

STRESS AND COPING EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH
LANGUAGE BARRIERS DURING THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS

By

JUNGEUN LEE

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2008

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To all who walk together with me on the road of my life

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was blessed to have support from many persons in my life. The beginning of the journey to this work would not have been possible without the unconditional love of my parents. My husband put me through the journey by standing next to me with his constant encouragement and support.

I would like to thank my supervisory chair, Dr. Sondra Smith, who has gone beyond any expectations that I could have for a supervisory chair. Her wise and compassionate guidance throughout the 6 years of my master's and doctoral studies was unflinching. I especially appreciate her meticulous reading and rereading of my manuscripts offering insight each time. I also thank my supervisory committee for their mentoring and the study participants for sharing their precious and inspirational stories.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

Jungeun Lee

December 2008

Chair: Sondra Smith

Major: Mental Health Counseling

My study focused on stress and coping experience of international students with language barriers in the United States. Knowledge of the language spoken in the host community plays a central role within the cultural learning process, since language is viewed as the primary medium through which cultural information is communicated. In this qualitative study utilizing grounded theory methods, twelve students were interviewed about their perceptions, emotions, and behaviors during the process from stress, coping, and adaptation.

Key finding of the study was a theoretical model to hypothesize the relationships of the categories and their components for stress and coping experiences of international students with language barriers. It was based on the five core categories extracted from the data: perceived stressors, immediate psychological and physical responses, stress-moderating factors (environmental and psychological), coping strategies (cognitive reframing, emotional release, and behavioral exposure), and adaptation. The theory presents a three phases in a linear order to explain the students' stress and coping experiences in conjunction with the changes in the meanings of language barriers.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

As a crucial center of knowledge and technology, the United States has attracted large numbers of students from many foreign countries (Sandhu, 1995). During the 2005-2006 academic year, 564,766 international students constituted 3.9% of the total enrollment in academic institutions across the United States. Among the twenty-five most common countries of origin, all but Canada (ranked 6th) and the United Kingdom (ranked 11th) are non-English speaking countries (Institute of International Education, 2006). Due to language barriers, students who come from non-English speaking countries may face a greater challenge than students whose first language is English. Even for students from countries that use English as their official language (e.g., Belize, Puerto Rico), the transition to formal academic English may be difficult (Soto-Carlo, Delgado-Romero, & Galvan, 2005). Thus, language differences can become a critical concern for international students who come from non-English speaking countries.

Because the English language is an indispensable tool for international students who study at higher educational institutions in the United States, students from non-English-speaking countries are required to prove their English proficiency via standardized testing (TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language) as a condition of admission to colleges and universities (Coppi, 2007). However, international students from non-English-speaking countries often struggle with English comprehension and speech even when they attain high TOEFL and GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Kagan & Cohen, 1990). Thus, language barriers are an almost universal obstacle for international students from non-

English speaking countries, especially during the beginning of their acculturation process (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002).

A positive acculturation and adaptation process for international students from non-English speaking countries may be facilitated by college counselors who are cognizant of these language and communication difficulties, the impact of language barriers on academic and interpersonal problems, and the ways in which the problems can be ameliorated. Moreover, college counselors can help faculty, staff, and administrators increase their knowledge and ability to work with international students. In order to best meet the counseling needs of international students from non-English speaking countries and to facilitate their academic and personal success in the United States, further description and understanding of international students' unique experiences due to language barrier and its impact on acculturation process is needed.

Statement of the Problem

Acculturation refers to changes in values, beliefs, and behaviors that result from sustained contact with a second culture. Although refugees and immigrants also experience acculturation, international students face unique stressors and concerns (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). These students, often classified as "sojourners" (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), must quickly adapt their daily lives to broader United States social systems as well as to standards imposed on them by the higher education system (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Mori, 2000).

Acculturative stress refers to stress that results from the process of acculturation (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). Adjustment to a new environment is inherently stressful. Academic pressure, financial difficulty, poor health, loneliness, and interpersonal conflict are common to both domestic and international students who enter a new school (Baker & Siryk, 1986). However, international students may experience more serious alienation than domestic students due to a greater change in culture and less access to social and emotional resources (Hechanova-

Alampay et al., 2002; Klomegah, 2006; Pedersen, 1991). In addition to the universal challenges of higher education, many sojourners report a profound sense of loss, anxiety, and feelings of isolation (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994).

