

NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI[®]

**ESL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE CULTURAL COMPONENTS
IN THEIR ENGLISH LEARNING**

by

Qi Li

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Education

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO

JUNE 2003

© 2003 Qi Li



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*

Our file *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-84952-X

Canada

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. The participants in the study were eight adult ESL learners who were enrolled in Lakehead University programs or courses but were not taking ESL courses. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences; (b) the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning; and (c) ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning. This study showed that the participants learned English culture when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. For the eight participants, learning English culture and having more knowledge about it were necessary components in their ESL learning. The participants' experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture positively influenced their ESL learning. The participants revealed that they benefited significantly from their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many individuals to whom I would like to extend my sincere appreciation. Without their support I would not have been able to complete this thesis.

I would like to thank Dr. John O'Meara, my thesis supervisor, for his wise guidance, patience, constant corrections and editing, and concrete and wonderful ideas.

I would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Mary Clare Courtland, for her insight, valuable advice, and patient revisions of my thesis.

I would like to thank the eight students who volunteered to participate in the study for their cooperation and support.

I would also like to thank Mrs. Diana Mason for her helpful and friendly assistance.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents and brother for their encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
Personal Assumptions/Rationale.....	2
Definitions of Terms.....	3
Second Language Learning.....	3
English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners.....	4
Culture Learning.....	4
Acculturation.....	5
Comprehensible Input.....	5
Immersion in a Predominantly English Culture.....	5
Research Design and Methodology.....	6
Significance and Limitations of the Study.....	6
Significance.....	6
Limitations.....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Second Language Learning Theory.....	9
The Input Hypothesis.....	9
The Acculturation Model.....	11
The Perceptions of Culture Learning.....	14
Models of Culture Learning.....	14
Culture Learning Goals and Outcomes.....	14
Culture Learning Processes.....	15
Culture Learning in Second Language Teaching and Learning.....	17
The Place of Culture in Second Language Pedagogy and Learning.....	17
The Context of Culture Learning in Second Language Education.....	19
The Concept of Context.....	19
The Settings for Culture Learning.....	20
Learner Variables.....	22
Summary.....	26
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	28
Theoretical Foundation of the Research Design and Methodology.....	28
Research Design.....	29
Research Questions.....	29
Time Frame.....	29
Participant Selection/Entry.....	30
Setting.....	31
Methodology.....	31
Data Collection.....	31

Data Analysis.....	31
Research Ethics Considerations.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION.....	35
Participant Profiles.....	35
Tom.....	35
Kate.....	36
Mike.....	36
Emma.....	37
Andrew.....	37
Maggie.....	38
Peter.....	38
Jenny.....	39
Research Findings.....	39
The Nature of ESL Learners' Culture Learning Experiences.....	39
Acculturation.....	40
Culture Shock.....	42
Social Distance.....	44
Cultural Awareness.....	47
The Positive Influence of Immersion in English-Language Culture on ESL Learning.....	50
Access to Comprehensible Input.....	50
Enhanced Motivation.....	54
Effective Communication and Interaction.....	56
ESL Learners' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture Learning.....	59
Favorable and Unfavorable Conditions.....	59
Benefits.....	61
Reasons for English Improvement.....	63
Effective Strategies.....	65
Interpretation of Findings.....	67
The Nature of ESL Learners' Culture Learning Experiences.....	67
The Positive Influence of Immersion in English-Language Culture on ESL Learning.....	71
ESL Learners' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture Learning.....	76
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	80
Conclusions.....	80
Recommendations.....	83
Recommendations for ESL Learning.....	83
Recommendations for Further Research.....	84
REFERENCES.....	86
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	91
APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER & CONSENT FORM.....	93

List of Tables

Table 1. Categories and Themes.....34

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners are enrolled in academic programs at universities in English-speaking countries where they are living and studying in a predominantly English culture. These ESL learners are adults. To these adult ESL learners, their knowledge and proficiency in the language used in the new country is an important factor in their adaptation to the new cultural environment. At the same time, their direct exposure to English-language culture can contribute significantly to their English learning experiences. According to Schumann (1978a), the degree of second language learners' adaptation to the second culture determines the success of their second language learning. These adult ESL learners face many challenges in learning and using English for their study and daily life in an English cultural context which is different from their own. It may be a hindrance for them both in their study and social life. On the other hand, as they immerse themselves in a predominantly English culture, they may have more favorable conditions than they had in their home countries to develop English language proficiency.

This study explored English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. The relationship between language and culture has been a research focus for many years. Cultural factors can influence many different aspects of second language learning and use (Hinkel, 1999). However, there is little literature describing how second language learners perceive the relationship between their second culture learning and second language learning based on their own experiences. ESL learners' perceptions may provide insights into how cultural factors influence their second language learning. There is a need for research that

illuminates second language learners' experiences of second culture and language learning in the second cultural environment, and what these experiences mean to them.

Therefore, this study is significant since it provides insights into ESL learners' perceptions of the cultural components in their English learning when they immerse themselves in a predominantly English culture. The findings of this study were primarily based on qualitative data collected from eight semi-structured interviews with open-ended interview questions. The participants were a sample of eight adult ESL learners who were enrolled in Lakehead University programs or courses.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to investigate English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning.

The research questions were:

- 1) What is the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture?
- 2) How does immersion in English-language culture influence their second language learning?
- 3) What are ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture on their English learning?

Personal Assumptions/Rationale

My reasons for investigating this problem were primarily inspired by my personal experiences and interests. In China, I had studied English for six years in secondary school, and then majored in English Education at university. After graduation from university, I worked as

an English teacher for eight years in a secondary school. From my personal experiences of learning and teaching English in China, I have found that many ESL learners can use English quite well in a controlled classroom situation, but have difficulty in transferring this ability to a real predominantly English environment, which requires spontaneous, real-life communication. This may mean that learners need to be taught not only the internal patterns of language, but also the context in which the language is used.

From my personal experiences as an ESL learner, studying for my master's degree in Canada, I have found that the best way for me to develop my ability to use the English language is to learn more about English-language culture, understand the cultural context of communication, and communicate with native English speakers. That is, I can receive a large amount of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) in the English language. When I immerse myself in this predominantly English culture, I benefit significantly from the cultural environment with respect to improving my English. However, because there are some cultural conflicts between my culture and the English culture, I still have some negative experiences in learning and using English, although they are far fewer in number than positive experiences.

Therefore, I am very interested in investigating ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning.

Definitions of Terms

Second Language Learning

'Second language learning' can be broadly defined as the internalization of rules and formulas, which are then used to communicate in the second language (Ellis, 1986). In this sense it is synonymous with 'second language acquisition' (Ellis, 1986). However, Krashen (1985) uses the term second language 'learning' to refer to the process of developing conscious or

metalinguistic knowledge through formal study, and reserves 'acquisition' for the unconscious process of mastery of language. The acquisition – learning distinction is defined in terms of 'unconscious' and 'conscious' processes. The former are not open to inspection, while the latter are reflected in language learners' overt efforts to utilize grammatical rules. In this study the terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' are used interchangeably given that the distinction made by Krashen is not directly relevant to the study.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners

'English as a second language (ESL) learners' refers to people who learn English after they have acquired their first language or mother tongue. English as a second language learning may occur in a foreign language context where the first language is spoken, or in a predominantly English cultural context where English is spoken. 'ESL learners' will be used as a short form of this term.

Culture Learning

'Culture learning' (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby, 1999, p. 3) refers to the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively. 'Culture-specific learning' (Paige et al., 1999, p. 4) refers to the acquisition of knowledge and skills relevant to a given 'target culture,' i.e., a particular culture group or community. 'Culture-general learning' (Paige et al., p. 4) refers to knowledge and skills that are more generalizable in nature and transferable across cultures.

Acculturation

'Acculturation' refers to the process of adapting to a new culture. This process involves developing an understanding of the systems of thought, beliefs, and emotions of the new culture as well as its system of communication (Ellis, 1986). Acculturation is an important concept in second language learning. It has been hypothesized that successful second language learning is more likely when second language learners succeed in acculturating (Ellis, 1986).

Comprehensible Input

'Comprehensible input' is the most important hypothesis in Krashen's (1985) second language acquisition theory. Input refers to the language to which learners are exposed. This can be comprehensible (understood by learners), or incomprehensible (not understood by learners). When native speakers speak to second language learners, they frequently adjust their speech to make it more comprehensible. Access to comprehensible input may be a necessary condition for successful acquisition of a second language (Ellis, 1986). Acculturation can be regarded as a means of obtaining comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987).

Immersion in a Predominantly English Culture

Many students study abroad in an English-speaking country. In most cases, they will have taken English as a Foreign/Second Language courses before they leave their home countries. Although they may not be currently enrolled in an ESL program, they are still ESL learners. These ESL learners are presently living in an English-rich environment. Direct exposure to a predominantly English culture can contribute to their English learning significantly.

Research Design and Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and the design was emergent (Patton, 2002). The primary method for data collection was the interview. The general interview guide (Patton, 2002) was the main method for data collection.

The interview participants were eight students enrolled in Lakehead University programs or courses, were ESL learners, but were not taking an ESL program. They were from seven different countries and had studied English as a foreign language for at least five years before they came to Canada.

The interviews were approximately one hour in length and were audio-taped with a recorder. The content was transcribed after each interview. In this study, the constant-comparative approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was used to analyze the data. Reading through the interview transcripts, the data were analyzed to find recurring patterns emerging from them. Codes were assigned to categories and clustered around themes.

While the investigation was ongoing, a research log was kept to document the research process, decision-making, and note emerging categories/themes, and reflections.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

Significance

It is now broadly accepted that second language learning and learning about the second language culture cannot be separated (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993). Cultural awareness and learning of the second language culture can only help the attainment of second language proficiency (Kramsch, 1993). Because a second language cannot be learned without the understanding of the cultural context in which the second language is used, second language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture (Kramsch, 1993).

Although a substantial amount of literature on culture learning exists, much of it is unrelated to second language learning (Paige et al., 1999). Moreover, there has been little documented research on learners' experiences of second culture and language learning in the second language culture and on what these experiences mean to them.

This study investigated ESL learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. It provides insights into English culture and English language learning experiences of ESL learners, and into the influence of English culture learning experiences on their English learning, as they immerse themselves in English-language culture. The findings might illuminate the role of English culture learning in English learning and provide strategies and suggestions for English learning, which may be valuable to ESL learners. Thus, the study has the potential to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ESL teaching and learning, especially, on ways to conceptualize culture in ESL education contexts.

Limitations

The study involved eight ESL learners who were enrolled at Lakehead University. They were from seven different countries. The researcher herself was also a non-native speaker of English. This might be perceived as having an influence on the outcome of this study, which was conducted in English. However, the researcher's status as a non-native speaker of English may have been an advantage given that she could share her own experiences with the participants during the interviews, which may have encouraged participants to be more open about their opinions. Due to time constraints, the sample size is relatively small. The findings are not generalizable, but may be transferable to other ESL learners of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the study is an attempt to describe and explore

what immersion in English-language culture means to ESL learners with respect to their English learning, and their perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning.

This chapter has provided an overview of the purpose, rationale, definitions of terms, design and methodology, significance as well as the limitations of this study. The following chapter presents a literature review of second language learning theory, the perceptions of culture learning, and culture learning in second language teaching and learning.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section summarizes relevant literature in the field of second language learning theory. Two main theories of second language learning are discussed here: 1) the Input Hypothesis, and 2) the Acculturation Model. The second section addresses the perceptions of culture learning in related literature. The last section examines the related theoretical and research literature pertaining to culture learning in second language teaching and learning.

Second Language Learning Theory

The Input Hypothesis

The term 'input' refers to the language to which learners are exposed. It can be spoken or written. Input serves as the data, which language learners must use to determine the rules of the target language (Ellis, 1986). It can be comprehensible (understood by learners), or incomprehensible (not understood by learners). The Input Hypothesis was formulated by Krashen (1982, 1985). The Input Hypothesis states that second language learners acquire language by understanding the message rather than by consciously employing grammatical knowledge. Access to comprehensible input may be a necessary condition for acquisition of a second language (Ellis, 1986).

Krashen's proposal has enjoyed considerable prominence in second language acquisition research. Ellis (1986) indicates that the Input Hypothesis is probably one of the most important theories as it attempts to answer the central question, "How is language acquired?"

According to Krashen (1985), there is a significant distinction between language acquisition and language learning. The distinction lies at the heart of Krashen's second language acquisition theory. Krashen (1985) suggests that there are two independent ways of

developing knowledge and skills in a second language: acquisition and learning. Acquisition is a subconscious process similar to the process children use to acquire their first language. Learners develop their abilities in a second language by participating in natural communication. Learning, on the other hand, refers to the conscious study of a second language, the mastering of its formal properties: morphology, phonology, syntax and lexicon. Krashen asserts that acquisition plays a much greater role than learning in second language performance. 'Acquired' knowledge serves as the major source for understanding and speaking a second language.

However, McLaughlin (1987) argues that when 'learnt' knowledge is automatized through practice, it becomes 'acquired,' that is, it is available for use in natural communication. The acquisition versus learning distinction is defined in terms of 'subconscious' and 'conscious' processes, which are not open to inspection. Because of the difficulty in demonstrating whether the knowledge learners possess is 'acquired' or 'learnt,' in this study the terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' are used interchangeably.

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis states that 'acquisition' takes place as a result of language learners' having understood input that is slightly beyond the current level of their competence:

Put differently, if an acquirer proceeds along an order of acquisition or structures: 1 2 3 4 ... i where i is his or her current stage of development, he or she can proceed to the next structure $i + 1$ by understanding input that contains $i + 1$ (p. 39).

Here, "understand" means that learners are focused on the meaning, not on the structure of the language. In order to understand linguistic material containing as yet unacquired structures, language learners use context, their knowledge of the world and their extra-linguistic knowledge, besides their linguistic competence (Krashen, 1987).

The Input Hypothesis also indicates that language learners acquire communication skills by focusing on meaning. As a result, when good quality comprehensible input is provided, the necessary grammar is automatically acquired (Krashen, 1987). Thus, the claim made by this hypothesis is the opposite of that made by traditional pedagogy in second language learning and teaching, which assumes that language learners learn structures first, then practice them in communication, and that over time fluency develops. Moreover, the Input Hypothesis indicates that speaking fluency cannot be taught directly (Krashen, 1987). Speech emerges on its own when language learners are exposed to sufficient comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987).

To sum up, in the Input Hypothesis Krashen (1985) claims that language learners acquire a language by focusing on the content and context of messages, rather than their structural features.

The Acculturation Model

The concept of 'acculturation' refers to the adaptation to a new culture (Brown, 1980). Schumann (1978a) defines acculturation as learning to function in the new culture while maintaining one's own identity. According to Ellis (1986), acculturation is seen as a significant aspect of second language acquisition, because language is one of the observable ways by which culture is expressed. In a second language setting the acquisition of the second language is regarded as closely related to the way in which the second language learner's community and the target language community view each other. The importance of this close relationship has been explored by Schumann (1978a) in his Acculturation Model:

... second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language. (p. 34)

Schumann observes that the acquisition and use of the second language is a measure of the degree to which learners have become acculturated to the target culture. According to Schumann (1986), acculturation refers to the social and psychological contact between second language learners and native speakers of the target culture. His research examines the social and psychological integration of second language learners as a predictor of the amount of second language they acquire. The more contact second language learners have with the target culture, the more opportunities will be provided for them to acquire the second language. In contrast, less contact will result in less acquisition of the second language. Thus, Ellis (1986) indicates that second language acquisition is determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between learners and the second language culture. Social distance comes from many factors, which affect learners who are in contact with the target language group (Ellis, 1986). Psychological distance comes from various affective factors concerning the learners as individuals (Ellis, 1986). According to Brown (1986), social distance refers to the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures.

