

Acculturation process and its implications for foreign language learners and teachers

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ABSTRACT

The acculturation process that will be presented in this paper is by no means meant to be held as a common or accepted truth as to how a foreign language (FL) learner will evolve and transcend in their target language (TL) learning. The purpose of this investigation is to highlight the theoretical components involved in acculturation and the impact that they may have on the FL learner and their attempt to learn the TL and culture, and to emphasize the significant role the FL instructor does and has to play in the learners' development of their communicative and socialization abilities. In fostering such awareness in the learner and teacher, hopefully a sense of relevance among these individuals as to the importance culture plays in their learning and teaching will develop. If one were to accept this paper as a truth, then they are overlooking "the dynamic nature of the process" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 145), a process that is unique to each individual's own experience.

Keywords: Acculturation, culture learning, culture shock, culture stress, assimilation, cultural plurality

INTRODUCTION

One can assume that when one exposes oneself to foreign ways, there is a sense of interest on behalf of the individual and an increase in vitality, whether it is trying the local delicacies of the host nation or experiencing a foreign social custom. Does this experienced state of interest and increased vitality, generated by the shock of contrast and differences between the two foreign objects, always transcend into an interest in life within the individual? As well, does such a generated state of the foreign object always portray a positive one, or does the individual leave such an experience with a sense of disillusionment and an increased negativism towards things foreign?

Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have theorized in some manner on individuals' abilities to transcend cultural boundaries. From such theories, the defined term of 'acculturation', which encompasses the requirements and qualities an individual must possess in order to engender the individual's adaptability to other cultures has come into being. Damen (1987) believes "The process of acculturation involves dealing with new ways and systems of beliefs and patterns of an unfamiliar cultural group" (p. 140). An individual seen to be adept at crossing cultural boundaries is then referred to as being 'accultured'. Yet another group of theorists, particularly in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL), have continued the study of acculturation, with their main emphasis of inquiry being how the construct of acculturation affects an individual's language learning capabilities. For example,

Brown (1986) believes that “the process of acculturation runs even deeper when language is brought into the picture” (p. 34).

WHAT IS ACCULTURATION?

When one reviews acculturation theory, which generally concerns itself with new immigrants in a foreign land, a negative connotation of the concept is quickly developed. The traditional conception of acculturation has been the loss of one’s own cultural heritage to a more dominant culture, as Scollon and Scollon (1995) state: “acculturation is used as a negative term, since the process of cultural loss is considered by analysis to be an unfortunate one” (p. 150). This traditional conception of acculturation however, does not take into account the complexity of the encompassing theory. To believe that when an individual exposes oneself to a supposedly more powerful cultural group than that which they are from, they will need to adopt the behaviours and customs of the dominant cultural group is superfluous. A more modern perspective of acculturation and certainly one less rigid, proposed by Acton and Walker de Felix (1986) is that of “the gradual adaptation to the target culture without necessarily forsaking one’s native language identity” (p. 20).

It is axiomatic to believe that when one encounters a new alien environment, whether it is their own heritage as a child through the process of enculturation, beginning a job in a new work place, or even when relocating to a new city in one’s own country, the associated differences and complexities of such endeavours are great. “Finding a new place to live, locating places to shop, figuring out transportation to and from school and work, selecting schools for the children, and deciding on a bank are among the physical concerns of everyday living acculturation involves” (Park & Klopff, 2004, pp. 255-256). However, when an individual exposes oneself to a completely divergent environment with which they have no familiarity, the differences and complexities multiply to an astronomic level. Whether or not the individual succeeds in ‘assimilating’ oneself to the new environment greatly depends on a host of factors that influence their level of adaptability, or ability to become ‘accultured’ as theorists have described. The statement by Scollon and Scollon (1995) that “our sense of who we are as people and of our place in human society is tied up in the patterns of discourse we use in communication with others. To change our behaviour is to change who we are” (p. 240) clearly emphasizes the difficulties ESL/EFL learners and instructors will face from the outset of the learning process. In the study of discourse, the origin, meaning and interpretation of differing discourse patterns gives insight as to its influences and problems of intercultural communication and is a great resource as to the acculturation process individuals will be subjected to when confronted with a new culture.

THE PROCESS

Within the literature concerning acculturation process, many sub-factors of the construct are dealt with regularly, particularly those which an individual will most likely go through in the process of confronting a new cultural experience. The accepted theoretical framework within the ESL field describes the sub-factors, which an ESL/EFL learner will confront during their learning or acculturation process, include: culture learning, culture shock, cultural identity, personal identity, motivation, and socialization. If an individual/learner transcends entirely through the process, then they shall attain the ultimate goal of acculturation, that being assimilation.