In contrast with international students who speak English as their first or official language, sojourners from non-English speaking countries add language barriers to the list of factors that impede their acculturation process (Al-Mubarak, 2000; Huang, 2006; Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006; J.-C. G. Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Roth & Harama, 2000; Sheu & Fukuyama, 2007; Trice, 1992). High TOEFL scores do not ensure a smoother adjustment. In fact, lack of English proficiency was identified as the biggest obstacle in the acculturation process of Chinese students despite high TOEFL and GRE scores (Sun & Chen, 1997).

Historically, language competence and communication behaviors have received attention in research regarding sojourners and immigrants, often from the perspective of cross-cultural communication (Kim, 1988), social psychology (Berry, 1997), and sociolinguistics (Giles, 1977; Giles & Johnson, 1981). Findings reveal that language and communication barriers impede the acculturation process of these groups (Kim, 1988). As a sub-group of immigrants, international students received less attention than the broader immigrant group more often studied in these research fields.

Conversely, the counseling field has attended to the affective, behavioral and cognitive consequences of acculturation for international students (Kagan & Cohen, 1990), including the psychological impact of acculturative stress (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007) and various qualities that may predict successful adjustment (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Nonetheless, few

researchers have focused on understanding how language barriers affect international students' acculturation, nor have they designed counseling interventions to facilitate this process.

Because language proficiency has proven to be the most significant indicator in international students' sociocultural adjustment (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978; Ward & Kennedy, 1993), it is reasonable to postulate that language barriers are highly relevant to acculturation. This study is designed to investigate the impact of language barriers during on the acculturation process of international students from non-English speaking countries, with special attention to the resulting acculturative stress and how they cope with that stress.

Conceptual Framework

Earlier studies on acculturation mainly emphasized group differences rather than individual differences; group-level acculturation studies examined geographical, biological, political, economic, cultural, and social changes (Berry, 1994). However, more recent studies on acculturation have shifted the focus to individual-level changes, thus acknowledging individual differences within the same cultural group. Researchers have investigated psychological (e.g., motives, attitudes, values, abilities) and experiential aspects of how individuals learn a new culture and shed their original culture (Berry, 1994). Still, relatively little attention has been given to the pattern and process of adaptive changes in individuals (Kim, 1988). For example, the potential for conflict exists when individuals attempt to learn a new culture. When acculturation causes conflict, individuals tend to experience social, psychological, physical, and health-related problems. Researchers consider this set of problems to be signs of 'acculturative stress' (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987).

This study utilizes Berry's (1997) stress and coping model of acculturation as a conceptual framework to generate research questions about acculturation process of international students with language barriers. Berry's model is a part of the recent trend of individual-level analysis of

acculturation and identifies the cultural and psychological qualities that affect the development of acculturative stress and adaptation. Berry explains that the process of acculturation is initiated by the joint influence of the two societies in which the individual lives: origin and settlement. Concurrently, the acculturation process includes five phenomena: acculturation experiences (life events), stressors (appraisal of experiences), coping (strategies used), stress (immediate effects), and adaptation (long term outcome). Berry's model also notes that the five phenomena of acculturation are influenced by moderating factors prior to acculturation (e.g., age, gender, migration motivation, cultural distance, personality) and during acculturation (e.g., length of time, acculturation strategies, social support, societal attitudes). The research questions addressed by this study are closely related to Berry's five phenomena.

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

In keeping with the conceptual framework of Berry's (1997) stress and coping model of acculturation, this study focuses on individual-level rather than group-level differences to investigate the acculturation process of international students with language barriers. In order to acknowledge variation in individual change processes, constructivism will inform this study's approach. Researchers who utilize a constructivist framework believe that individuals are active agents who construct their own meanings, understanding, and knowledge about the world through experiences with their environments. A constructivist paradigm affords an opportunity to examine in detail the complexity of human experience as people live, interact, and make meaning within their own social worlds (Appleton & King, 2002).

This study's constructivist perspective assumes that international students from non-English speaking countries are active agents who create realities and meanings surrounding language barriers while studying in the United States. Also, these students actively engage in their acculturation processes by adopting their own acculturation strategies to deal with language

barriers and their related difficulties (e.g., academic, interpersonal). How students experience language barriers varies depending on characteristics such as level of English language ability, cross-cultural communication skills, and the qualities of interactions with host citizens.

During their acculturation process, international students' experiences, perceptions, and interpretation of language barriers affect their choice of acculturation strategies and outcomes because they construct their own meanings out of language barriers and the acculturation process. Stringer (1996) describes these constructions of meanings as "created realities" and "sense-making representations." The lens of constructivism helps the researcher understand the variety of "created realities" and "sense-making representations" that international students construct about their individualized acculturation processes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to develop a theoretical model to describe the international students' stress and coping experiences due to their language barriers. Understanding the core experience of international students with language barriers would enhance our understanding of the dynamics of how international students perceive, experience, and overcome their language barriers during the acculturation process in the U.S.