Schumann (1978b) indicates that social variables can either promote or inhibit contact between the learner group and the target language group, and thus control whether the overall learning situation is positive or negative. These social variables include: social dominance patterns, integration strategies, enclosure, cohesiveness, size, congruence, attitude, and the intended length of residence in the target language setting.

The psychological variables, according to Schumann (1978b), are affective in nature, and include: language shock, culture shock, motivation, and ego permeability. Here, language shock means that learners experience doubt and possible confusion when using the second language. Culture shock means that learners experience disorientation, stress, and fear because of

differences between their own culture and the target culture. According to Brown (1986), culture shock is associated with learners' feelings of estrangement, anger, hostility, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, homesickness, and loneliness. The learner undergoing culture shock relies on and seeks out the support of his fellow countrymen in the second culture. Motivation, which is considered to be a key affective factor, involves the learners' reasons for attempting to acquire the second language (Schumann, 1978b). Ego permeability is explained by Alptekin (1988) as follows:

This deals with the capability of lowering one's inhibition level in order to acquire and use the new linguistic forms free of phobias. Whereas fixed and rigid language ego boundaries are said to deter the language learning tasks, permeable boundaries are believed to promote them. (p. 339)

In short, Ellis (1986) concludes that social and psychological factors determine the amount of contact that second language learners have with the target culture and also the degree to which learners are open to that available input, so as to influence second language acquisition. For example, second language learners will receive very little second language input in 'bad' learning situations as a result of social distance. Also, learners will fail to change available input into intake, the portion of second language which is assimilated by learners, when the psychological distance is great. However, explanation of the significance of the interaction between situations and learners is missing from the Acculturation Model (Ellis, 1986). According to Ellis (1986), it is important to consider whether intake is determined by the way the input is shaped in interaction involving the learner and other speakers of the target language in different situations.

The Perceptions of Culture Learning

Models of Culture Learning

The literature on culture learning reflects a variety of theoretical perspectives regarding how culture is acquired or learned. There exists a substantial amount of important writing on models of culture learning (Paige et al., 1999). In earlier models, culture was more likely to be viewed as a relatively invariable and static entity, which is made up of classifiable, observable, and accumulated facts (Paige et al.). Brooks (1975) argues that these facts are eminently teachable and learnable. Moore (1991) contends that this perspective focuses only on surface level behavior, but does not look at the underlying value orientations. It neglects the variability of behavior within the target cultural community, the participative role of the individual in the creation of culture, and the interaction of language and culture in the making of meaning.

In contrast, more recent models view culture as dynamic and variable (Paige et al., 1999). It is a constantly changing process, that is, a way of perceiving, interpreting, feeling, wanting to smile, wanting to scream, loving, hating, and relating to where one is and whom one meets (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). This perspective sees culture as part of the process of living and being in the world, the part that is necessary for constructing meaning through human interaction and communication (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Thus, language in this process plays a complex double role: it is a medium for as well as a shaper of culture (Paige et al.).

Culture Learning Goals and Outcomes

Paige et al. (1999) define culture learning as follows:

Culture learning is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction

with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively. (p. 3)

In this newer culture learning perspective, learning aims change from the mere memorization of cultural facts to higher order learning results. According to Paige and Stringer (1997), such learning may include: learning about self as a cultural being, learning about culture and its impact on human communication, culture-general learning (i.e., acquiring knowledge and skills that are more universal and transferable across cultures), culture-specific learning (i.e., learning about a given target culture, including its language), and becoming an effective language and culture learner. To become an effective culture learner, the learner must develop various strategies ranging from reflective observation to active experimentation. It is important for the learner to know how to learn from the context while immersed in it.

Culture Learning Processes

According to Libben and Lindner (1996), the second culture learning process involves the expansion of an existing system by integrating new knowledge into it, rather than the development of a new one, because culture seems less bounded and it is probably impossible to develop dual non-interfering cultural systems. In the cultural system, we can only loosely discuss culture-specific concepts, attitudes and scripts, because there seem to be no well-defined elements. Thus, we can say that in the successful culture learning process, more elements are introduced into an undifferentiated cognitive system (Libben & Lindner, 1996).

In the early stages of second culture learning, new cultural elements are often learned without any conflict or difficulty (Libben & Lindner, 1996). This is probably because in the early stages learners are typically exposed to the more superficial aspects of the second culture, which can easily be learned (Libben & Lindner, 1996). Libben and Lindner (1996) explain that learners

are likely to encounter some new, exotic aspects of the second culture without any first culture counterparts. When they learn such new exotic knowledge, learners are inclined to integrate these aspects into their existing cultural systems in the same way as they would integrate new cultural knowledge acquired within the first culture.

However, when learners learn second culture elements that conflict with their first culture elements, they tend to use a variety of solutions in order to resolve conflicts that arise (Libben & Lindner, 1996). Libben and Lindner (1996) explain that one very common solution is to cling to the old first culture notions, which are particularly dear to them, even though new second culture elements are easily available. Thus, strongly held first culture concepts are preserved in a fossilized state as a result of being kept at the first-acquired level. The opposite way to settle cultural conflicts is that learners abandon their first culture elements in favor of the second culture elements (Libben & Lindner, 1996). This process may lead to acculturation if learners adopt this approach and employ it consistently.

According to Libben and Lindner (1996), there are two other ways to deal with problems in the process of second culture learning: amalgamation of first and second culture knowledge, and situationalization of cultural knowledge. With respect to amalgamation, learners keep their first culture concepts and apply them to relevant new second culture understandings. Thus, they can acquire new culture concepts simply by adjusting certain cultural features of their prior understanding. The situationalization method can be found not only in simple behavioral areas but also in cultural areas where first and second culture elements contradict each other and are therefore difficult to amalgamate. In these situations, learners maintain their first culture concepts and still learn new second culture concepts. However, learners contextualize each set of concepts to different situations (Libben & Lindner, 1996). In addition, Libben and Lindner

(1996) indicate that “language plays an important role in the contextualization of the different notions, for in speaking a second language individuals can often switch to cultural understandings which would otherwise contradict their first culture concepts” (p.11).

Culture Learning in Second Language Teaching and Learning

The Place of Culture in Second Language Pedagogy and Learning

According to Byram and Morgan (1994), culture learners cannot simply abandon their own culture and step totally into another culture, because their own culture is a part of themselves and created them as social beings. Thus, even nonnative speakers who have had many years of experience with the second culture may still have to find their own place at the intersection of their native culture and the target culture (Kramsch, 1993).

Byram (1989) also indicates that culture represents a form of hidden curriculum in second and foreign language teaching. Safty (1990) speaks to the important role of culture in second language learning: “learning a second language needs to be viewed no longer as a window through which the culture can be observed but as a wide open door through which the culture makes itself accessible” (p.13). A second or foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of its speakers because language invariably refers to their knowledge and perceptions of the world, the concepts of culture, and cultural learning (Byram, 1989). According to Thomas (1983), nonnative speakers are often perceived to display inappropriate linguistic behavior and are not even aware of what they do. This kind of violation of cultural notions of appropriateness in interactions between native and nonnative speakers may lead to sociopragmatic failure and breakdowns in communication (Thomas, 1983). Therefore, second language learners have to develop ways to heighten and refine their metapragmatic awareness in order to express themselves as they want. However, although applied linguists and

practitioners may have become aware that cultural variation is closely connected with language use, training in pedagogy rarely addresses the cultural influences on language learning and teaching (Hinkel, 1999).

It is now broadly accepted that learning a second or foreign language is not simply mastering an object of academic study but is more appropriately focused on learning a means of communication (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The authors also point out that “communication in real situations is never out of context, and because culture is part of most contexts, communication is rarely culture-free” (p. 197). Therefore, it is increasingly recognized that second and foreign language learning and learning about target cultures cannot be separated (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993). Kramsch (1993) also indicates that cultural awareness and the learning of the second culture can only help in attaining second language proficiency. In the process of developing cultural awareness, it is the comparison of the learner’s own culture and the second culture that begins to help the learner to perceive and cope with difference. It provides the learner with the basis for successful interaction with native speakers of the second culture (Byram & Fleming, 1998). According to Kramsch (1993), the teaching and learning of culture implicitly or explicitly permeates the teaching and learning of social interaction, and both the spoken and written language. Because a second language cannot be learned without the understanding of the cultural context in which the second language is used, second language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture. Similarly, Hymes (1996) advocates introducing ethnography and research on the influences of culture on language into language education.

The Context of Culture Learning in Second Language Education

The Concept of Context. The context of culture learning refers to the different kinds of settings and circumstances within which culture learning takes place. In language and culture learning, context may include many variables such as: the setting, the learner, the teacher, instructional materials, instructional methods, and assessment methods (Paige et al., 1999). The setting and learner variables are the focus of the following component of the literature review because they are closely related to this study. This brief review of the literature on context will assist in establishing the theoretical framework.

Byram (1988) asserts that language always refers to something beyond itself: the cultural context, because language has no function independent of the context within which it is used. This cultural context determines the language used by particular persons when they come together at a particular time and place under a given set of circumstances. The combination of these elements should have a cultural meaning, which influences language use (Paige et al., 1999). Paige et al. note that if participants understand the context, then they know the cultural meanings connected with time, place, person and circumstance. In turn, this understanding suggests the language behavior suitable to those circumstances. In short, one does need to understand the cultural context in order to communicate.

Therefore, it is not the context itself that changes language use or how language speakers behave, it is the meaning connected with that context. The meaning is determined by the culture. Accordingly, it is necessary for second language learners to be effective second culture learners who must understand how to interpret the context. This suggests that in second language education, opportunities must be provided for students to be exposed to, or immersed in the

target culture in order to gain knowledge in finding out the cultural meanings of time, place, person and circumstances (Paige et al., 1999).

The Settings for Culture Learning. There are two important settings for culture learning in second language education: the naturalistic setting of the field and the formal, structured setting of the classroom (Paige et al., 1999).

1. Naturalistic settings. According to Paige et al. (1999), in the research literature about settings for second language and culture learning, the emphasis has been on naturalistic settings as represented by study abroad programs. The study abroad literature has the most abundant research on the importance of context on culture learning. Paige et al. indicate that the experiences of students studying abroad and the impact of their educational visits abroad have aroused researchers' interest. However, much of the literature is focused on language learning; far less consideration is given to culture learning, or to the connection between them.

With respect to the impact of study abroad on second language learning, the research literature generally supports the hypothesis that second language proficiency is enhanced by the study abroad experience (Dyson, 1988), but it also shows that the process is more complex than might be expected. DeKeyser (1991) found a large difference in terms of learners' vocabulary gains as a result of the different amounts of time spent studying abroad. He attributes learners' vocabulary gains to these three factors: (1) access to native speakers, (2) enhanced motivation for learning new words, and (3) a large number of possible settings where new vocabulary can be practiced. Raupach (1987) researched groups of students studying at different universities abroad and found that the rate of the students' speech was faster after several months abroad, but their grammatical competence was not improved. Students in Meara's (1994) study did not feel that their reading and writing skills changed during their experience abroad, but some felt that their

oral-aural skills improved. Freed (1995) indicates that the benefit from an overseas experience is determined by the types of contact students have when they stay abroad, and also the level of their second language ability. Generally, those students who socialize with target culture people gain more than those who have less such contact, and engage in watching television or reading in the second language. However, students with higher levels of second language skills may also benefit more from activities such as watching television than those with lower levels (Freed, 1995).

Paige et al. (1999) note that many research studies show that the impact of study abroad experiences on culture learning is complex in nature. Armstrong (1984) suggests that study abroad experiences positively influence later language learning, promote favorable attitudes toward other cultures, and create a greater level of cultural awareness. In research with a group of Finnish students studying in the UK, Mauranen (1994) found that the students felt confident about their ability to use English as a second language, but were unsure about their knowledge of how to join in different conversational environments, due to their uncertainty about cultural aspects of those environments. Hannigan (1990) observed a strong relationship between successful intercultural communication and some definite personal characteristics such as: flexibility, organizational skills, cultural empathy, and higher levels of linguistic skills. However, according to Paige et al., Hannigan (1990) could not demonstrate a causal relationship between the intercultural experience and the development of these traits. Thus, although some outcomes such as greater self-confidence, and enhanced cultural self-awareness and positive attitudes toward other cultures are always found to be related to learning abroad experiences, the influence of those experiences on culture learning is less clear. Moreover, Freed (1991) also suggests that

even a single negative experience abroad can also have an impact on the learner's perspective about the target culture, and hinder both second language learning and second culture learning.

To sum up, studies on the influence of setting in language learning demonstrate that immersion in the target culture is a significant factor (Paige et al., 1999). It can accelerate second language and second culture learning, depending on two major conditions: (1) the individual learner's motivation and previous language background, (2) positive experience in the target culture. According to Paige et al., the naturalistic setting itself does not ensure increases in either second language or second culture learning beyond what can be learned in the classroom. However, if the cultural immersion experiences are positive and learners have the right motivation and backgrounds, their second language and second culture learning can be significantly improved.

2. Structured settings. With respect to the structured setting of the classroom, immersion programs are emphasized in many studies (Paige et al., 1999). Theoretically, immersion programs are based on the concept that instruction conducted in the target second language enables students to learn the language more effectively. Students can have "real experiences" with the target language if the target language is used across the curriculum in courses other than the language course (Edwards & Rehorick, 1990). However, Paige et al. indicate that there is very little known about classroom settings that try to replicate or approximate the target culture. There exists a gap on how naturalistic and classroom settings might interact to enhance second culture learning.

Learner Variables. For many second language educators, a significant reason for introducing the target culture into the classroom has been the hope that learning of the target culture will increase learner motivation and improve attitudes toward second language learning

(Paige et al., 1999). Motivation and attitudes are two major factors affecting individual learners in their study of a second language, although they are difficult to identify (Ellis, 1986). It is commonly held view that a person's behavior is controlled by needs and interests which influence how he/she actually acts. However, these cannot be directly observed. They are inferred from what he/she actually does (Ellis, 1986). The distinction between motivation and attitudes is not always clear in second language learning research, nor is the relationship between them (Ellis, 1986). Gardner and Lambert (1972) conducted the most extensive research into the role of motivation and attitudes in second language learning. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), 'motivation' refers to the second language learner's overall goal or orientation, and 'attitudes' refers to the learner's persistence in striving for a goal.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) identify two major motivational orientations for second language learning: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation occurs when the learner wants to learn the second language in order to meet with, talk to, and perhaps become like the native speakers of the second language with whom the learner wishes to identify. Instrumental motivation occurs when the learner wishes to learn the second language for more utilitarian reasons, such as passing an examination or getting ahead in one's occupation. It is generally considered that the motivational orientation associated with proficiency in the second language may vary according to setting (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Gardner and Lambert (1972) explain this variation in terms of the role the second language plays in the learner's community. They suggest that integrative motivation appears to be more powerful in facilitating successful second language learning in settings where the second language is not important or necessary outside the classroom for the learner. However, in other situations where the second language is used as a means of wider communication outside the classroom,

successful second language learning is associated with instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). They also point out that the two types of motivation are not mutually exclusive. Second language learning rarely involves only integrative or only instrumental motivation. The social context in which second language learning takes place strongly influences the type and the level of motivation.

There is little doubt that motivation is a powerful factor in second language learning. Its influences can be found in the rate and success of second language learning. However, it is not clear how motivation impacts learning. The problem is that it is only possible to demonstrate a relationship, not the direction of the relationship (Ellis, 1986). Byram and Morgan (1994) also point out the difficulty in inferring a causal relationship between second language learning and motivation. They argue that high motivation may be a result of success in learning second language rather than the cause of the success. Backman (1976) argues that high achievement promotes positive attitudes and high motivation. However, Gardner (1985) suggests reciprocity between these variables. Burstall (1975) indicates that the motivation generated by the learning process itself seems to matter most. MacNamara (1973) expresses a similar view that the most important part of motivation exists in the act of communication itself. The need to get meanings across and the pleasure derived from understanding meanings can actually motivate second language learning.

