major issue in second language education." (Smalley, p.226)

As global immigration continues to rise, the impacts of culture shock on language learning are critical to second-language teaching. The cycle must be broken. Unfortunately, the literature contains many theories and perceptions on the phenomenon, but it lacks concrete evidence of the impacts of culture shock on language learning. More studies must be conducted to better understand the cycle and how it impacts ELL students. This study addresses this need by providing a greater understanding of the connection between culture shock and language.

Research Question

1. Does culture shock impact language learning? If it does, how does it impact language learning?

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