Based on the conceptual framework of Berry's (1997) stress and coping model of acculturation, this study explored the five sets of phenomena of international students' experiences due to language barriers: life events, stressors, coping, stress, and adaptation. Specific research questions of the study will include: (a) how language barriers occur as life events in international students' acculturation experiences, (b) how the students appraise their experiences, (c) what kind of coping strategies they adopt, (d) what immediate psychological and psychosomatic stress symptoms they experience, and (e) what long-term adaptation they achieve.

Rationale for the Methodology

Although language barriers are cited as the biggest obstacle to acculturation and as an important factor in acculturation and psychological strain (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Kagan & Cohen, 1990), little is known about the acculturation experiences that international students with language barriers undergo and how they perceive their experiences (Yoon & Portman, 2004). In other words, studies tend to operationalize the level of acculturation into sets of indicators (e.g., level of language proficiency) and the data have been presented without any guide to implications or meaning. Systematic efforts to determine what qualities account for, mediate, or moderate findings in the acculturation research are rare (Nguyen, 2006).

Theories that examine the processes and contexts of acculturation are needed to provide a deeper understanding of acculturation within the realm of individual experience. The specific context of this study encompasses questions of how international students from non-English-speaking countries face and manage language barriers as the major stressor in the acculturation process.

A qualitative methodology was chosen to examine the experiences of international students with language barriers because it has potential to yield rich, deep, and often unexpected information (McCracken, 1988). Grounded theory methods are a qualitative research approach designed for the systematic generation of theory from data (Glaser, 1978). In this study, grounded theory methods will serve as the research method to produce (a) descriptions of language barrier experiences, (b) explanations of how language barriers impact the acculturation process, and (c) a theory about relationships between language barriers and other related factors. Interrelationships among these factors may be much more complex than prior research suggests. For example, language barriers may mitigate or exacerbate students' confidence level,

particularly regarding academic tasks. Thus, students' low self-confidence may affect their choice of acculturation strategies.

Significance of the Study

If counselors, faculty members, and fellow students better understand how language barriers impede an acculturation process, create acculturative stresses, and promote an adaptation of international students from non-English speaking countries, they may contribute to a more beneficial academic and social experience for international students. Without this understanding, students who struggle with English may suffer a multitude of acculturation problems. Lack of language proficiency negatively affects numerous aspects of non-native-English speaking international students' academic and social interaction on United States campuses (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Among other problems, language barriers can lead to a loss of academic self-efficacy, which in turn predicts lower general adjustment (Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002). Language barriers can also deter international students from social interaction with their American peers (Hayes & Lin, 1994) and professional interaction with their professors (Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

International students' academic and social difficulties due to their language barriers can also negatively affect their emotional well-being (Leung, 2001). Due to the lowered academic and social self-efficacy, international students may experience a sense of loneliness and social isolation (Jacob & Greggo, 2001); fear of speaking to native speakers of English (Hsieh, 2006; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Schram & Lauver, 1988); psychological strain such as depression and anxiety (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002); and negative self- image, feelings of shame, humiliation, or inferiority when they perceive their English language ability as poor (Barratt & Huba, 1994). In serious cases, international students may develop somatic symptoms such as headaches, chest pain, fatigue, or loss of appetite as a part of these negative reactions to language

barriers (Lacina, 2002). Thus, language barriers are not only simple linguistic challenges but more complicated phenomena where psychological factors and impacts are closely related with. In this study, such psychological aspect of language barriers would be described to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of how international students perceive and deal with their language barriers during the acculturation process in the U.S.

With the help of this study's findings, international students and the counselors who help them can prioritize and address common experiential features of language barriers to lessen acculturative stress. As international students try to overcome their language barriers, they would almost certainly benefit from more satisfying cross-cultural communication and interpersonal interactions with United States citizens as well as other international students.

There are many benefits to improving these cross-cultural interactions. On a global level, cross-cultural interactions lead to effective international relations and diffusion of knowledge among cultures (Pedersen, 1991). On an individual level, sojourners report an increased appreciation of their home culture; broader worldview or perspective; reduction of ethnocentrism, intolerance and stereotypes; increased cognitive complexity; and greater personal awareness, self-esteem, confidence, and creativity (Church, 1982). Conversely, native English-speaking United States citizens may garner similar advantages from more positive cross-cultural interactions with international students.