Compared with motivation, attitudes can be generally defined as the learners' positive or negative feelings toward the target language, the target culture, and study of the target language and culture. Gardner and Lambert (1972) also investigated many different attitudes, which they found are relevant to second language learning. Stern (1983) classifies the attitudes which were investigated by Gardner and Lambert (1972) into three types: (1) attitudes toward the target

culture and people who speak the target language; (2) attitudes toward learning the language in question; (3) attitudes toward languages and language learning in general. Stern (1983) also states that the factors that affect learning the most in second language learning are the perceptions held by second language learners. These perceptions are usually influenced by cultural and sociolinguistic assumptions that are prevalent in the community where learning occurs.

Contact with people from the target culture has a positive influence and improves attitudes under some circumstances (Paige et al., 1999). Porebski and McInnis (1988) assert that increased contact with native speakers leads to positive attitudes rather than the reverse. In their study, positive attitudes were defined as the willingness of learners to cultivate friendships with speakers of the target culture. Their study also suggests that research on examining second language learners' voluntary contact with native speakers of that language may lead to more interesting and useful findings.

Paige et al. (1999) indicate that future studies of learners' voluntary contact with native speakers should focus on affective improvement as well as linguistic competence. Ellis argues that "it has become apparent that even if the aim is to find out how learners acquire purely formal features (such as verb + ing or copula 'be'), it is often necessary to examine how they use these features to express meaning" (Ellis, 1994, p. 13-14). Whereas many researchers continue to focus their attention on how second language learners improve their grammatical competence, others are concerned with how learners develop their ability to appropriately perform speech acts such as requests or apologies (Ellis, 1994).

To summarize, a number of factors relevant to the language learner may also influence linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes (including cultural outcomes) in formal and informal

contexts of second language and second culture learning (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Among these are learning strategies, intelligence, previous language background, and language aptitude. The research on motivation and attitudes appears to focus upon the concept of contact between language learners and native speakers of the language being learned, and the role of this contact in the initial stage of intercultural development. In Dodick's (1996) study of motivation and attitudes, he found that American students' lack of motivation to learn French as a second language is a result of their lack the exposure to foreign culture. He also argues that greater cultural awareness is the key to increase students' motivation to learn a second language.

Summary

Learning English as a second language in the target culture is a complex process. Second language learners may learn the second language by immersing themselves in the target culture rather than enrolling in regular ESL programs. During the process of improving second language competence, learning of the target culture plays an important role because it can help second language learners to negotiate meaning and understand the communicative and cultural contexts in which linguistic codes are used.

The literature on the second language learning theories reviewed in this chapter suggests that many variables influence the learning of a second language. The research on second culture learning provides a theoretical framework for integrating second language learning and second culture learning. The major variables in the contexts of second culture and second language learning are also emphasized in the review of the literature on culture learning in second language education. However, there has been little documented research on the learners' experiences of second culture and second language learning in the target culture and on what these experiences mean to them. The purpose of this study is to investigate English as a second

language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning.

The next chapter focuses on the research design and methodology for data collection, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study aimed at investigating English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. This chapter provides a discussion of the research design and methodology used in the study. The theoretical foundations of the research methodology are examined first. Then, the design of the study, research methods employed, and approaches for data analysis are presented.

Theoretical Foundation of the Research Design and Methodology

Generally speaking, in qualitative research the researcher endeavors to depict an accurate description of reality as seen by the respondents themselves (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The qualitative researcher does not assume that he or she knows what the participants will say. Qualitative research in this regard is a form of naturalistic inquiry, which discovers the natural flow of events and processes and how participants interpret them. Most qualitative research describes and analyzes people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993).

Qualitative research is based on a naturalistic-phenomenological perspective that sees reality as series of layers of interactions and social experiences from the participants' points of view (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). Researchers are interested in how different people make sense of their lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In order to capture perspectives and depict the meaning accurately, qualitative researchers "set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants' perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.7).

Qualitative inquiry was selected for this study because of the nature of the three research questions and the importance of maintaining the integrity of the individuals' experiences and

perceptions by enabling them to express these experiences and perceptions in their own words and voices. In this way the ESL learners' perceptions inform us of the impact of their culture learning experiences on their English learning. By exploring the perceptions of these ESL learners, I hoped to understand not only their culture and English learning experiences, but also the role of their culture learning in their English learning.

Research Design

This was a qualitative study in which the primary method of data collection consisted of interviews with eight ESL learners who were enrolled in academic programs or courses at Lakehead University. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended interview questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Following each interview, theoretical and methodological notes were taken and a research log was kept to record issues and observations relevant to ongoing development of the investigation.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture?
- 2) How does immersion in English-language culture influence their second language learning?
- 3) What are ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture on their English learning?

Time Frame

Eight interviews were conducted in January 2003. Each interview lasted for about one hour and was audio-taped. The tapes were subsequently transcribed. Making theoretical and methodological notes, data analysis, and continuing to review the literature were ongoing.

Participant Selection/Entry

In order to gain access to a pool of prospective interviewees, information about the study was distributed to international students currently enrolled at Lakehead University, by means of electronic mailing lists circulated within the university. The International Student Office at Lakehead University assisted in contacting students. Because many international students are ESL learners, the international student body provided a pool of prospective participants. A brief description of the study and what would be required of the participants was explained in the electronic mail messages. Those who were interested in participating were invited to contact me by electronic mail.

However, the number of responses received was not sufficient. Therefore, I attended a number of international student activities and distributed handouts to international students, in order to let them know the purpose and nature of the study and the expectations for participation. In this way, I was able to locate volunteers who agreed to participate in the study. Eight participants representing a number of different nationalities were chosen from the volunteers. This sample size was determined by the time needed to transcribe the interviews and analyze the volume of data obtained in this type of study.

All of the participants were ESL learners enrolled in Lakehead University programs or courses, but who were not currently taking ESL courses. The eight participants came from several different countries, spoke several different first languages, and had different personal backgrounds. Prior to conducting interviews, I met the participants and sent them copies of cover letters and consent forms (Appendix B). They were apprised of research ethics considerations (Appendix B) before the interviews.

Setting

Each interview was conducted at a location that was convenient to each participant. For example, the interview with Kate took place in her house.

Methodology

Data Collection

The primary method used to collect data was a semi-structured interview with open-ended interview questions. The interview guide is included as Appendix A.

The interview was the dominant strategy used because it “is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 94). Each participant was interviewed for about one hour. The interviews were audio-taped with a recorder and the content was transcribed after each interview. Some notes were taken during the interview process.

Following each interview, theoretical and methodological notes were taken. While the investigation was ongoing, a research log was kept to document the research process, decision-making, and note emerging categories/themes, and reflections.

Data Analysis

In this study, the constant-comparative approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was used to analyze the data to determine categories and themes. Analysis of the data started with coding transcribed interviews. The data were searched for regularities and patterns with keywords and phrases being chosen to represent these regularities and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Initial data analysis was concurrent with data collection and continued through the study. Coding in qualitative research is an ongoing process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Throughout the data collection process, preliminary codes were developed, and data were coded as they were

collected. The example below illustrates how the data were analyzed and coded. This is an excerpt from the response of Emma during the interview:

If I think the Canadian way is good for me, then I accept it and sometimes I do things like them, but I still keep our Chinese way sometimes, because it's too familiar to me. If I think the Canadian way is not good for me, then I don't accept it, but I just know about it and get some knowledge about it. (p. 43)

This piece of data was coded as 'keep one's own first culture' because it indicated that the participant would never abandon her first culture. Data with this code were then placed into the category of 'acculturation,' which covered data that indicated how the participants adapted themselves to a new culture – a predominantly English culture in Canada.

Formal analysis of the data did not take place until data collection was complete (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). ATLAS.ti, a software program for qualitative data analysis, was used in the process of analyzing data in this study. After data collection was complete and the preliminary codes were defined, the transcripts and preliminary codes were input into ATLAS.ti. The data were also coded in ATLAS.ti. During the process of coding, the preliminary codes were modified, the identified categories were also input into ATLAS.ti and codes were grouped into the categories in ATLAS.ti. After codes were assigned to categories, these categories were clustered around themes, which corresponded to the research questions. Table 1 below displays the categories and themes developed in this study and provides an example of each category.

Research Ethics Considerations

I explained relevant research ethics considerations to all study participants. Approval for the research being proposed was sought from the Lakehead University Senate Research Ethics Board. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from each interviewee before each interview, in accordance with the Research Ethics Board's requirements. A covering letter explaining the relevant ethical issues was given to each interviewee and discussed with them. A

form indicating their informed consent for participation was signed by each interviewee. Copies of these documents are included as Appendix B. The ethics considerations included the following:

Voluntary participation. All participants were informed that they were volunteers and could withdraw at any time from the study.

Risks and benefits. There were no apparent risks of physical or psychological harm to the participants. The primary benefit to them may be an increased interest in language learning.

Confidentiality and anonymity. All participants were informed that the data they provided were anonymous and confidential.

Dissemination of research findings. All participants were informed that a copy of the research findings would be available in the Faculty of Education Library at Lakehead University.

Storage of data. All participants were informed that information obtained during interviews would be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of seven years and then would be destroyed.

In summary, this chapter described the theoretical foundations of the research methodology, the design of the study, and the methodology for data collection and data analysis. The next chapter presents the findings and interpretation of the study.

Themes	Categories	Examples
The nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences	Acculturation	"Much more used to the English culture than before" (Tom, p. 63).
	Culture shock	"But I still don't like to talk with Canadian students and make friends with them. I feel stressful to speak to native speakers" (Kate, p. 52).
	Social distance	"Because it's their society, not yours, I mean, there's no relationship between them, because they don't understand you, and you don't understand their things" (Andrew, p. 35).
	Cultural awareness	"Actually, if I want to compare, I can tell you these two cultures are very different" (Andrew, p. 36).
The positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning	Access to comprehensible input	"Because in class teachers use simple English, quite formal without slang, they speak quite clearly, easy to understand, not too difficult" (Peter, p. 2).
	Enhanced motivation	"I think it's a requirement for me to learn English well, when I live in Canada and study in Canada" (Emma, p. 45).
	Effective communication and interaction	"Sometimes we get together and talk for two hours or so. I mean, in the house, because I live with these people, we have a good time, you know, like, we joke, we play together, we chat" (Tom, p. 61).
ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning	Favorable and unfavorable conditions	"Because I live with Canadians now, I can more and more understand them and know more about them, like their personalities, their habits, their thinking and such things. It's good for me, especially when I speak to them, I can understand them more exactly and express myself more clearly" (Kate, p. 53).
	Benefits	"Actually, every day I learn something new in Canada, such as: new idioms, new words, and something like that" (Andrew, p. 38).
	Reasons for English improvement	"In Thunder Bay, really, I'm involved in an English cultural environment. It helps me improve my English, because I have to use English most of time" (Kate, p. 52).
	Effective strategies	"If you want to improve your English, you have to use more and contact English-speaking people" (Mike, p. 13).

Table 1. Categories and themes.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents the findings and interpretation of my study of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. Three themes based on the research questions were identified from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences; (b) the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning; and (c) ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning. The first section of this chapter presents profiles of the participants. The second section describes the findings of the study. The third section discusses the interpretation of the findings.

Participant Profiles

The eight participants consisted of four males and four females. All eight participants had studied English as a foreign/second language for at least five years. Moreover, all of them thought it was very important for them to learn English and they were all willing to share their experiences and perceptions with respect to their English learning. Following is a profile of each of the eight participants. Pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Tom. Tom, male, is enrolled in an undergraduate program in Geography. Malaysian and Chinese (Mandarin) are his first languages. He is from Malaysia, but studied in Singapore from Grade 3 to Grade 12. After graduation from secondary school in Singapore, he immigrated to Canada with his family. He has been in Canada for three years. This is his third year at Lakehead University. He began learning English fifteen years ago. He said that before coming to Canada, "my use of grammar is not absolutely that good...pronunciation is not good, having a strong strange accent." Although English is one of the official languages of Singapore, and is also the

language of instruction in the school system, he thought “in Singapore, you know, there is a joke we say like, they don't speak English, they speak 'Singlish,' because they use a lot of Singapore slang, and the tone is so much different, and some words are pronounced differently.”

Kate. Kate, female, is an undergraduate student in Computer Science. She was born in Hong Kong. Her first language is Chinese (Cantonese). She can also speak Mandarin Chinese fluently. She had spent two years in Vancouver in secondary school, and four years in Toronto studying for her Bachelor's degree in Mathematics. She is in her second year at Lakehead University working towards a second Bachelor's degree. She has lived in Canada for eight years since coming here at the age of twenty. She started to learn English in kindergarten when she was three years old. Her formal English education continued until her graduation from secondary school. She described her knowledge of English before coming to Canada, as “...in reading and writing it was ok...in listening and speaking, it was very poor. All is simple English. I could only understand and speak very simple English.” Although she was the participant who has lived in Canada for the longest time, she described her English proficiency in the following way: “In those past six years in Vancouver and Toronto, I didn't really need to speak English, because we have a lot of our own shopping malls, restaurants, and everything...honestly, before I came to LU, Thunder Bay, I couldn't even speak English fluently.”

Mike. Mike, male, is taking elective courses in Philosophy and English Literature at Lakehead University. Portuguese is his first language. He is not a degree student at this time, but plans to enroll in a B.A. program in Anthropology next fall. He comes from Brazil. His mother is Brazilian, but his father is Canadian. He commented, “My Dad adapted to the Brazilian culture. In this way I say my family is a Brazilian culture, and Portuguese speaking family.” He came to Canada in June 2002, but had previously visited Canada on three separate occasions. When he

was six years old, he came to Canada and started learning English at school. After one year, he went back to Brazil and his English learning was interrupted for one year until he went to study in an American boarding school in Brazil. He learned English there for ten years before coming to Canada. He thought that before coming to Canada, "I could speak English well" because "I grew up in an American culture in the school for eight months a year."

Emma. Emma, female, is in the second year of a Master of Arts degree in Economics. She is from Mainland China. Her native language is Chinese (Mandarin). She has lived in Canada for one year. She had studied English in secondary school and at university for ten years. After graduation from university, her formal English education ended. However, she kept studying English by herself, so her English learning never stopped. Although she had been learning English for nearly twenty years, since the age of twelve, she still thought that "before coming to Canada...I was good at written English, but I was poor in listening comprehension and oral English."

Andrew. Andrew, male, is enrolled in the Master of Computer Science program. He comes from Iran. His first language is Farsi. He immigrated to Canada in 2001. He has been in Canada for one and a half years. This is his first year at Lakehead University. He started to learn English when he was twenty-five years old. He had studied English for five years, the shortest period of the eight participants. In his home country, he attended two kinds of English classes. One was English grammar class; the other was oral English class. Both of them were divided into 12 levels. He started each class at the first level and finished at level 12, the last level, before he came to Canada. He was very confident in his English proficiency before coming to Canada because he had completed the highest level of English language studies in his home country. However, after coming to Canada, he realized that "grammar is very good...my conversation

with native people, I mean, all Canadians, oh, is difficult...I have so many big problems with my hearing, especially when I talk to Canadian people.” He mentioned that “at that time when I just came here, I thought I didn't know anything about English, a lot of slang, different accents, really, it's difficult to understand.”