This theoretical assumption that an individual’s goal when encountering a foreign culture is complete assimilation into it leads to the question of exactly what the ‘process’ is that one will go through in becoming ultimately assimilated. Additionally, what forms, functions and realities exist within the given

'process'? The assertion of assimilation is taken from the old perspective of immigrants to a new country, whereas, many individuals only temporarily visit foreign lands for business, education or travel. Then is the 'process' of acculturation necessarily the same for these transient individuals, or is a "process of learning to adjust to a new culture, either within a native culture or among strangers, at home or in a foreign land" (Damon, 1987, p. 140) a more appropriate distinction to an individual's learning?

CULTURE LEARNING

"To be sure, culture is a deeply ingrained part of the very fibre of our being, but language – the means for communication among members of a culture – is the most visible and available expression of that culture" (Brown, 2000, p. 183). It is this idea about communication being the most visible and available aspect of a culture that lies at the heart of what, Schumann (1975), Brown (2000) and Acton and Walker de Felix (1986), among several of the ESL/EFL theorists, believe the first stage of the acculturation process is, that of 'cultural learning'. During this stage, the L2 learner endures a heightened sense of euphoria and excitement (Brown, 2000), due to the overwhelming novelty of not only the new culture, but also the language with its divergent discourse system from the one to which they are accustomed. For L2 learners, in particular ESL learners immersed in a new cultural environment, the uncharacteristic forms and manners of how to communicate in particular situations essentially confounds the learner in multifarious instances due to them not being able to understand or being able to communicate their message properly. The discourse patterns that one has known and become accustomed to their entire life are no longer viable in the new culture and its contradictory patterns of discourse and socialization with members of the new cultural group. What causes great burdens for countless L2 learners in this stage is the fact that "these divergences from reality are often very resistant to change" (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 95).

The art of adaptability, and of being open-minded to the new experiences, enables the learner to progress through the initial stage far more comfortably. This essentially bestows upon the individual the necessity of learning the new culture, and all of its intricacies, in regard to discourse and socialization. Assuredly, this does not happen over-night, and the likelihood of an individual ever truly being able to conquer outright the inner workings of a culture other than the one they were born into, is improbable. "Because we have grown up doing it and we do much of what we do through habit, acquired almost unnoticed from our elders and our cultural environment" (Lado, 1986, p. 52), one's ability to grasp a conflicting cultural environment is a daunting task for anyone. Although, in order for a L2 learner to expand one's competence in their L2, one has to be committed to acquiring all the knowledge they can about the new culture and its conventions.

For countless FL students not exposed to a different culture other than in the classroom, the concept of cultural learning is an alien parameter. "Cross-cultural awareness involves, uncovering and understanding one's own culturally conditioned behaviour and thinking, as well as the patterns of others" (Damen, 1987, p. 141). The ability to perceive anomalies and similarities between the contrasting cultures in all probability will enable the learner to progress more briskly in their learning of the L2 and assist them in their adaptation to a new culture far more competently. Samovar and Porter (1985) note, "'similarity' of the original culture to the host culture is perhaps one of the most important factors of acculturation potential" (p. 383). This emphasizes the need of educators in FL environments to assist their students in closing the gap between the cultural variances or, at least prepare them to understand and accept the differing characteristics of cultures for what they are: only differences, and not something to fear, which is all too often the case among FL learners. "Culture is extremely complex

and context-specific, and it is not at all understood how culture may affect cognition or behaviour of individuals, much less groups” (Hunt, Schneider & Comer, 2004, p. 982). Therefore, it is imperative not to label the divergent cultures as either ‘ethnic’ and ‘mainstream’ or ‘more powerful’ and ‘less powerful’ or even ‘dominant’, as is commonly found in the literature concerning acculturation.

CULTURE SHOCK

The variable degrees to which, an individual questions and attends to various factors when encountering a foreign culture context can at times become burdensome for the individual due to the shock of contrast and difference between the two cultures. Brown (2000) highlights this when he states; “And so a person’s world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a contact with another culture” (183). Thus, an individual is lead into the consequent phase of the acculturation continuum, ‘culture shock’. Once the “initial period of euphoria and joy at the new and strange” (Damen, 1987, p. 225) has worn off, an individual may be plagued by the enormous complexities that living in a new culture and learning a new language generate.