Definition of Terms

As Kim (1988) pointed out, different terms are used by different investigators to refer to essentially the same process, and the same terms are defined by different investigators in different ways. For example, a variety of terms have been used to refer to the process sojourners and immigrants to go through in a new and unfamiliar culture including 'acculturation',

‘adjustment’, ‘adaptation’, ‘assimilation’. These terms means the cultural contact process in essential but may refer to different outcome of the contact.

Assimilation: a term used to emphasize the acceptance of cultural elements of the host society by the individual

Acculturation: a term which has been defined as culture changes that results from continuous, first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). While changes to both groups are implied in the definition, in fact most changes occur in the non-dominant group as a result of influence from the dominant group. However, acculturation is not limited only to learning and acquiring some aspects of the host cultural elements. According to Berry (1994), the outcome of acculturation can vary from assimilating with the host culture to integrating both original and host culture. Integration is considered most positive and less stressful outcome of acculturation.

Acculturative stress: one kind of stress, that in which the stressors are identified as having their source in the process of manifestations which occur during acculturation, such as lowered mental health status (particularly anxiety, depression), feelings of marginality and alienation, and heightened psychological and psychosomatic symptom level (Berry, 1994).

Adaptation: Kim (1988) suggested that this term can be used as the most broad concept that accommodates other existing meaning including assimilative, acculturative, and adjustive. However, in this study, this term specifically refers to the long term effect of acculturation due to the cross-cultural contact possibly meaning well-adaptation and mal-adaptation (Berry, 1997). A distinction has been made between psychological and sociocultural adaptation, with the former referring to a clear personal and cultural identity, good mental health, and personal satisfaction in the new context, and the later referring to social skills, culture learning, and other external

outcomes that link individuals to their context, such as handling daily problems related to school or work (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1993)

Adjustment: a term refers to mental-emotional state of comfort, satisfaction, and positive attitude of the individual

International students: foreign students who came to the United States to study in degree programs in U.S. higher education institutions.

International students with language barriers: international students from non-English speaking countries that speak English as a native or official language.

U.S. host citizens: U.S. citizens who were born and grew up in the United States and speak English as a first language.

Language barriers: a figurative phrase with difficulties faced when international students from non-English speaking countries attempt to communicate in English with those who speak English as their first language such as U.S. citizens.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the current level of knowledge about international students' language barrier and its impact on the acculturation process. A brief historical review on the acculturation studies is delineated along with the concept of acculturative stress and strategies. More importantly, the role of language in the acculturation process is examined link international students' language barrier and its impact on their acculturation process. Studies on the international students' language barriers are summarized in terms of four compositions of language barriers (English language, communication, psychological, environmental barriers) and three areas of challenges due to language barriers (academic, interpersonal, psychological distress).

Acculturation

Although acculturation is now a term commonly used in discussions around immigrants, refugees, and international students, its meaning and operationalization remain elusive. Sam (2006) specifies that Powell, in 1880, is accredited as the first person to have used the term "acculturation" in the English language, referring to psychological changes induced by cross-cultural imitation. In its simplest sense, acculturation covers all the changes that arise following contact between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds. A more formal definition of acculturation was proposed by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits in 1936. They defined acculturation as "Those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of wither or both groups" (Redfield et al., 1936). Redfield et al.'s

definition is now regarded as the classical definition of the concept and is perhaps the one most cited by acculturation researchers (Sam, 2006).

Sometimes, the term, acculturation, is wrongly used instead of assimilation, as exemplified by an everyday expression such as “he is acculturated to...,” implying “he is very assimilated into...” In the past, acculturation was used synonymously with assimilation, meaning a unidimensional, linear process in which individuals became assimilated to the host culture through the gradual process of giving up their original cultural background. However, more recent conceptualizations, such as Berry’s (1997) model, suggest that it is possible for individuals to retain their ethnic identity and behaviors while acquiring competence in the host culture. Berry (1997) regards assimilation as one of four acculturation strategies as individual may use during acculturation and defined it as turning one’s back on his or her original cultural background and adapting wholly into the host culture.

Acculturation was originally introduced as a group-level phenomenon by anthropologists and sociologists (Linton, 1949). However, early discussions around the concept also recognized it as an individual-level phenomenon (Dohrenwend & Smith, 1962). “Psychological acculturation” refers to the changes an individual experiences as a result of being in contact with other cultures (Graves, 1967). Within psychological acculturation schools of thought, the framework of Berry (1990, 1997) has received the most attention (Sam, 2006). Berry suggested that the acculturation process proceeds according to the degree to which the individual simultaneously participates in the cultural life of the new society and maintains his or her original cultural identity. The simultaneous participation and maintenance of the two cultures may lead to four different outcomes which Berry (1997) called assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization. These four outcomes are collectively referred to as

“acculturation strategies.” Since acculturation is a continuous process, an individual may adopt different strategies at different times, and to deal with different life issues.