Maggie. Maggie, female, is studying for her Bachelor of Engineering degree in Electrical Engineering. She was born in Burma, but moved to Singapore after finishing secondary school, and lived there for several years before coming to Canada. Her first language is Burmese. She has been in Canada for four months since starting her program at Lakehead University. She started to learn English in kindergarten and continued her formal English education in Burma for about thirteen years. After moving to Singapore, she continued to learn English because she thought “...my English is really still poor, especially compared with native English speakers, yeah, so I still want to learn more really, yeah.” In Singapore, she took English courses in a language school to prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Test. She described her knowledge of English before coming to Canada as “intermediate.”

Peter. Peter, male, is an undergraduate student in Chemical Engineering. He is from France. French is his first language. He is an exchange student at Lakehead University, in the third year of the Chemical Engineering program. He will be returning to France at the end of the current academic year, to complete his studies at his home institution. This is his second time in Canada. Five years ago, he came to Canada as a secondary school exchange student for three months. He had studied English for nine years. He commented “...my English was still very poor when I came here. We have maybe twelve hours of English classes a week in France, but it wasn't very good. So when I came here, I probably understood English, but I couldn't speak

English at all.” However, he acknowledged the benefit of his first stay in Canada, stating that “after three months in Canada, I was able to speak English and understand English. But after five years, I almost forgot everything.”

Jenny. Jenny, female, is in the first year of her Master’s program in Mechanical Engineering. Tamil is her first language. She was born in Sri Lanka and lived there until 1996. In 1996, she emigrated to Canada and subsequently became a Canadian citizen. At the time of the interview, she had lived in Canada for seven years. Before she started her program at Lakehead University in January 2003, she had one year of secondary school in Canada, and had also studied for her Bachelor’s degree at university for four years. She started to learn English when she was in kindergarten. Because there are two different cultures and languages in Sri Lanka, Tamil and Sinhala, she had to use English to communicate with people speaking Sinhala when she lived in Sri Lanka. She said, “Before coming to Canada, my accent was strong... I learned grammar in Sri Lanka, but I didn't learn spoken English that much. I knew English, but I didn't use that much.”

Research Findings

This section presents three themes emerging from the analysis of the qualitative data: the nature of ESL learners’ culture learning experiences; the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning; and ESL learners’ perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning. Each theme is discussed below.

The Nature of ESL Learners’ Culture Learning Experiences

The first theme describes the nature of ESL learners’ culture learning experiences. Because they had different personal backgrounds, the eight participants had different culture learning experiences during their stay in Canada. Canada is a country with a predominantly

English culture (with the obvious exception of Quebec, where French predominates). The participants' culture learning experiences shared some similar features in the areas of: (1) acculturation; (2) culture shock; (3) social distance; and (4) cultural awareness.

Acculturation. All eight participants expressed the idea that when they immersed themselves in this predominantly English culture in Canada, they could adapt to it, and at the same time, maintain their own first culture. When responding to the question of how they felt about their capability to adapt to a new culture – a predominantly English culture, Emma thought her capability was good:

I think it's OK for me, because, you know, every culture has, it has both its good side and bad side. Just throw, just give up that bad side, and to accept good side. So I think, I have good capability to adapt to a new culture. There's no problem for me, as I want to have some new experiences in a foreign country with a new culture. (p. 42)

However, she said she would never give up her first culture:

If I think the Canadian way is good for me, then I accept it and sometimes I do things like them, but I still keep our Chinese way sometimes, because it's too familiar to me. If I think the Canadian way is not good for me, then I don't accept it, but I just know about it and get some knowledge about it. (p. 43)

Mike's description of his capability to adapt to the English culture in Canada focused on his personal life experiences:

I don't have any problem to adapt to the English culture here, because I grew up in an American school. And there was an American culture, and American teachers. And I have some relatives living in Canada, I visited Canada a couple of times, each time for about one year. And I think because of these, I've been growing up in this kind of multicultural situation, I can adapt to the English culture in Canada easily. (p. 12)

Although he could easily adjust to the English cultural environment in Canada, he stated that he could not accept all aspects of the English culture:

I don't think people have to agree with everything in the culture that they are living in. If something in the English culture here I don't agree with, I just keep my own culture. (p. 13)

Maggie attributed her easy adaptation to the English culture in Canada to her willingness to interact with people in her new environment:

Capability...for me, I like to deal with people, I like to speak to people, I like to chat with people, I like to meet new people, and I like to have more friends, so I mean, for me, I am easy, very easy to adapt to this new culture. Yeah, so far the culture is ok for me. (p. 28)

At the same time, she indicated that she would maintain particular values held in her first culture:

Second example like, having sex. For me, I think this is an individual belief, like some of my Asian friends, they are like Canadians, they don't take it that serious, and they think that it doesn't matter, it's all right for them to have sex before marriage. For me, I personally like to take it serious by myself, so I want to be a virgin until I marry, I want to keep me as a virgin until I marry. So this is my personal belief, so I want to do that, so I did it, so I just keep it, and I don't follow the Canadian culture. (p. 29)

Six participants indicated that they learned the English culture from schooling, daily life, and the environment here in Canada. Maggie described her culture learning experiences:

I learn from school. I learn from friends. I learn from the environment that I went to. And sometimes when I go to somewhere, even like I go to Superstore, I look at how people behave. Then I know this is how people do here, so that's the way I learn from the environment. I pick up the English culture from the environment. (p.30)

Emma emphasized that living with Canadians was one of the most valuable culture learning experiences:

I am now living with my landlady, and she is a Canadian and she is also a retired teacher. So, because I live with her, I learn a lot about what the normal Canadian's daily life is. And also I talk with her a lot about all kinds of things, like the health insurance in Canada, and sometimes about the education in Canada, and also I tell my landlady about the culture in China. So through these, every day I learn. I learn how to speak English and the English-language culture. (p. 43)

Mike's and Peter's culture learning experiences in Canada differed from the other participants because the English culture was familiar to them before they came to Canada. Mike indicated that he learned the English culture when he studied in an American boarding school in

Brazil: "I learned the English culture in my school, it's an American boarding school. The culture here is very much like the American culture" (p. 14).

According to Peter who came from France, his first culture was similar to the English culture in Canada and he could easily adapt to the culture here:

I can easily adapt to the culture here...I don't have to learn the English-language culture here, because our culture is too close to it...So the English culture is not new to me. I'm familiar with it. I don't need to learn the culture here. (pp. 3, 4)

Culture Shock. All eight participants suggested that they underwent some forms of culture shock. When they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture, they experienced, to varying degrees, feelings of fear, stress, loneliness and homesickness. When being asked about the difficulty in expressing herself in English, Jenny mentioned her fear of speaking English:

I was too shy to speak English, to express myself in English. I was shy, because I thought, I was like, if I made a mistake or something like that, you know, they would make some fun of me, right. (p. 18)

She also described how she dealt with this difficulty with the help of friends from similar cultural backgrounds:

For example, you know, if I had a question in the class, I had to go ahead and ask the teacher how to do that. But at the beginning I was so shy, you know, like, I was afraid maybe I may make a mistake when asking, and things like that. But then, you know, the people that I was hanging around, at least they adapted to the environment, they explained to me how things were, and you don't worry about it. And I just believed them and tried to do it. So then I just asked questions in class, it wasn't that hard. I found that my feeling at first was wrong, yeah. No one made fun of me even if I made a mistake. (p. 18)

Kate's response was similar to Jenny's. She said that she found it stressful to speak with native English speakers:

But actually, I don't like to talk to native English speakers; I just like to talk to people speaking English as a second language and they aren't Chinese. I think it is stressful for me to speak to native speakers, for I may make grammar mistakes and something like

that...I also find the personalities of some of Canadians are aggressive. They are too confident, and they are talkative sometimes. So I don't like to talk to them. (p. 48)

Seven participants identified some cultural conflicts between their cultures and the English-language culture which made them uneasy and influenced their adaptation to the new culture. Kate explained some cultural conflict issues in terms of the relationship between people:

Compared with Canadians, Chinese people have more patience and they are more modest. For example, when Canadians see something go wrong or your fault, they just point it out directly, they just say it, in a direct and harsh way. Sometimes it really hurts people's feeling. But...(thinking) Chinese people usually use an indirect way, and you still can know what they want to say. I like our Chinese way, it makes me feel better and not so embarrassed if I do something wrong. Chinese know well how to soothe your feeling and something like that. Well...(hesitating) maybe... Canadians think to say something directly will save time. (p. 50)

She also described her negative experiences in contacts with native English speakers, which had caused her to feel angry, hostile and unhappy:

At the beginning of this term I lived with three Canadian girls in a townhouse. They are in charge of everything in our house. Well...(seems very angry) you know, they wanted to control my lifestyle and schedule. They always criticized the food I cooked and something like that. They moved my stuff without my permission. They even changed the light bulbs. Their bulbs are too dark. Once I nearly fell down when I went downstairs. Oh, it was awful. (p. 50)

When responding to the question of how she dealt with this kind of situation, she seemed frustrated:

Most times I just ignored and kept silent. I didn't want to argue with them. ...(thinking) Sometimes they did something wrong, I talked to them very politely, then, they kept on talking. They are so talkative. They spoke very fast and much more than me. I can understand most, but some I can't understand clearly, so I can't give a response. So they always felt they did right and I did wrong. They seldom considered my feelings, and I'm not a native speaker. So, (seems helpless) you know, that's why I moved out and changed to this house. (p. 50)

Kate noted that these unhappy experiences in her contacts with her Canadian roommates had a negative impact on her use of English: "That's why I don't like to talk to Canadians. When I talk

to them, I am very careful and try not to make mistakes. Sometimes I just feel uncomfortable and upset to talk to them” (p. 50).

Emma found that it was difficult to maintain close relationships with native English speakers even though she lived with them:

I think since there're still some barriers, especially in culture, so it's, I found it's difficult to keep very close relationship with them. I think the most difficult part is the different cultural things...for example, I am now living with my Canadian landlady. Yeah, I have some, I have a little bit close relationship with her, but...sometimes there are some great differences between our different living habits, like food, and other entertainments. So I found it's difficult to have very close relationship with my landlady, even though we're living together. Yeah, and I think it's also true to keep close relationship with other Canadians. Yeah, it's my feeling. (p. 44)

However, she expressed her willingness to have friendships with students from her own cultural background because it was easy for her to do so:

Well, actually, I'm now studying in Canada, and most, the closest relationship that I keep with is our Chinese students studying here in Lakehead University. And I found, yeah, because we are from the same culture, and we use the same language, so it's more comfortable to have social relationships with them, and make friends with them. (p. 44)

Mike's viewpoint was similar to Emma's. In addition, he ascribed the difficulty in making close friends with native English speakers to the different cultural understandings of 'friendship':

But there were conflicts, like, even in the American school, there were conflicts there. Like, for example, the way people relate to each other, I guess here too, you don't have friendship with people. Like, when you have the friendship, first, it is very superficial; and then maybe because of interest, and if the interest is gone, the friendship is gone. But in Brazil, people can make very close relationship with a few people, and the friendship is not superficial. Like, if you have some problems, you can go to that person, I mean, go to your friends. We have strong relationship. If we need help, our friends will come and help. But here you got friends, seems like friends, but it's very superficial, yeah. If anything happens, they can't help you...maybe because of the culture. (p. 12)

Social Distance. All eight participants indicated that Canada is a multicultural country with a predominantly English culture. The multicultural nature of Canadian society meant that

they could easily find people from their own cultural backgrounds, and as a result had access to at least some aspects of their own culture even while living in Thunder Bay or elsewhere in Canada. Four participants had immigrated to Canada, and two of them had already become Canadian citizens prior to their interviews. They all desired to adjust themselves to this predominantly English culture and intended to live in Canada for a long time. They held positive attitudes towards Canadian culture. Jenny described how her attitudes towards the new culture changed:

I was too shy to speak English, to express myself in English. I was shy, because I thought, I was like, if I made a mistake or something like that, you know, they would make some fun of me, right. So that's all. When I, you know, it's a good thing about Canada, then I came to understand that everybody is the same, no one can look down upon me, right...as time passed by, when I understand that I am my own, I'm really independent, you know, I am just be myself, no one can do anything to me. So, then I could speak English as I wanted. (p. 18)

That was the difficult thing for me to see the bad side of this new culture, especially, when I just came to Canada, I really had some difficulties to take it. But after I became the Canadian citizen, I have to see all these bad things, but I can take it. And I have gained a lot in Canada, I can further my education very easily. (p. 19)

Both cultures have advantages and disadvantages, like, food, and other things are better in my country, but like education and professional, to study, Canada is a good place. It's a very independent place, and it accepts my culture here, it's multicultural, yeah. So I don't have anything wrong here. (pp. 19-20)

When asked how he dealt with the cultural conflicts, Andrew explained that he tried to integrate and assimilate new cultural elements:

Of course, I cannot resolve. I have to, I mean, take some. I mean, you don't have any choices if you want to adapt yourself. You cannot change the differences in your culture or something like that...so you have two choices, first of all, hide the questions, I mean, escape from conflict situation; two, adapt yourself to that new culture, to the conflict. Another opinion, take some...you have to live here and feel the culture here, and something like that. (p. 37)

Three participants, Emma, Kate, and Maggie, who were international students in Canada, acknowledged that they wanted to learn the English culture in Canada. They stated that their

experiences of immersion in this predominantly English culture were beneficial to them. Their desires were not only to get their academic degrees in Canada, but also to have some new cultural experiences and improve their command of English as well. They also suggested that they might find a job in Canada after graduation. Emma explained the positive experiences that she had benefited from in Canada:

I think another beneficial experience may be to travel in Canada, because when traveling in Canada, you can meet a lot of different people. And they will be very glad to introduce all kinds of things in Canada to you, because you're from China, a very different country with a very different culture. And I found most Canadians are very kind, warm and warm-hearted. So I found I always have very good experiences when I travel in Canada. And I, really, I know and learn a lot about Canada through these traveling experiences. (p. 45)

Maggie found that both she and her Canadian roommates wanted to learn more about each other's cultures:

Now my roommates, all of them are white Canadian girls, and they are really good to me. We are really happy to live together, you see, like, sometimes we have a chat, we chat about social things. Sometimes we chat about education, sometimes we chat about politics, and all those kinds of stuff in our two countries. (p. 25)

Emma's response was similar to Maggie's:

I am now living with my landlady, and she is a Canadian and she is also a retired teacher. So, because I live with her, I learn a lot about what the normal Canadian's daily life is. And also I talk with her a lot about all kinds of things, like the health insurance in Canada, and sometimes about the education in Canada, and also I tell my landlady about the culture in China. (p. 43)

Four participants, Tom, Jenny, Emma, and Mike, described their experiences with religious cultures in Canada:

I attend church. There is a Bible study program there, I attend this Bible study. We come together and study the Bible, and then talk about what we think. And...I go to the international student Bible study group. (Mike, p. 9)

Here, I go to Bible study. (Jenny, p. 17)

I often went to the church to join the religion activities. There I met a lot of people, and I also talked with them about all kinds of things. (Emma, p. 43)

Because I think the religion culture in Canada is a very important part of Canadian culture, so when I talk with these people in the church, I want to know more about the religion culture. And usually, they are very kind, and they told me a lot about the religion, so I learned a lot about this, and I, also I, from this knowledge of religion, I know a lot about what the Canadian culture is, and the way Canadian people thinking about things and doing things. I think religion really has a deep impact on Canadian people's daily life. So I think I benefit a lot from this experience. (Emma, p. 45)

I go to church, and almost everybody in the church, they are Canadians, of course. They use English; their services are in English. (Tom, p. 55)

No problem with talking to those people in the church, and very good relationship with the pastor and pastor's wife, and many people in the church, I know them personally. We talk a lot, especially after the church services when we have time for coffee, time for cookies, and such things. (Tom, p. 61)

Cultural Awareness. The participants' immersion in Canada made them aware of differences between their own first cultures and the Canadian culture. They gave examples of a variety of cultural differences which they found significant. Mike illustrated the differences between his own first culture and the culture here on the basis of people's behavior:

Like, one thing, driving in the street is very different. Here everybody drives very slowly. But in Brazil, people drive very crazily and fast...there like, the traffic is a lot crazier, when you come here, you find people all drive slowly. Like, if somebody here goes somewhere in Brazil, they will get very shocked at the way people drive there. (p. 10)

Jenny also commented on the differences in people's behavior:

My culture is close to Indian culture, so much different from here. In front of you, I can't complain, you know, I'm totally disagreeing with the gay and sexual culture here, and so much drunk. We, in my country, we don't see that at all. And even like pub, drinking very openly, we don't have that. In my country, like, people who drink are old men, like my grandfather, but young people don't drink, not like people doing here. They are smoking, drinking...It's so bad. For me, it's difficult to pick it up. I mean, I can't accept it. (p. 18)

Good things, like, they are all friendly, everybody does their own things, you know, nobody is interested in others' things. But, in my country, like, everybody knows what happens to everybody, you know what I mean, very nosy with everybody. (p. 18)

All eight participants mentioned the differences between the lifestyles in their own countries and the predominant lifestyle in Canada. They all voiced their concerns about food, which is significant in their daily lives, and could have an impact on their adaptation to the new culture. Six participants noted that they preferred to eat the traditional food in their cultures after comparing it with the food in Canada. Peter said that Canadians eat a lot of fast food, and he did not like it: "And like, here they eat too much fast food, like hamburger, I don't like to eat this fast food" (p. 3). He also noticed that his Canadian roommates did not like his French food:

I think...the food is the main conflict. Like, if I give some French food to them, to my roommates, they don't like it at all. If I ask them: "What do you think?" they always tell me it makes them feel sick or something like that. I don't know. Maybe the strong smell or whatever. Like, the cheese from France. They don't like it. (p. 3)

Mike's comments on the food that Canadians ate were similar to Peter's: "...eat fast food every day. I don't think that's healthy" (p. 12). He compared it with what people ate in Brazil: "The ladies cook the food, and also there we eat the natural food, a lot of food, too. We don't, like, eat out every day, not like people here" (p. 11).