An individual cannot avoid the construct of culture shock. It is a natural process that anyone who is exposed to a foreign culture environment different than their own will go through, in varying degrees, dependent on how one copes with the emotional (loneliness, homesickness, anger, indecision) and physical (water, food, physical contact) feelings one will experience (Brown, 2000; Damen, 1987; Schumann, 1975). With the emergence of culture shock, “individuals feel the intrusion of more and more cultural differences into their own image of self and security” (Brown, 2000, pp. 183-184). Therefore, it is critical on the part of the individual experiencing culture shock, to put aside what he/she has learnt in their native environment, in regard to behaviour and communication with others, as what they have learnt will not hold true in the new culture. If one is cognizant of the fact that they are experiencing culture shock, they will have a greater ability to overcome the emotional and physical feelings. By being accepting and open-minded to the new scenarios, even though they do run counter to what one has learnt and is habituated to, rather than viewing them with derision and contempt as acknowledged in culture shock, the learner is empowered to survive this phase. The individual in regard to both their learning of the new culture and the TL can hopefully now see progression through the acculturation process.

A factor identified by Schumann (1975) as one of the main causes of culture shock is what he has termed ‘social distance’. Brown (1986) believes that “The concept of ‘social distance’ has emerged as an effective construct to give explanatory power to the place of culture learning in second language learning” (p. 39). The hypothesis is: the more two cultures contradict each other in terms of discourse and patterns of behaviour, the more challenging it will be for an L2 learner to acquire the TL and adapt to the new culture; and vice versa; the closer the two cultures, the more effortless it will be. The acceptance of the concept of ‘social distance’ is straightforward enough to appreciate; however, the problem of actually trying to measure an individual’s degree of social distance is impossible, simply because it cannot be quantified (Brown, 2000). How an individual perceives and interprets the differences between their native culture and those of the new culture is entirely up to that individual and their own reality. What plagues the theory of acculturation and confutes the construct of social distance is that “culture simply cannot, in our opinion be reduced to a measurable variable” (Hunt, Schneider, & Comer, 2004, p. 982). “What do you measure?” and “How do you measure it?” are questions that cannot be resolved, even though we understand that there are disparities between the two cultures.

How then one progresses through the phase of 'culture shock' without developing increased negativism or becoming disillusioned towards the new culture and the TL is a legitimate question. For the L2 learner, the key to answering such a question lies in their motivation. An integratively motivated individual in all likelihood will experience minimal culture shock and accept the differences for what they are, just differences. Their desire to learn the culture and the TL will override the burdens associated with the phase and their progression will forge ahead. That is not to say that an instrumentally motivated individual will not succeed, but in all probability, they will have a more arduous and extended bout of culture shock and, in many cases, become stuck (Acton & Walker de Felix, 1986). During this crucial period of language acquisition and culture learning, it is imperative for the learner not to "blame himself for all the discomfort he feels and then consider himself incapable of living in a foreign culture and of learning a foreign language" (Schumann, 1975, p. 213). The motivation one has will go a long way in defending against and curbing such feelings.

In regard to the FL teacher (a native speaker) in an FL learning environment, because of the minimal amount or non-existence of culture shock among their learners, it is important to foster in their students the willingness and motivation to want to learn the FL and foreign culture. In addition, the instructor absolutely needs to highlight that language learning and culture learning are correlated variables that do not exist separately. Educating the learners in what they could expect upon entering a new culture, if teachers choose to, will most certainly enable the students to understand and accept the new culture more thoughtfully. It will also impart to the learners the need to distinguish what it is that makes their own native culture so unique in the ways they communicate and socially interact. In conveying to their learners their own personal experiences of culture shock, FL teachers in a FL setting can - make it possible for the learners to see firsthand that life in a new culture is not as arduous or daunting as it may appear to be. With the negative connotations that derive when one hears the term "culture shock", learners need to be made aware that culture shock "can also be viewed more positively as a profound cross-cultural experience, one that leads to a 'high degree' of self-awareness and personal growth" (Brown, 1986, p. 38).

CULTURE STRESS

Throughout the process of acculturation, which we have seen thus far to include the phases of euphoria and excitement, cultural learning and culture shock, the learner of the TL and the new culture has most certainly acquired a greater ability to communicate competently. As well, the learner likely has an increased awareness of what it takes to interact and socialize within the new culture. Additionally, a new appreciation of not only the foreign culture but also their own native culture has developed within their psyche. One may assume that the individual is likewise discovering a heightened consciousness of who they are as an individual. Having previously experienced culture shock, the learner's next progression along the acculturation continuum is that of 'culture stress' (Brown, 2000).