Kate and Emma also had similar impressions of the Canadian food and the eating habits of native English speakers:

Canadians eat in a quite different way from Chinese. They eat a lot of fast food and very sweet food. I don't like it. It isn't as healthy as Chinese food. So, I cook Chinese food every day. (Kate, p. 49)

Canadians' eating habit is very different from Chinese's. We cook in different ways, and we eat different food. In China people eat a lot of fresh food, people go to market almost every day to buy fresh vegetables, meat and something like that; here in Canada people often eat canned food and they go to buy food not as often as Chinese people. When Canadians go grocery shopping, they always buy a lot of food, maybe for a whole week, they like to stock food. (Emma, p. 42)

The eight participants compared the customs and values in both their own first cultures and the predominantly English culture. Customs and values in Canadian culture were the

significant factors that influenced their understanding of native English speakers. Andrew found that people from different cultural backgrounds had different concerns:

Well, they are very easy, easy-going, easy-coming, don't think about their future. I met so many people in Canada, especially, I mean, in Thunder Bay. They don't care about their future, and they just think about right now... They don't worry about their future, just relax now. But in my culture, I mean, my back home culture, I mean, they don't care about right now, but very care about their future. Very different. For example, it's not important for me that I don't have money right now, I mean, not so much money. But I plan something for the future, for ten years, just like what I will be after ten years. That's very important for Iranians to do like this. It depends on the culture. But in the English culture, I've never met any Canadians who care about their future. (p. 36)

Emma discovered that the values held in her first culture were different from those kept in the English culture in Canada:

Saving time is more important to Canadians than to Chinese. Chinese regard cooking and eating as a culture. We like to spend time on cooking and eating. But Canadians, I find, they like to spend time on sports and such things. I think these are different values. The meaning of fun is different. And, I think Chinese people value the close relationship between family members, but Canadians not, as I observed. (p. 43)

Tom also mentioned differences in values:

Canadians like to enjoy their life much better, I mean, if you go to Asian countries, people just work, work and work, try to work as much as they could. But people here, they like to enjoy life, so even they don't have a lot of money, they still like to go for vacations, they still like to play, go for sports and things like that, they still like to go out for family trips and things like that, they still like to go for movies and things like that. Yeah, they enjoy life, you know, those things, and they put them at the very important place. They enjoy these recreation activities very much, the recreation is really, really an important part of them. (p. 60)

For five participants one of the most significant differences in cultures was the relationship between parents and children. The awareness of this difference enabled them to better understand themselves and native English speakers. Among the responses were the following:

Canadians are very independent and confident in themselves. They don't have dependence among family members. For example, most of old Canadians live alone. They and their children seldom help each other or stay, live, and have dinner together,

even on holidays. Many Canadian students earn their living when they study at university...Chinese people are more dependent on their families, especially Chinese women. We are more family-oriented. Family members have closer relationship and live together. We have a lot of family gatherings, especially on holidays. We often have dinner together. Most Chinese people financially support their families. Well...for example, our parents financially support our education. After having a job and earning money, we support our parents and younger brothers or sisters. After marriage, we still support them and take good care of them. (Kate, p. 49)

I mean, even after marriage, we often go to our home, I mean, to meet my family, my parents every day, and keep very close relationship in our family. But in Canada, I mean, teenagers become 18 years old, they leave their own home, their parents, and live on themselves. (Andrew, p. 36)

And then, parent and child's relationship is different. I mean, in our culture, like, it's kind of like, it's normal for the parents to go to support their children in their study, in their life and things like that. But many of my Canadian friends, I mean, they have to pay their tuition themselves, some of them even pay their parents rents because they live in their parents' house. I mean that's very different...then I know it's their culture, and it's quite contrary to my culture...when our parents are old, we will take care of them. Yeah, it's also like, it's a requirement, you have to do that. And in Canada, not every people, not every people is doing that. Some parents actually prefer to live themselves, rather than to bother their children, so whatever, so there's big difference. (Tom, p. 58)

The first theme illustrated the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences. All eight participants learned English culture when they immersed themselves in this predominantly English culture in Canada. The second theme, the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning, is discussed below.

The Positive Influence of Immersion in English-Language Culture on ESL Learning

Participants identified three positive influences of immersion in English-language culture on their ESL learning: (1) access to comprehensible input; (2) enhanced motivation; and (3) effective communication and interaction.

Access to Comprehensible Input. All the eight participants perceived that immersion in English-language culture provided them with chances to receive a large amount of valuable English language input, much of which would qualify as comprehensible input in the sense of

Krashen (1985), as discussed in Chapter Two. In order to live and study in this English-speaking country, they had to understand English and communicate in English in different situations. At the same time, these English-rich situations helped them to understand and use English. Therefore, they could learn English from these different situations, which were valuable sources of English input. The English-rich situations that the participants regarded as valuable sources of English input included: (a) school; (b) home; and (c) the broader society.

Four participants mentioned that in class they could understand English easily and use English comfortably because they were familiar with the context in which the English was used. Peter said: "Because in class teachers use simple English, quite formal without slang, they speak quite clearly, easy to understand, not too difficult" (p. 2). He also explained that he used a lot of English when he helped his classmates at university:

I think maybe it's, I explained, during one month, no, maybe two months, chemistry to some of my classmates. I worked with them for the mid-term examination. I had to explain very, very, a lot of terms to them very clearly in English. That's why I improved my English...I explained to them, because these questions are quite easy for me, I mean, the program here is very easy, so I am a lot better than the others, so I explained to them. (p. 6)

Andrew considered that his knowledge of the context influenced his understanding and use of English in it:

Actually, because my major is computer science, I don't have any language problems with my academic study...but if I were a political student, I mean, political science student, for sure, I will have some problems with the language. Because my major, it doesn't need, I mean, so many special or very difficult words, or complicated sentences. So, in contacting with my other students, classmates or talking with my teachers about my major, I didn't have any problems. (p. 34)

Usually when I want to talk something not about my major, I mean, other topics, not my major. If I want to talk about, I mean, party, or if I want to talk about some movies. That situation is difficult for me. Or if I want to talk about something, I mean, emotionally, because I don't know their behavior or their feeling. You know every culture has its own feeling, yeah. Culture to culture is different, I mean, feeling or expressing some ideas. If I want to talk something about my major, everything is clear, I can talk effectively. But if I

want to talk about social problems, or social culture, or any other, I cannot say anything, because I don't have any ideas about it. (p. 35)

Six participants indicated that they had many opportunities for receiving a large amount of English language input in their daily life at home because they lived with native English speakers. Their roommates or landlord talked to them in English every day, at different times, and in different contexts. Kate reflected on her experiences with her roommates who were native English speakers:

You know, when I first came here two years ago, I lived in residence with three Canadians. At first, I hardly talked with or spoke to them, because I couldn't speak any real English. But they just kept talking to me or each other and something like that. They didn't really help me, because their first language is English. But I just... I like to listen to, you know, their talk. As I listened more, I can understand more and, especially learned more about spoken English. (p. 51)

Maggie illustrated how her experiences of living with native English speakers positively influenced her English learning. She said that her Canadian roommates were very nice to her and they often chatted about all kinds of things in both of their countries. She emphasized that she could learn English from their daily talk in English:

Sometimes they can teach me when I use a wrong phrase, you see. If I use something that, I mean, not meaningful, is not that suitable to casual talk, is not that very useful, they can rephrase for me any time, so that I mean I don't have to, need to purposefully go to learn English somewhere, you see, I can learn at any time, something like in everyday life. (pp. 25-26)

Andrew and Emma shared the experiences of living with their landlords. Andrew said that "Whenever I talk to my landlord, she is a Canadian, of course. She is very nice. Every day she teaches me something, more words...I mean I'm learning from her every day" (p. 38). Emma also indicated that she benefited from her talk with her landlord about all kinds of things in Canada: "So through these, every day I learn, I learn how to speak English and the English- language culture...she really teaches me a lot about the slang, and idioms, and how to use them" (p. 43).

Seven participants found that in their daily conversations native English speakers used a lot of idioms and slang, which the participants had not learned from their ESL textbooks before coming to Canada. Jenny admitted that she could understand more slang since coming to Canada because of greater exposure to it:

But I picked up some slang and idioms and such things. It's new to me, yeah, new to me. I had to learn... at the beginning it was so hard, because the way they talked, like, really fast; and they talked in slang, you know, even when they made a joke, I could not really understand. But now I can understand, you know, the way I am used to and understand now, so it's okay. (p. 17)

Maggie's response was similar to Jenny's. She realized her problem was lack of understanding and using idioms and slang although she only had been in Canada for four months. She decided that she had to learn more slang:

When I came here...(thinking) usage, in terms of English usage, is the same, but the only thing different is that here I need to be more familiar with the slang that they use and the phrases that they use and things like that. They have their own slang and own phrases, and yeah, so I need to be more familiar with them and I need to try more. (p. 25)

Six participants indicated that media sources such as television, radio, and newspaper, which are part of the broader society, were also significant sources of English language input. Emma emphasized the effectiveness of Canadian television programs in learning English, which were full of idioms and slang:

Because in all kinds of, in some kinds of TV programs there are idioms, slang and something like that, you can learn these idioms, slang and such things when you watch TV programs. I found if I can understand most part of the talk between the characters, and if there's only one or two idioms in their talk, then I always can guess its right meaning. (p. 43)

Jenny acknowledged the role of watching television programs in Canada in improving her English:

But here I watched more English TV programs. I like to watch "Friends", an English TV program, and such kinds of TV programs, I watch a lot. And also I watch English movies a lot. I learned a lot of English from these TV programs and movies. (p. 20)

Kate and Andrew also held similar opinions about the value of television programs that they watched in Canada:

I like watching TV. I watched TV a lot, of course lots of in English. So I learned lots of new words, even some dirty words. I like to watch and read some comedies sometimes, and jokes, and sometimes, dirty jokes, and in this way I learn English very fast because I'm interested in it. (Kate, p. 51)

Actually, every day I learn something new in Canada, such as: new idioms, new words, and something like that...I have the chance to watch TV, it's very good for my English, especially, for my hearing, my listening. (Andrew, p. 38)

Enhanced Motivation. All eight participants spoke of their motivation to come and study in Canada. Before coming to study in Canada, four of them believed that they could improve their English while they were enrolled in academic programs in Canada. The other four participants had immigrated to Canada or had already become Canadian citizens, and thought it was easy to further their education in Canada. In either situation, the participants indicated that they increasingly came to realize the importance of improving their English proficiency in the process of their adaptation to the English culture in Canada. Therefore, their motivation to learn English was enhanced after coming to Canada because they wanted to gain success both in their academic lives and in their personal lives. Emma expressed her willingness to learn English in Canada:

I am now living in Canada, studying in Canada, so the English culture is predominant. Every person here speaks English when I'm having class, when I go shopping, and when I go to watch movies, all kinds of things, so this environment forced me to, to improve my English, especially my spoken English, my listening comprehension, because if I don't understand, and if I cannot express myself correctly, I cannot live, yeah, in Canada, and I cannot complete my graduate study in Canada, and I cannot get my M.A. degree in Canada, and even I cannot live in Canada. So such kind of predominant English culture forced me to learn English, to improve my English ability as quickly as possible, so, yeah, it's really, I think it's a requirement for you to learn English well, when you live in Canada and study in Canada. (p. 45)

Andrew's response was similar to Emma's. He also emphasized the significance of mastery of English to ESL learners who were living in Canada:

I mean, in Canada, especially, in Canada, usually, I mean, talking influentially is the most important point to everybody. If whenever you cannot talk influentially, I mean, you can't impress listener. So it is said if you want to get a job, a good job, you have to talk influentially. If you can't talk influentially, you will have some problems, every problem like, in finding a job, in finding a friend, a Canadian friend, having some relationship with them, for sure, you'll have some problems. (p. 38)

I just care about English because it's an international language. If you want to go to everywhere, you have to use English, not Farsi or Chinese. I just care about using English, because it's not my native language. If I want to live here, I have to use English. I try my best to learn English. I have problems with words, new idioms, I just care about this. But anyway, I must use English here. That's it. I want to improve my English. (pp. 38-39)

Maggie's motivation to learn English was strengthened by the English-rich environment in Canada:

Since I am here, and this Ontario region is, I mean, the majority of people, they use English, they don't use French that much. So I think English language is a good thing to learn here. And I'm really, really appreciate to learn that, I mean, new English knowledge, and the opportunities that I can learn whatever that I can pick up from anybody else. I'm happy to be here...I mean, I'm happy to learn proper English here, you see, that's another thing. Even though I stayed in Singapore, I might not have a chance to learn proper English and formal English. But staying here, I can understand more about formal English and even in the writing skill, I can improve a lot, I mean, the formal writing skill, yeah. (p. 25)

Tom asserted that he had the strongest motivation to improve his English when he communicated with native English speakers:

I mean when I talk to Canadian people, I always like, you know, like, hope that some day I could speak English to Canadians as fluently as they do. So one day I hope that some day I could speak English so easily, you know, non-stop, no problems, no grammatical mistakes, no pauses and things like that, just speak like Canadians, no accent and don't need to think how to pronounce the words. (pp. 61, 62)

Seven participants acknowledged that it was after they came to Canada that they came to realize their actual level of knowledge and proficiency in English. Because all of them had learned English for at least five years in their home countries, they had thought that their English

was good before they came to Canada. However, after they used their English in a real English environment, they came to be aware of the difference between their English proficiency and that of native English speakers. The great difference between their English proficiency and that of native English speakers motivated them to learn English as best they could.