In the context of culture stress, this phase is one of recovery from the trying experience that just occurred in culture shock. Brown (1986) believes that "general progress is made slowly but surely, as the person begins to accept the differences in thinking and feeling that surround him, slowly becoming more empathic with the persons in the second culture" (p. 36). Since we were young, our conception of our world and of ourselves is such an ingrained personal trait that to view ourselves in a different manner can be quite perplexing (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). However, in order for an individual to successfully cope with the travails of culture stress, this is exactly what one needs to create - a new image of oneself - and in a sense, become a new person. "It is the cultural or social identity that is at stake when the process of acculturation is under way. To become bicultural is to develop an altered cultural personality

and identity" (Damen, 1987, p. 142). In doing so, the individual is progressing to a state of fluctuation between the two divergent cultures - are they still a member of their native community or are they now a member of the new cultural community? Brown (1986) describes these conflicting feelings within the individual of where their place is in the world as anomie. Such a state develops from the fact that one's communicative ability has increased to a level of near mastery of the language. As Brown (2000), "mastery of the foreign language takes place hand-in-hand with feelings of anomie or homelessness, where learners have moved away from their native culture but are still not completely assimilated into or adjusted to the target language" (p. 187).

The forces of (euphoria, excitement, cultural learning, and culture shock) that have engendered the learner to reach this degree of near mastery of the TL and culture have been termed 'empathic capacity' (Schumann, 1975). The construct of 'empathic capacity' also commonly referred to as 'ego permeability' - lends itself to the learner; one will be more open to the unfamiliar situations that one experiences when exposed to a divergent culture. In a sense, ego permeability is a conception, where the learner lowers their inhibitions that they have concerning the TL and culture (Schumann, 1975) and are more willing to accept the differences. Learners "who are more sensitive in their interactions with others, who are more receptive to subtle cues of behaviour and feelings, would have an enhanced capacity to discern those cues and nuances" (Taylor, Guiora, Catford, & Lane, 1969, p. 463), leading to an exceptional degree of communicative and cultural competence on the part of the learner.

Certainly, not every learner will have the aptitude or motivation to totally overcome the difficulties along the acculturation continuum and will not achieve a competent communicative ability. Because, "virtually every encounter with people in a foreign culture is an 'intense relationship' in which tremendous effort is expended to keep communication from breaking down" (Brown, 1986, p. 37), the learner may cease acquiring the TL and may never continue along the continuum. Acton and Walker de Felix (1986), Schumann (1975), Damen (1987), and Ellis (1985) have referred to such a learner as being 'fossilized'. The learner's level of communicative competence may have reached a point where they are able to perform simple everyday tasks of communication (Acton & Walker de Felix, 1986), but the learner has not acquired a significant understanding linguistically. The learner will most likely speak a 'pidgin' language, which could be the "result of social and psychological distance" (Ellis, 1985, p. 235).

The implications of culture stress, in regard to the FL learner studying in their native community, are minimal or non-existent, since they most certainly have not had the good fortune of experiencing the euphoria, excitement, and culture shock of living in the TL community as a SL learner has. However, the FL learner should not ignore the construct of culture stress, and neither should the FL instructor. In fact, it is highly desirable for the FL instructor to impart in their students the necessary requirements and skills they will need to overcome culture stress if they are ever in a SL environment. Aiding in their development in learning of cultures, and linguistic and communicative competence, and nurturing the learner's motivation to one that is integratively motivated, the FL instructor provides the quintessential tools for their learners to increase their ability to not only communicate competently, but also to progress smoothly along the acculturation continuum. Additionally, in regard to whether or not the FL learners TL becomes fossilized or pidginized, the FL instructor must make aware to the FL learner that "fossilization will depend on the degree to which the learner wishes to acculturate to the FL language and society" (Johnson, 2001, p. 100). Thus, the FL instructor enlightens the learner that they simply cannot expect to use simple communication patterns if they really want to truly assimilate into the TL's culture as well as again emphasizing the role that motivation plays in their desire to learn the TL and culture. What the FL learner needs to understand is that they must develop a more sophisticated social communicative ability "then there is a motivation for fossilized forms to be replaced by the standard ones" (Johnson, 2001, p. 100). Further, Schumann (1975) sets out his idea on this plainly enough: "when

initiating factors such that the learner has empathic capacity, motivation, and attitudes which are favourable to both the target language community and language itself, his cognitive processes will automatically function to produce language acquisition" (p. 231).

ASSIMILATION OR CULTURAL PLURALITY

Having reached a point where one's cognitive processes will function automatically as Schumann has theorized, a learner will inevitably be nearing the proposed ultimate goal in the acculturation process: 'assimilation' into the TL culture. In essence, the learner has endured an exhaustive quest in their studies to reach a point where they cannot only communicate proficiently, but also socialize competently in the TL culture and the TL culture's people have accepted them as being the same as them. However, it must be noted that a learner "who has achieved non-linguistic means of coping in the foreign culture" (Brown, 1986, p. 42) may still reach the final stage of acculturation, yet may never attain a complete mastery of the TL. Essentially, a learner who is able to function socially and with a relatively functional linguistic ability still has the opportunity to assimilate. Therefore, even though a learner may not have attained a mastery of the TL or the social contexts, which in all likelihood they never will, their ability to become functional and productive members of their new cultural group is achievable. However, the difficulty in attaining such a linguistic and social ability is an arduous task, best exemplified by what Acton and Walker de Felix (1986) describe as "the form of the 'permanent immigrant' state, where one is always able to understand the words but is never completely capable of comprehending all of their connotations" (p. 21).

For the learner, paramount to assimilation into the TL's culture is not whether they have gained a mastery of the language, but rather whether or not they have adopted the willingness and aptitude to socialize in the target culture. Such effort on the part of learner involves a level of cross-cultural awareness "that moves a culture learner across the acculturation continuum from a state of no understanding of, or even hostility to, a new culture to near total understanding; from monoculturalism to bi- or multiculturalism" (Damen, 1987, p. 141). Inherent in this idea is that L2 learners must develop an identity of their own that differs from the person they were in their native land (Brown, 1986). Having already progressed through the stage of "culture stress", the learner has already or has likely developed such an identity due to having dealt with one's 'ego permeability' and the social distances that are present between the two contrasting cultures.

There is debate between acculturation theorists as to whether a learner completely assimilates to the new culture or whether they adopt a sense of cultural plurality, where one maintains a part of their cultural ethnicity (Samovar & Porter, 1985). Samovar and Porter (1985), who view acculturation from the immigrant perspective, feel that "no immigrant, as long as livelihood or other needs are functionally dependent upon the host society, can escape acculturation completely" (p. 384). What they state may be conceivably axiomatic, but they fail to distinguish which perspective the learner (or as they believe, the immigrant) will inevitably adhere to, either becoming completely assimilated or culturally plural, or as we saw previously, bi- or multicultural. Whatever the perspective one believes, one must keep in mind that there are significant adjustments that individuals go through dependent on the length of sojourn of either the immigrant or the learner.

Irregardless of the perspective one takes on the ultimate goal of the acculturation process, either complete assimilation or cultural plurality, it ultimately depends on the immigrant or learner's ability to socialize. With each divergent culture having their own set of conceptions pertaining to beliefs, values, traits, and situations (Anderson, 2000), it is inevitable that misunderstandings will transpire between two unenlightened individuals communicating interculturally. This unawareness on the part of

individuals due to the culture in which they grew up in leads to this miscommunication. In a native culture, individuals learn the methods and forms of communication and socialization that are of appropriate use for that culture. They are also conditioned in what “to use, and how, when and where to use them” (Park & Klopff, 2004, p. 214). It is easy to see that, when individuals partake in intercultural discourse, they bring their own learnt attitudes and behaviours to the table. Assuredly, each individual has different perceptions concerning interpersonal behaviour based on their cultural upbringing, if the two interlocutors have no conception of their differing beliefs and value systems, the probability of a misunderstanding taking place is highly likely to occur. In many instances where there are misunderstandings, it can be accredited to our own ignorance of other cultures (Hall, 1973), exasperating the need of the learner to devote a large portion of their studies on cultural awareness of the TLs culture.