Andrew explained that before coming to Canada, he had completed English classes at the highest level in his home country, so he thought he would not have any problems in communicating in English. However, the real situation was exactly the opposite, and as a result he decided to study English intensively:

I totally, I mean, when I just came to Canada, I really had many problems, so many problems. And I can tell you I didn't understand anything, even one word, I mean, when I came to Canada, at the airport when I went to check in and had conversation with Canadians, I didn't understand anything...I can say that in this previous one and a half years, I mean, I improved my listening, my English very completely. And before I came to Canada, I thought that I wouldn't have any problems with my English. But after I came to Canada, I found so many problems, that's why I attended one class, TOEFL class in Toronto. That's it. I mean, definitely, my English improved a lot, much better than before. (p. 40)

Effective Communication and Interaction. All eight participants provided insights into their perceptions about the important role of effective communication in English in their English learning. Seven participants realized that their communication skills in English were still very limited after coming to Canada, although they had studied English for at least five years in their home countries. They commented that their low level of communication skills in English resulted from the fact that there were no English-speaking environments in their home countries, and they seldom had exposure to English-language culture before coming to Canada. Peter explained that his English learning experiences in his home country lacked real communication in English:

Because we don't have to speak English in our daily life in France, and the English teachers are very bad, they use French all the time, so...they speak French in class to teach English, they use French all the time except they have to say English. (p. 6)

He compared it with his English learning experiences in Canada, which were full of real communication:

I think it's very good for me to learn English in Canada. For me, staying in an English-speaking country is the only way to learn English...Because I have to speak English all the time, when I speak to my roommates, when I speak to everybody speaking English, here very few people speak French. So I always use English, and staying here, I'm interested in speaking English with English-speaking people. So I can improve my English here. (p. 6)

Jenny noted that she had more contact with English culture and more communication in English in Canada than in her home country:

In Sri Lanka, we don't see any white people. I can only learn about the English culture through living here...I learned English in Sri Lanka, but I never used it that much, I knew English, but I didn't use it that much. But here I speak English every day, so I have confidence in using English. So I think talking in English every day is the most beneficial experience. (pp. 19, 22)

Mike's response was different than those of the other seven participants. He attributed his high level of ability to communicate in English to his early English immersion education in an American boarding school:

I guess I could speak English, because I studied from Third Grade to Twelve Grade in an American school, so yeah, I could speak English well. (p. 8)

I was speaking English in my school, yeah, it's a boarding school, so I spoke English all the time. They have American teachers. (p. 9)

I used English a lot when I was in the American school in Brazil. Yeah, actually, before I came to Canada, I had already immersed in an English-speaking environment for a long time. I grew up in an American school, an English environment, eight months a year. (p. 15)

The participants indicated that they had more effective communication and interaction with native English speakers when they immersed themselves in this predominantly English

culture. They also stated that understanding English culture was necessary for them to communicate and interact with native English speakers. Greater understanding of English culture enabled them to have more effective communication and interaction, which were significant to their English learning. Kate regarded her contact with native English speakers as a way of learning English:

But, you know, because I live with Canadians now, I can more and more understand them and know more about them, like their personalities, their habits, their thinking and such things. It's good for me, especially when I speak to them, I can understand them more exactly and express myself more clearly. (p. 53)

Emma concluded that she benefited significantly from her contact with native English speakers and the English culture here:

I usually talk with my Canadian landlady, and through this daily talking for one hour or around two hours, I really improved a lot in my English, and also I know a lot about Canada, yeah, through talking on its education, its health insurance, and its employment and politics, and culture, religion and all kinds of things. (p. 45)

Because I went to church very often, and I think now I know a lot about the religions in Canada, yeah, I think so, now I can talk a lot of things with them in English, much more than one year ago, when I just got here. (p. 46)

However, seven participants indicated that because of the cultural differences between their cultures and the predominantly English culture in Canada, it was difficult for them to form truly close relationships with native English speakers. Nonetheless, they were able to adapt to the predominantly English culture and communicate with native English speakers. Among the responses were the following:

But I think since there're still some barriers, especially in culture, so it's, I found it's difficult to keep very close relationship with them. I think the most difficult part is the different cultural things. (Emma, p. 44)

I know quite a lot of English-speaking people, but not like very close friends. I just play with them, that's all. (Peter, p. 4)

Personally, I don't. I don't have many Canadian friends. I pretty much hang around my own people, I mean, people from my culture. We have the similar cultural background...it's not because of communication in English. I have friends, not only the people who speak my language, all my friends, we all speak English. I have friends from Pakistan, they don't speak my language. I have friends from India, they don't speak my language...but we all kind of eat the same food. We have the similar cultural background, but we all speak English. (Jenny, P. 21)

This section demonstrated the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning. The third theme presents ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning.

ESL Learners' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture Learning

The participants' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their ESL learning included four dimensions: (1) favorable and unfavorable conditions; (2) benefits; (3) reasons for English improvement; and (4) effective strategies.

Favorable and Unfavorable Conditions. Each participant indicated that immersion in a predominantly English culture provided favorable conditions for English learning. When living and studying in a predominantly English culture, the participants had to interact with both the English culture and with native English speakers. Most of these interactions were identified by participants as presenting favorable conditions for their English learning. All eight participants indicated that the English-rich environment was one of the most favorable conditions for them.

In order to explain it, Kate described her English learning experiences in different places:

I started English learning in Kindergarten, from some vocabulary...Yeah. But you know, in Hong Kong, you know, Chinese speaking place, you just learn some more grammar and yeah, just, you know, one hour a day, five days a week, you go to school and every day has one hour English class, but you don't really, you don't have chance to practice English, right, to speak and something like that, so that's not very useful. I still couldn't speak English after high school. No English environment, I think. (pp. 50, 51)

You know when I first came to Canada, I lived in Vancouver for two years, and then four years in Toronto. Those are big cities having lots of Chinese, especially people from Hong Kong. We have our own communities, and ... (trying to express clearly) you know,

in those past six years, I didn't really need to speak English, because we have a lot of our own shopping malls, restaurants, and everything...honestly, before I came to LU, Thunder Bay, I couldn't even speak English fluently. Of course, when I listened to or read English, I could really know. My textbooks and everything are written in English, but I barely spoke English and I couldn't really speak English. (p. 47)

I think my spoken English improved a lot after coming here. Now I can really speak English...well, you know, there're not many Chinese in Thunder Bay, so I speak English more than before and I really want to improve my English...if you go out, everything is real English. Sometimes you go to supermarket or shopping mall, you'll learn lots of vocabularies, because you know, everything is written in English, right. I'd like to pay attention to those things in mall. I want to know, you know, what they are called in English. Yeah, that's why I like going shopping. Of course, at LU I have to speak English a lot every day, because, you know, my friends aren't Chinese. We talk in English...now my spoken English is more fluent. (p. 51)

Andrew emphasized the benefits of living in an English environment:

I mean, there are so many opportunities to students to learn about Canada and improve English. You're just influenced by the language environment in Canada. Especially for English, you can have conversation with some other people, not only with Canadians, but with many other students, international students...I mean, you have to talk in English. It forces you to talk and improve English to have conversation with them, and have relationship with them, in English language, not in your own languages...English is our common language. (p. 33)

I can say it's good to immerse in the culture here, because it let me know more about English language, and of course, knowing more about the culture here enables me to better understand Canadians, and their Canadian English too. (pp. 39,40)

Seven participants indicated that having a large number of opportunities to interact with native English speakers was also very helpful. They thought that more contact with native English speakers enabled them to know more about English culture, and at the same time, more knowledge about English culture helped them to effectively communicate in English. Tom regarded living with Canadian roommates as the most beneficial experience of learning English:

Well, it would be living with the Canadians, like, as my housemates. I got to talk to them in English every day, learn their lifestyles and cultures, like, having Thanksgiving with them and some other holidays, and sometimes learn to compromise when there's any conflict between my culture, lifestyle and theirs...so it helps me and forces me to use English, forces me to think in English, and speak in English everything, and like, just

give me a whole English environment, you know. I really immerse in this English environment, you know, everything is real English. (pp. 62, 63)

Several participants also noted that immersion in a predominantly English culture might not always be effective for English learning. In particular, if they could not adapt themselves to English-language culture in Canada and primarily associated with people from their own countries, the benefits from being in an English language environment would be reduced. For example, Tom said:

I mean, like, there're those people who came to Canada from other countries, and they're still the same, and they also stay with their own people, and they never learn English because the way, the only time they use English is with the government and with police, and the government departments, and thing like that, so they never learn English, they never learn any English. (p. 60)

As well, Mike said:

Like, it's possible like, feel like, some Italians here, they still speak their own language, so anyway, preserve their own culture...but if you just move to Canada, you might not have very much conversation, not very much close contact, so you might live in your own little world, away from the main English culture...because you don't use your English, it's harder. If you want to improve your English, you have to use more and contact English-speaking people. (pp. 11, 13)

Benefits. All eight participants stated that they significantly benefited from their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture with respect to their English learning. They concluded that they improved their knowledge and proficiency in different English language processes: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Seven participants mentioned that their greatest improvement was in oral/aural communication. When asked how she would compare her knowledge and proficiency in English before coming to Canada with that of the present, Emma commented:

I think, sure, I improved a lot. Because before coming to Canada, in my English, I was only good at written English, I was poor at spoken English, and listening comprehension. And now I think I actually improve a lot in spoken English and listening comprehension. And also before coming to Canada, I have, really, I have little knowledge about the

English culture, especially about Canada, for example, in religion and such things, but now I really know a lot about some parts of Canadian culture, especially, in religion. Yeah, so I think I really improve a lot and know a lot. (p. 46)

Peter described his English skills before coming to Canada: "Quite poor. I can hardly speak English. I can understand when people speak very slowly, but I didn't understand the conversation between two native English-speaking people" (p. 1). After staying in Canada for five months, he thought:

All English I know now is from Canada, I think. I mean, only some grammar I knew before, but all the vocabulary I learned from Canada, yeah, I knew from Canada. So, yeah, I think all I know is from Canada...like, grammar wasn't that bad, but vocabulary was very bad. So I couldn't say anything because I didn't know a lot of words before I came to Canada. But now I can speak with English-speaking people, so my oral English improved a lot...listening, I wasn't able to understand English people when they speak, when I came here. But now I can understand them. (pp. 6, 7)

Jenny found that it was not difficult for her to improve her spoken English because she had lived in Canada for more than five years:

It wasn't that hard to improve my spoken English, because I lived in Canada for more than five years. At first I was a little scared, you know, the culture is different. And I was too shy to speak, but after I got used to it. I was OK. I spoke English every day, so my spoken English improved a lot. (p. 22)

Andrew acknowledged that his English proficiency was vastly improved after coming to Canada:

I mean, when I just came to Canada, I really had many problems, so many problems. And I can tell you I didn't understand anything, even one word...if you want me to compare my English right now, my English obviously improved, completely changed, I mean, my English. And I can say that in this previous one and a half years, I mean, I improved my listening, my English very completely...I mean, at that time when I just came here, I thought I didn't know anything about English, a lot of slang, different accents, really, it's difficult to understand. But now I can say I improve a lot, completely different from one and a half years ago, especially in listening, words, idioms, conversation and something like that. (p. 40)

The participants also mentioned that they improved their English pronunciation after coming to Canada. Jenny said: "My accent has changed. Before I came to Canada, my accent was strong" (p 16). Maggie's response was similar to Jenny's:

And I can improve my pronunciation. The very important thing is pronunciation. The way that I pronounce is different from them, so I need to learn how they pronounce and how their accent goes, and something like that. (p. 29)

All eight participants agreed that only immersion in a predominantly English culture could help them to acquire English idioms and slang; without immersion in an English-speaking environment, English idioms and slang would seldom be heard or learned. As a result, they thought that their improvement in acquiring English idioms and slang was significant:

I picked up some slang and idioms and such things. It's new to me, yeah, new to me. I had to learn. (Jenny, P. 17)

Actually, every day I learn something new in Canada, such as: new idioms, new words, and something like that. (Andrew, p. 38)

Because in all kinds of, in some kinds of TV programs there are idioms, slang and something like that, you can learn these idioms, slang and such things when you watch TV programs. I found if I can understand most part of the talk between the characters, and if there's only one or two idioms in their talk, then I always can guess its right meaning. Sometimes I asked my landlady about them, and she really teaches me a lot about the slang, and idioms, and how to use them. (Emma, p. 43)

Reasons for English Improvement. Participants identified three reasons for improvement in their use of English: (a) personal motivation, (b) English-speaking environment, and (c) English culture learning. Peter attributed importance to his strong motivation for improving his English:

I just intend and try to improve my English, like, slowly. So I try to speak with English-speaking people, and try to remember, like, how they say what I want to say...I didn't have any classes of English and whatever, so I just try to speak with English-speaking people, try to practice English more. (p. 4)

Emma, Maggie and Tom held similar views to Peter:

I want to speak English as much as possible, I want to practice English with native speakers. I, surely, try my best to use English in every situation. (Emma, p. 43)

The more I use all these words again and again, then the more I remember them. I try to learn them and remember more. I try my best to be familiar with them. (Maggie, p. 29)

...for learning English, when I heard people talking, I try to imitate them, you know, use the words like the way they said, like, try to do it properly, do it better...(Tom, p. 62)

All eight participants considered the English-speaking environment as a favorable condition in their English improvement. Peter thought he improved his vocabulary because he had to use it many times a day:

I think five months is long. Like, using them or listening to them times and times a day, I can learn very fast, then two weeks is long enough that I can use them somewhere else after two weeks. Because if I listen to them or use them twenty times a day, it's easy to remember...when I came here, I learned very fast at the beginning. But now my learning is slowing down. The words that I learned at the beginning are the words everybody uses every day. But the words I am learning now are more complicated words, and people use them less, so it's harder for me to remember. (p. 7)

Jenny's description of her reasons for improvement in English also focused upon her increased use of English in a predominantly English culture:

I learned grammar in Sri Lanka, but I didn't learn spoken English that much. I knew English, but I didn't use that much. But here, I speak English everywhere, every day, same as my own language here...I have to write in English. Yeah, everything in English...of course, I think I have improved my English a lot since I came to Canada. Like, we knew the words, but we didn't know how to use them in Sri Lanka. But here we use them every day, right. So I improved my spoken English a lot, reading, writing, and listening improved too, I think. (p. 23)

Maggie responded in a similar way:

I believe I can improve my English in Canada because since English is the first language in this country, definitely, people speak English and I can practice more my listening skill, and I can practice more my speaking skill as well. (p. 25)

English culture learning was another reason for English improvement that the participants mentioned. They found that they had difficulties in understanding and using English when they were not familiar with the cultural contexts of communication. According to the participants,

learning English culture could help to solve these difficulties. Kate admitted that she had difficulty in understanding English in situations with unfamiliar cultural elements:

But informal English, like slang, jokes, I sometimes have difficulties to understand, especially, if I don't have the cultural background knowledge of what Canadians talk, then I usually can't make sense of what they said. (p. 53)

She spoke of the reasons for her improvement:

But, you know, because I live with Canadians now, I can more and more understand them and know more about them, like their personalities, their habits, their thinking and such things. It's good for me, especially when I speak to them, I can understand them more exactly and express myself more clearly...my English has improved a lot, listening, reading, writing and speaking, all of them. (p. 53)

Jenny explained why she improved her spoken English: "At first I was a little scared, you know, the culture is different. And I was too shy to speak, but after I got used to it. I was OK. I spoke English every day, so my spoken English improved a lot" (p. 22). Andrew discussed his difficulty in using English:

That situation is difficult for me, if I want to talk about something, I mean, emotionally, because I don't know their behavior or their feeling. You know every culture has its own feeling, yeah. Culture to culture is different, I mean, feeling or expressing some ideas. (p. 35)

Then he noted his own motivation for improving his English, "...you have to fit into their society, you have to understand their society, then you can understand them. If you don't fit into their society, I mean, separate from their community, you cannot understand Canadian people here" (p. 35).