For FL learners, what further hinders their communicative and socializing abilities is the fact that they cannot observe the actions of the TL group’s people in a social context other than the formal education they receive in the classroom from their native speaker instructor. This then limits their ability to recognize what patterns of discourse and behaviours are appropriate for any given context that they may encounter when in the TL’s sphere. The lack of informal (socialization) teaching and learning, which people learn when they are encultured into their native culture is nonexistent (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). “It should be obvious that in most cultures the first learning of children is socialization, not education. That is they are not given explicit training in behaviour through rules, guided practice, testing, and other forms of formal assessment” (p. 149). Yet, these are the exact manners in how many FL learners learn in the classroom in order to understand a differing culture. No matter how much FL instructors may identify and instruct their learners on behavioural and socialization patterns of the TL’s culture, such formal education can never replace the informal learning one will achieve from actual participation in the TL culture. However, it is imperative on the part of the FL instructor to highlight the great importance that culture plays on one’s learning of a FL and how it will affect eventual success, failure or fossilization in the TL for the learner. There are many different approaches for the FL instructor to utilize in highlighting cultural awareness among their students, some of which include: films, TV programs, readings, culture assimilators and simulation games (Brown, 2000). In utilizing the different approaches, the FL instructor must remember, “in teaching an ‘alien’ language, we need to be sensitive to the fragility of students by using techniques that promote cultural understanding” (p. 189).

CONCLUSION

Whatever the language learner brings to the task, whether innate ability, a language acquisition device, attitudes, previous knowledge, and experience of languages and language learning, the outcome of language learning depends in a large measure on the amount and kind of exposure to the target language (Spolsky, 1989, p. 166). For the FL learner, the exposure to not only the TL but also the target culture is in most instances dependent in large measure on the information they receive from their native-speaking FL instructor. This being the case, a great burden is placed upon the FL instructor to not only be sensitive to what aspects of the TL and culture that they present to their students, but also to an awareness of the differing teaching methodologies. Employing appropriate teaching methods that best suit the cultural context they are working in and for which they hope to educate their students' needs careful consideration. Byram (1989) believes

... that there are three interwoven strands in foreign language teaching; language use, awareness of the nature of language, and understanding of foreign and native culture. Each of these is

integral to the contribution of language teaching to learners' general education (and consequently to their preparation for life on leaving school), and each is interdependent with the other. (p. 23)

The facilitation of educating their students will enhance if the FL instructor is cognizant of these issues.

Exacerbating the burden placed on the FL instructor is the fact that "the foreign language context produces the most variable degrees of acculturation since people attempt to learn foreign languages for such a variety of reasons" (Brown, 1986, pp. 34-35). The variety of reasons that influence the FL learner to study the TL greatly affects how far along the acculturation continuum the learner will progress. Will the learner remain in the stage of culture shock, become fossilized, or become assimilated or culturally plural? Whichever reason the FL learner has for studying the TL ultimately starts with their motivation, whether it is integrative or instrumental. While both motivational types enable a learner in acquiring the TL, the different types affect ones' rate of progression in terms of language proficiency and socialization skills. Central to the acculturation theory is the idea of socialization, Schumann (1986) believes that "acculturation as a remote cause brings the learner into contact with TL speakers. Verbal interaction with those speakers as a proximate cause brings about the negotiation of appropriate input which, then, operates as the immediate cause of language acquisition" (p. 385). What acculturation theory fails to address however, is the fact that "there is no specification of the learner's assembly mechanisms" (Ellis, 1985, p. 254). Theorists never account for how the learner becomes communicatively and socially competent in the theory. The theory is seen not so much as a predictor of competence, whether linguistically, communicatively or socially, but rather as a predictor of what the SL/FL learner will encounter and what they will need to comprehend when faced with the task of learning a SL/FL.

The theory of acculturation still has its many critics, like Hunt, Schneider, and Comer (2004) who feel that because of "the absence of a clear definition and an appropriate historical and socio-economical context, the concept of acculturation has come to function as an ideologically convenient black box" (p. 982). Other problems that plague the theory is the fact that it cannot be qualified since an individual's unique experience does not hold true for another individual and "by its lack of generalization to all kinds of second language learning" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 145). The theory does however offer great insight to the importance of social factors in the learning and using of everyday language (Spolsky, 1989). By offering such insight to the FL learner, the FL instructor may enable their learners to gain a greater conception as to the complexity of the task they are undertaking in learning a FL and hopefully will aid them in attaining their goals.

With all of its shortcomings and critics, the theory of acculturation is a debate that needs to continue, not only for its relevance to SLA but also to the fields of sociology, anthropology and psychology. Byram (1989) feels that "One of the contributions of foreign language teaching to pupils' education is to introduce learners to and help them understand 'otherness'" (p. 25). This debate in effect ensures the education of learners to the differing ways that people communicate and socialize in the world, and in doing so, encourages a greater awareness that in reality we are not very different.

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