Effective Strategies. All the eight participants identified several effective strategies for learning English when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. Seven participants regarded contact with native English speakers as a good strategy:

If you want to improve your English, you have to use more and contact English-speaking people. (Mike, p. 13)

If you want to learn, you have to contact with them. If you want to have conversation with Canadians, you have to contact them. Because I am living in Canada, English is dominant, some time I have to say something English. If I want to improve my language, my English, I have to contact them. (Andrew, p. 38)

I think the most beneficial experiences are to talk with all kinds of Canadians. I mean Canadian people in different jobs, and at different ages. (Emma, p. 45)

If you want to learn English really very well, you really have to go to somewhere, like Thunder Bay, I mean, live with the people here, learn about their daily life, meet different kinds of people, you can talk to the bus drivers, you can talk to the cashiers in the Superstore, and in class speak with the professors, if you are living with somebody, speak to them in English, if they are Canadians, it's much better. (Tom, p. 63)

Involvement in the English environment was another strategy mentioned by the participants, including activities such as watching television and movies, listening to radio, reading newspapers, traveling, and living with native English speakers. The participants responded as following:

And also I watch movies to improve my ability of listening and understanding the spoken English. (Peter, p. 4)

I listen to the radio. I think on the radio, they speak very well, because those people use proper English, they speak English very well. Especially, listen to day to day radio, that is the best thing, because on the radio there is news, I can know everything what's going on. (Maggie, p. 29)

Actually, I live with a Canadian landlord. I talk to my landlord in English every day...having conversation with my landlord improved, I mean, my listening and idioms. (Andrew, p. 39)

Then at the same time, also in another way...read newspapers and things like that. (Tom, p. 63)

All eight participants believed that it was necessary to practice English as much as possible in order to learn English. Jenny described her strategies: "And every day talking to English speaking people, yeah, and writing essays, and using the computer to chat with people in English online" (p. 21). Peter and Emma said how they practiced English:

Probably just try to say it in another way. Like, if I don't know how I say it in this way, then I would try to say it in another way, or I would show people something by writing it down in English. (Peter, p. 2)

Usually, I will describe it, try to describe it as detailed as possible, and maybe sometimes I will look it up in the dictionary and write it down to let the Canadians know, yeah. (Emma, p. 41)

All the participants suggested that in order to improve your English, you should encourage yourself to adapt to the English environment and use English in every situation.

The above section of this chapter presented the research findings. The following section discusses the interpretation of the findings.

Interpretation of Findings

This study investigated English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: (a) the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences; (b) the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning; and (c) ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning. The following is an analysis of the findings in relation to these three themes.

The Nature of ESL Learners' Culture Learning Experiences

Analysis of the data revealed how ESL learners learned English culture when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. The participants in this study indicated that it was necessary for them to adapt to this predominantly English culture when they lived and studied in Canada, a primarily English-speaking country. They showed that they could adapt to the English culture while they still retained their first culture values. This finding is consistent

with Schumann's (1978a) definition of 'acculturation,' which focuses upon learning to function in the new culture while maintaining one's own identity.

The participants mentioned that they had more contact with English culture when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. They could learn English culture from schooling, daily life, and the English-rich environment. In the process of their culture learning, they increasingly realized the differences between their first cultures and English culture. They identified differences in a number of areas, such as the systems of thought, beliefs, values, emotions and lifestyles. They found that some cultural differences were a source of tension; others were not. By comparing their first cultures with English culture, they tried to develop their own views of these differences. Holding their own views of these cultural differences was helpful for them when interacting with native English speakers. Byram and Fleming (1998) note that it is the comparison of the learner's own culture and the second culture that begins to help the learner to perceive and to cope with differences in the process of developing cultural awareness. This process of comparison provides the learner with the basis for successful interaction with native speakers of the second culture.

Each participant identified some conflicting tensions between their cultures and the predominantly English culture in Canada. They admitted that when they immersed themselves in this predominantly English culture, because of these conflicting cultural differences, they sometimes had feelings of fear, stress, unhappiness, hostility and homesickness. Jenny and Kate indicated that they felt timid and under stress when they communicated with native English speakers, because they thought they might be laughed at if they made mistakes. Jenny also noted that she sought the help of her friends from her own cultural background, who were also immersed in this predominantly English culture, especially when she experienced difficulties.

Such responses are consistent with the literature on culture shock, which occurs when learners experience unhappiness, stress, and fear because of differences between their own culture and the target culture (Schumann, 1978b; Brown, 1986).

Jenny indicated that after being in a predominantly English culture for several years, she seldom had feelings of fear when communicating with native English speakers. She attributed the change in her feelings to greater or increased understanding of the English culture and of native English speakers. In contrast, Kate, who has been in Canada for eight years, had some negative experiences with native English speakers. This form of culture shock had a negative impact on her interactions with native English speakers and her use of English. She indicated that she still felt distressed and upset when communicating with native English speakers, to the point that she did not want to talk to them. This is consistent with Freed (1991), who indicates that a negative experience abroad can have a negative impact on the learner's perspective of the target culture, and hinder both second language learning and second culture learning. The findings of the present study reveal that ESL learners' experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture are complex in nature and may influence their English culture learning and English learning in a variety of ways.

The study suggests that the nature of ESL learners' experiences of immersion may relate to personal characteristics and individual cultural backgrounds. However, it was not clear from the participants' words how their personal characteristics and individual cultural backgrounds influenced their experiences of immersion. Further research is needed to determine how personal characteristics and individual cultural backgrounds influence ESL learners' experiences of immersion.

The participants in this study stated that it was good for them to live and study in Canada because Canada is a multicultural country with a predominantly English culture. The multicultural nature of Canadian society may be an advantage for second language learners, since on the one hand they could find some of the elements of their own cultures, and on the other hand build relationships with people from an English-language cultural background. Participants indicated that in such a situation they were willing to learn English culture, and because of the contact between their first cultures and English culture, they could receive more English culture and English language input. This kind of situation is defined by Schumann (1978b) as a 'good' learning situation because second language learners can receive a large amount of second language input as a result of the small social distance.

The English culture learning experiences of the participants suggested that they learned elements of English culture in two different types of situations when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. In one type of situation, English cultural elements did not conflict with those of their own culture. In the other type of situation, English language cultural elements conflicted with those of their own culture. In cases where there was no conflict, the participants integrated English cultural elements into their existing cultural knowledge. For example, Emma thought that if English cultural concepts were good for her, she integrated them into her own Chinese cultural frame of reference (see quote on Page 40). In cases where there were conflicts between components of their own cultural views and elements of English-language culture, the participants dealt with the conflicting elements in a variety of ways. Mike indicated that he did not accept English culture concepts that he did not agree with. However, Andrew indicated that he was inclined to accept and assimilate the conflicting English cultural elements in order to adapt himself to the English language environment. Libben and Lindner

(1996) note that if learners abandon their first culture elements in favor of second culture elements, the learning process may lead to acculturation if learners adopt this approach and employ it consistently. However, as noted above, there was a lack of consistency among the participants regarding how they dealt with their first cultural elements. In particular, some participants were prepared to abandon first culture elements in favor of second culture elements in cases where there was a conflict. In contrast, others clearly were not, and preferred to maintain first culture elements.

The findings of this study suggest that in the process of adapting to the English culture, ESL learners developed their understanding of the systems of thought, beliefs, values, emotions and lifestyle of the English culture, improved their ability to contact with the English culture and native English speakers, and increased their opportunities to receive English language input (Krashen, 1985) as well.

The Positive Influence of Immersion in English-Language Culture on ESL Learning

In responding to the interview questions concerning the influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning, the participants indicated that they had more opportunities to listen, read, speak, and write English when they immersed themselves in the predominantly English culture in Canada. They acknowledged that immersion in a predominantly English culture enabled them to receive a large amount of valuable English language input. In situations where they understood the contexts of communication, such input was readily understood. For example, four participants found that they could understand English easily in class because they were familiar with the subject matter of the classes in question. Ellis (1986), following Krashen (1985), notes that access to such comprehensible input may be a necessary condition for acquisition of a second language.

Understanding the contexts of communication not only assisted participants in understanding English input, but helped them to express themselves in English as well. Andrew said that he had no difficulty in talking about his academic problems with his professors and classmates in English because he had enough background knowledge about his academic program. However, he sometimes had difficulty in expressing his feelings in English in affective contexts because he thought: "I don't know their behavior or their feeling. You know every culture has its own feeling, yeah. Culture to culture is different, I mean, feeling or expressing some ideas" (p. 35). This is consistent with Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis which proposes that language learners acquire communication skills by focusing on meaning. Speech emerges on its own when language learners are exposed to sufficient comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987).

The participants in this study stressed the importance of living with native English speakers as a source of English language input. When the participants lived with native English speakers, their English-speaking roommates or landlords talked to them in English every day, at different times, and in different contexts. This kind of English input that the participants received in their daily life, such as slang and idioms, was so informal and colloquial that they seldom were exposed to it in the more formal and structured classroom environments where the majority of them had previously undertaken most of their learning of English. Jenny mentioned: "I picked up some slang and idioms and such things. It's new to me, yeah, new to me" (p. 17). Therefore, immersion in a predominantly English culture enabled the participants access to a broad range of English input, written to spoken, formal to informal.

English media, such as television, radio and newspaper were another important source of English input mentioned by the participants in this study. Understanding the content of these English media helped the participants to improve their knowledge and proficiency in English.

Emma indicated that television programs were full of idioms and slang, so she could learn these expressions when she watched television programs. She found that: "if I can understand most part of the talk between the characters, and if there's only one or two idioms in their talk, then I always can guess its right meaning" (p. 43). This is consistent with Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, which states that 'acquisition' of a second language takes place as a result of second language learners' understanding input that is a little beyond the current level of their competence. In order to understand this kind of input, language learners use context, their knowledge of the world and their extra-linguistic knowledge, as well as their linguistic competence (Krashen, 1987).

When asked about the reasons for their decision to study in Canada, four participants indicated that one of their reasons for studying in Canada was because it would provide an English-speaking environment in which to improve their English language proficiency. Having immersed themselves in this English-speaking environment, all the participants felt that they had enhanced their motivation to learn English, because they came to realize that their knowledge and proficiency in English was a significant factor in the process of their adaptation to this predominantly English culture. Schumann (1978a) observes that acquisition and use of the second language is a measure of the degree to which learners have become acculturated to the target culture. At the same time, the degree to which learners acculturate to the second culture will influence learners' acquisition of the second language (Schumann, 1978a).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Gardner and Lambert (1972) identify the concepts of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation in second language learning. Integrative motivation occurs when the learner wants to learn the second language in order to meet with, talk to, and perhaps become like the native speakers of the second language with whom the learner

wishes to identify. Instrumental motivation occurs when the learner wishes to learn the second language for more utilitarian reasons, such as passing an examination or getting ahead in one's occupation. The motivation associated with proficiency in the second language may vary according to setting (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Gardner and Lambert (1972) explain this variation in terms of the role the second language plays in the learner's community. They suggest that integrative motivation appears to be more powerful in facilitating successful second language learning in settings where the second language is not important or necessary outside the classroom for the learner. However, in other situations where the second language is used as a means of wider communication outside the classroom, successful second language learning is associated with instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

In my study the participants suggested that their knowledge and proficiency in English determined their success in both their academic lives and their social lives when they lived in a predominantly English culture. Emma said that if she wanted to obtain her master's degree in Canada, she had to adapt to the English culture as well as to improve her English. Andrew stated that if he wanted to find a job in Canada, he had to speak English very well. This kind of motivation is defined by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as instrumental motivation. Upon immersing themselves in an English environment, the participants found that they had difficulty in using English in real-life communication. As a result, they were motivated to improve their command of English in order to communicate effectively with native speakers of English. Tom hoped that he could speak English as fluently as native English speakers. This kind of motivation is defined by Gardner and Lambert (1972) as integrative motivation.

In Gardner and Lambert's (1972) analysis, use of the second language in broader settings outside the classroom is associated with instrumental motivation, as noted above. For the

participants in my study, these broader settings were very important for their perceptions of success in language learning. Both integrative and instrumental motivation were displayed in the participants' responses. The observation that participants displayed both types of motivation is not consistent with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) analysis, which associates each type of motivation with a particular learning context.

The participants' experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture provided them with more chances to communicate in English in real life situations, especially to interact with native English speakers. Emma indicated that talking with her Canadian landlord every day helped her to improve her knowledge and proficiency in English. Moreover, more contact with native English speakers enabled participants to learn more about English culture. More understanding of English culture may enable more effective communication and interaction.

Kate stated:

...because I live with Canadians now, I can more and more understand them and know more about them, like their personalities, their habits, their thinking and such things. It's good for me, especially when I speak to them, I can understand them more exactly and express myself more clearly. (p. 53)

Thomas (1983) indicates that violation of cultural notions of appropriateness in interactions between native and nonnative speakers may lead to sociopragmatic failure and breakdowns in communication. The quote above from Kate indicated that increased exposure to English-language culture resulted in an improved understanding of English language norms for interaction and communication. The participants had more effective communication and interaction when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. Effective communication and interaction were important for them to improve their knowledge and proficiency in English. Learning a second language is not simply mastering an object of

academic study but is more appropriately focused on learning a means of communication (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

Although the participants had more contact with English culture and native English speakers when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture, they felt that it was difficult for them to maintain close personal relationships with native English speakers because of the differences between their cultures and English culture. It is unclear whether the extent and type of contact that the participants had with native English speakers had an impact on their English learning. This is an area where further research may be beneficial. Ellis (1986) suggests that it is important to consider whether intake, i.e. language material that has been successfully assimilated by language learners, is determined by the way the input is shaped in interaction involving the second language learner and speakers of the second language in different situations.

To summarize, the participants' experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture positively influenced their ESL learning. In a predominantly English culture, they had access to comprehensible input and had more opportunities for effective communication and interaction. Moreover, immersion in an English-language cultural environment enhanced their motivation to learn English.

ESL Learners' Perceptions of the Influence of Culture Learning

The participants in this study perceived that immersion in a predominantly English culture provided favorable conditions for their ESL learning. They reported that they could learn English culture effectively by having greater contact with English culture and native English speakers during the period of their immersion. Learning English culture and having more knowledge about it were viewed by participants as necessary components for their ESL learning.

Andrew stressed the important role of learning English culture in his ESL learning: "...knowing more about the culture here enables me to better understand Canadians, and their Canadian English too" (p. 40). This is supported by Byram's (1988) assertion that language always refers to something beyond itself: the cultural context. Therefore, second language learners do need to understand the cultural context of the second language in order to communicate (Paige et al., 1999). Kramsch (1993) argues that because a second language cannot be learned without an understanding of the cultural context in which the second language is used, second language learners necessarily become learners of the second culture.

However, as has been previously discussed (pp. 60-61), the participants also showed that immersion in a predominantly English culture might constitute an unfavorable condition for ESL learning, if ESL learners could not adapt themselves to the English culture and always clung to their first cultural community. In this situation, ESL learners had fewer chances to learn English culture, less contact with native English speakers, and fewer opportunities to use English in real life communication. This is consistent with Freed's (1995) finding that those students who socialize with members of the target culture gain more than those who have less contact of this type.

In responding to questions concerning changes of knowledge and proficiency in English which may have occurred since their arrival in Canada, participants indicated that they benefited significantly from being immersed in a predominantly English culture. They acknowledged that they greatly improved their knowledge and proficiency in English, especially in listening skills, speaking skills, and the acquisition of English idioms and slang.

Although the process of improving their English proficiency when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture was complex, the participants in this study

identified some common reasons for improvement in their English. First, they attributed the improvement in their ESL learning to personal motivation. They were motivated to learn English in order to communicate and interact with native English speakers, to gain academic and professional success, and to adapt to the predominantly English culture in which they studied and lived. This finding supports MacNamara's (1973) finding that the most important part of motivation exists in the act of communication itself. The need to express meanings can actually motivate second language learning. The participants in this study suggested that it was their high level of motivation that caused the improvement in their ESL learning, not the reverse. This is inconsistent with Byram and Morgan's (1994) argument that high motivation may be a result of success in learning second language rather than the cause of the success.

Second, the participants regarded the English-rich environment in which they were living as a reason for the improvement in their ESL learning because such an English-speaking environment forced them to use English more. They thought that the more they used English, the more progress they made.

Third, their experiences of English culture learning were identified by the participants in this study as an important reason for the improvement in their ESL learning. They thought that learning English culture enabled them to better understand native English speakers from a cultural perspective. In addition, more knowledge about English culture helped them to better understand cultural contexts of communication. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) state that "communication in real situations is never out of context, and because culture is part of most contexts, communication is rarely culture-free" (p.197). The participants in this study thought that their experiences of English culture learning led to more effective communication and more contact with native English speakers, and that these factors were significant in their ESL

learning. Kramsch (1993) indicates the learning of the second culture can help in attaining second language proficiency. From their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture, the participants identified useful strategies for ESL learning, which they thought played a role in the improvement in their ESL learning.

This chapter presented profiles of the participants in the study, the findings of the study, and a discussion of these findings in relation to the literature. The final chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated English as a Second Language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. The study was qualitative in nature and the design was emergent (Patton, 2002). The primary method for data collection was the interview. The interview participants in the study were eight adult ESL learners, who were enrolled in Lakehead University programs or courses, but were not taking ESL courses. Three themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. The following sections discuss the conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

Three themes based on the research questions were identified: (a) the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences; (b) the positive influence of immersion in English-language culture on ESL learning; and (c) ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences on their English learning.

This study showed that the participants learned English culture when they immersed themselves in a predominantly English culture. Their culture learning experiences enabled them to be more familiar with the predominantly English culture in Canada and helped them to adapt to it. The participants indicated that they could adapt to this predominantly English culture while they still maintained their own first cultures. In the process of their English culture learning, the participants identified differences between their own first cultures and the English culture. They tried to develop their own understanding of these differences and this was helpful for them when interacting with native English speakers. The participants also expressed the view that the predominantly English culture in Canada in which they had immersed themselves, was good for their English learning because they could receive a large amount of English language input as a

result of the interaction between their own first cultural backgrounds and the English culture in Canada.

The participants acknowledged that when they immersed themselves in the predominantly English culture, they underwent forms of culture shock because of conflicting cultural differences between their cultures and the English culture. However, in the process of English culture learning, different participants had different experiences in dealing with culture shock. This study found that the participants' experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture were complex in nature and might influence their English culture learning and English learning in a variety of ways. It also revealed that in the process of adapting to the predominantly English culture, ESL learners developed their understanding of the English culture and cultural contexts of communication, improved their ability to interact within the context of the English culture, and increased their opportunities to receive English language input as well.

The participants perceived that their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture positively influenced their ESL learning. First, immersion in a predominantly English culture enabled them to gain access to a large amount of comprehensible English language input. In situations where they understood the contexts of communication, such input was more readily understood. Understanding the contexts of communication not only assisted participants in understanding English input, but helped them to express themselves in English as well. The participants stressed the importance of living with native English speakers as a source of English language input. They also identified English media, such as television, radio and newspaper as another important source of English input.

Second, the participants indicated that they enhanced their motivation to learn English because they came to realize that their knowledge and proficiency in English was a significant factor in the process of their adaptation to this predominantly English culture. They also found that their knowledge and proficiency in English played a role in determining their success in both their academic lives and their social lives when they lived in a predominantly English culture.

Third, immersion in a predominantly English culture provided the participants with more opportunities to communicate in English in real life situations, especially to interact with native English speakers. More contact with native English speakers enabled the participants to learn more about English culture. More understanding of English culture caused more effective communication and interaction, which was important in improving their knowledge and proficiency in English.

Most participants perceived that immersion in a predominantly English culture provided favorable conditions for their ESL learning. They could most effectively learn about English culture by having greater contact with English culture and native English speakers during the period of their immersion. Learning English culture and having more knowledge about it were viewed by the participants as necessary components of their ESL learning.

However, several participants noted that immersion in a predominantly English culture might constitute an unfavorable condition for ESL learning, if ESL learners could not adapt themselves to the English culture and always clung to their first cultural community. In this situation, ESL learners had fewer chances to learn English culture, less contact with native English speakers, and fewer opportunities to use English in real life communication. Immersion in a predominantly English culture might not always be effective for ESL learning.

The participants revealed that they benefited significantly from their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture. They greatly improved their knowledge and proficiency in English, especially in listening skills, speaking skills, and the acquisition of English idioms and slang. They attributed the improvement in their ESL learning to personal motivation, the English-speaking environment, and English culture learning. From their experiences of immersion in a predominantly English culture, the participants identified useful strategies for ESL learning, such as contact with native English speakers, getting involved in the English environment, and practicing English as much as possible. The perceptions of the participants may be valuable to other ESL learners and suggest ways to conceptualize culture learning in ESL education contexts.

Recommendations

Recommendations for ESL Learning

The study found that for the eight participants learning English culture and having more knowledge about it were necessary components in their ESL learning. It is recommended that ESL learners make every effort to learn as much as possible about the English-language cultural environment and try to understand the cultural contexts of communication in order to improve their knowledge and proficiency in English.

Having greater contact with English culture and native English speakers in Canada was beneficial for English culture learning and ESL learning. It is recommended that ESL learners get involved in the English cultural environment and make contact with native English speakers while they immerse themselves in an English cultural context. This will enable them to adapt themselves to the English-language culture.

The participants found media such as television and radio to be valuable sources of language input and cultural information. It is recommended that ESL learners use media sources as part of their learning experience.

Participants found that using English in a variety of contexts was valuable for improving their language skills because of their exposure to use of English in a variety of cultural contexts. It is recommended that language learners attempt to practice English frequently and in a variety of contexts.

The study suggested that personal motivation was significant in ESL learning. A high level of motivation on the part of the participants was a significant factor in their ESL learning. It is recommended that ESL learners be strongly motivated and have a positive attitude toward learning English and improving their knowledge and proficiency in English. ESL learners should encourage themselves to practice English as much as possible and to use English in different situations and different cultural contexts.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study focused upon research into ESL learners' experiences of English culture and English language learning, and the influence of English culture learning experiences on their English learning, as ESL learners immersed themselves in English-language culture. Further research in this area is needed to explore:

- 1) the relationship between ESL learners' personal characteristics and individual cultural backgrounds, and the nature of ESL learners' experiences of immersion in English-language culture;

- 2) the influence of ESL learners' personal characteristics and individual cultural backgrounds on their English culture and English language learning in an English-language cultural context;
- 3) the ways in which ESL learners negotiate conflicting elements of their first culture and the English culture in the process of their English culture learning;
- 4) the relationship between the types of interactions that ESL learners have with native English speakers and improvement in their English learning;
- 5) the relationship between ESL learners' enhanced integrative and instrumental motivation and the improvement in their ESL learning;
- 6) cases where ESL learners have difficulty in adapting to English culture.

Such research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on ESL teaching and learning, which will illuminate the role of English culture learning in ESL learning, provide strategies and suggestions for ESL learners to learn English, and suggest ways to conceptualize English culture learning in ESL education contexts.

REFERENCES

- Alptekin, C. (1988). Target language acquisition through acculturation: EFL learners in the English-speaking environment. In G. H. Irons (ed.), *Second Language Acquisition: Selected Readings in Theory and Practice* (pp.334-342). Ontario: The Canadian Modern Language Review.
- Armstrong, G. K. (1984). Life after study abroad: A survey of undergraduate academic and career choices. *The Modern Language Journal*, 68, 1-6.
- Backman, N. (1976). Two measures of affective factors as they relate to progress in adult second language learning. *Working papers on bilingualism*, 10, 100-122.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). Qualitative research in education: An introduction to theory and methods. 3rd ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brooks, N. (1975). The analysis of language and familiar cultures. In R. Lafayette (ed.), *The Cultural Revolution in Foreign Language Teaching* (pp.19-31). Reports of the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook.
- Brown, H. (1980). Principles of language learning and teaching. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Brown, H. (1986). Learning a second culture. In J. M. Valdes (ed.), *Culture Bound: Bridging the Cultural Gap in Language Teaching* (pp. 33-48). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burstall, C. (1975). Factors affecting foreign-language learning: A consideration of some relevant research findings. *Language Teaching and Linguistics Abstracts*, 8, 5-125.
- Byram, M. (1988). Foreign language education and cultural studies. *Language, Culture, and Curriculum*, 1(1), 15-31.

- Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural studies in foreign language education*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M., & Morgan, C. (1994). *Teaching-and-learning language-and-culture*. Clevedon, UK: Multicultural Matters.
- Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (1998). *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China. In H. Coleman (ed.), *Society and the Language Classroom* (pp.169-206). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DeKeyser, R. M. (1991). Foreign language development during a semester abroad. In B. F. Freed (ed.), *Foreign Language Acquisition Research and the Classroom* (pp.104-119). Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company.
- Dodick, D. J. (1996). A study of the attitudes and motivation of high school foreign language students. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 52(4), 577-595.
- Dyson, P. (1988). *The year abroad*. Report for the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges. Oxford University Language Teaching Centre.
- Edwards, V., & Rehorick, S. (1990). Learning environments in immersion and non-immersion classrooms: Are they different? *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 46(3), 469-493.
- Ellis, R. (1986). *Understanding second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Freed, B. F. (1991). *Foreign language acquisition research and the classroom*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company.

- Freed, B. F. (1995). *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Gardner, R., & Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). A student's contributions to second-language learning. Part Two: Affective variables. *Language Teaching*, 26, 1-11.
- Hannigan, T. P. (1990). Traits, attitudes and skills that are related to intercultural effectiveness and their implications for cross-cultural training: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(2), 89-111.
- Hinkel, E. (1999). *Culture in second language teaching and learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hymes, D. (1996). *Ethnography, linguistics, narrative inequality*. Bristol, PA: Taylor and Francis.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. New York: Longman.
- Krashen, S. D. (1987). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Prentice-Hall International (HK) Ltd.
- Libben, G., & Lindner, O. (1996). *Second culture acquisition and second language acquisition: Faux amis?* (Online) From <http://www.ualberta.ca/~german/ejournal/libben2.htm>

- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- MacNamara, J. (1973). Nurseries, streets and classrooms: Some comparisons and deductions. *Modern Language Journal*, 57, 250-254.
- Mauranen, A. (1994). Two discourse worlds. *Finlance*, 13, 1-40.
- McLaughlin, B. (1987). *Theories of second language learning*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Meara, P. (1994). The year abroad and its effects. *Language Learning Journal*, 10, 32-38.
- Moore, J. (1991). An analysis of the cultural content of post-secondary textbooks for Spanish: Evidence of information processing strategies and types of learning in reading selections and post-reading adjunct questions. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
- Paige, M., Jorstad, H., Siaya, L., Klein, F., & Colby, J. (1999). Culture learning in language education: A review of the literature. CARLA Working Paper Series #15: Culture as the Core: Integrating Culture into the Language Curriculum. Minnesota: University of Minnesota, from <http://carla.acad.umn.edu/>
- Paige, R. M., & Stringer, D. (1997). *Training design for international and multicultural programs*. Portland, Oregon: Intercultural Communication Institute.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. California: Sage.
- Porebski, O. R., & McInnis, C. E. (1988). Changes in the friendship pattern and proficiency level of FSL students as a result of the French animator program. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 44, 285-294.
- Raupach, M. (1987). *Procedural learning in advanced learners of a foreign language*. Duisberg: Universitat Gesamthochschule Duisburg.

- Robinson-Stuart, G., & Nocon, H. (1996). Second culture acquisition: Ethnography in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 80(4), 431-449.
- Safty, A. (1990). Insights from the French immersion experience in Canada. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Nashville, TN.
- Schumacher, S., & McMillan, J. H. (1993). *Research in education : A conceptual introduction*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Schumann, J. H. (1978a). The acculturation model for second language acquisition. In R. C. Gingras (ed.), *Second Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Teaching* (pp.27-50). Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Schumann, J. H. (1978b). Social and psychological factors in second language acquisition. In J. C. Richards (ed.), *Understanding Second & Foreign Language Learning: Issues & Approaches* (pp.163-178). Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Schumann, J. H. (1986). Research on the acculturation model for second language acquisition. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 7(5), 379-392.
- Stern, H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 91-112.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the reasons for your decision to study in Canada?
 - a) Could you give me some background information about yourself?
 - b) What is your motivation for studying in Canada?
 - c) How would you describe your knowledge of English before coming to Canada?
2. How does it feel to be a student in Canada?
 - a) Tell me about a typical day as a student:
 - Opportunities to use English
 - Social events
 - b) As an English as a second language (ESL) learner, in which situations do you have difficulty in understanding spoken English and expressing yourself orally as you want? What do you think are the reasons for the difficulty?
 - c) What strategies do you use when you experience difficulty?
3. What are your perceptions of the English language culture in Canada?
 - a) What are some of the characteristics of English culture that you have observed?
 - b) How do these compare to your culture? Describe some examples.
 - c) How do you feel about your capability to adapt to a new culture – a predominantly English culture in Canada?
 - d) Tell me about any situations where you feel there was a conflict between your culture and the English language culture. How did you resolve such situations?
How did these cultural conflicts influence your use of English in Canada?
4. Tell me about some of your experiences of learning the English language and its culture in Canada.

- a) What are your experiences of learning English as a second language? What are your experiences of learning the English language culture?
 - b) Tell me about your social relationships with native English speakers and ethnic group.
 - c) What are your concerns about using English as a second language? In what situations do you feel most comfortable about using English independently? Least comfortable?
 - d) Tell me about the most beneficial experiences.
5. How has immersion in a predominantly English culture influenced your English learning?
 6. How would you describe your knowledge and proficiency in English since living in Canada? How would you compare them with your knowledge and proficiency in English before coming to Canada?

APPENDIX B COVER LETTER

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. I am conducting this study in partial fulfillment of thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Education. My thesis supervisor is Dr. John O'Meara of the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University.

The purpose of the study is to investigate English as a second language (ESL) learners' perceptions of the nature and influence of immersion in a predominantly English culture on their English learning. The research looks at (a) the nature of ESL learners' culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture, (b) how immersion in the English language culture influences their second language learning, and (c) ESL learners' perceptions of the influence of culture learning experiences in a predominantly English culture on their English learning.

To accomplish these goals, I would like to interview you, an ESL learner, concerning your perceptions of the cultural components in your English learning. The interview will be approximately one hour and will be audio-taped.

As a participant in the study, it is important that you understand the following ethics considerations.

1. You are a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study.
2. There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm. The primary benefit to you may be an increased interest in language learning.
3. The data you provide will be anonymous and confidential.
4. A copy of the findings will be available in the library at the Faculty of Education.
5. Information obtained during interviews will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of seven years and then will be destroyed.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Qi Li

APPENDIX B CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in the study by Qi Li, on “ESL learners’ perceptions of the cultural components in their English learning.” The researcher has explained the nature and the purpose of the study to me, and I understand the following:

1. I am a volunteer and can withdraw at any time from the study.
2. There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm. The primary benefit to me may be an increased interest in language learning.
3. The data I provide will be anonymous and confidential.
4. A copy of the findings will be available in the library at the Faculty of Education.
5. Information obtained during interviews will be securely stored at Lakehead University for a period of seven years and then will be destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date