Especially, long-term outcomes is referred to “adaptation” and it consists of two kinds of adaptation: Psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Psychological adaptation refers to more subjective and internal aspects of psychological well-being, satisfaction, and comfort with the new culture. Sociocultural adaptation refers to a more objective and external aspect of acculturation, involving the individual’s effectiveness in dealing with the challenges of the new environment and the tasks that he or she must complete in that environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). While conceptually distinct, psychological and sociological adaptations are empirically related to some extent where correlations between the two measures are in the +.4 to +.5 range (Berry, 2006).

Acculturation Strategies

Different patterns of responding to the demands of acculturation have been referred to as acculturation attitudes, strategies, modes, or outcomes. Berry and Kim (1988) identified varying ways in which individuals can seek to acculturate as acculturation strategies by posing two questions: “Is there value placed on and a desire to retain my cultural origin?” and “Is there a desire or need for positive relations and interaction with the host culture?” Four different acculturation strategies may be arrived at based on combinations of dichotomous yes or no answers to these questions. The strategies include assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration.

Assimilation is defined as relinquishing one’s way of absorbing and moving into the host culture. International students adopting the assimilation strategies try to disengage from their culture of origin in hopes of being accepted into the dominant host culture. While assimilation strategy has shown effectiveness for social adaptation, negative impacts have been seen with

regard to psychological adaptation (Kagan & Cohen, 1990; Searle & Ward, 1990). Assimilation is considered a risky strategy and likely to result in high level of stress and anxiety, low self-esteem, difficulties in work or school, and low mood rating (Ward & Kennedy, 1994).

Separation refers to a strategy of segregating from the host culture and remaining within relationships primarily from their culture of origin. International students adopting a separation strategy may garner social support from their co-nationals and maintain their cultural identity. But, they may be socially and academically ineffective within the university community and larger society (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). Measured by lack of English proficiency, separation has been associated with various problems, including depression, withdrawal and obsession-compulsion (Torres-Mastrullo, 1976) as well as somatic symptoms, PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder) and alcohol abuse/dependence (Escobar, Randolph, & Puente, 1983).

Marginalization is the condition in which individuals lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and the larger society. Marginalization is characterized by striking out against the larger society and by feelings of alienation and loss of identity. International students adopting a marginalization strategy may face the highest levels of acculturative stress and greatest risk of psychological maladjustment (Ward & Kennedy, 1994).

Integration implies some maintenance of the cultural integrity of the group as well as the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework. This strategy is associated with reduced risk and is increasingly recognized as the most adapted or well-adaptive strategy (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Research with various immigrant groups has generally suggested that a tendency to isolate oneself from the host culture is associated with greater stress, and that an integration approach is usually the most adaptive strategy, while total assimilation into the dominant culture is more likely to be related to psychological maladjustment and

psychosomatic problems (Berry, 1997; Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Ward, 1996). For example, immigrant youth with an integration showed high English language proficiency and high peer contacts with both their own ethnic group members and the host nationals (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

Acculturative Stress

The concept of stress has had wide usage in recent psychological and medical literature (Lazarus, 1997). Stress is considered to be a generalized physiological and psychological state of the organism brought about by the experiences of stressors in the environment, which requires some reduction in normal functioning to occur, and then, through a process of coping achieve satisfactory adaptation to the new situation.

To deal with problematic aspects of acculturation, the concept of acculturative stress was proposed by Berry (1970). Acculturative stress is a response by people to life events that are rooted in cross-cultural contact. Frequently, these reactions include heightened levels of depression and anxiety. This notion is broadly similar to that of culture shock (Oberg, 1960), but the term acculturative stress is preferred for two reasons (Berry, 2006). First, the term shock is essentially a negative one, implying that only difficulties will result from with a different culture contact. However, the term stress has a theoretical basis in studies of how people deal with negative experiences by engaging in various coping strategies, leading eventually to some form of adaptation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The second reason the concept of acculturative stress is preferable is that the source of the stressful experiences lies in the interaction between cultures, rather than in one culture or the other.

Several factors moderate the degree of international students' acculturative stress, in particular, the cultural distance between the host culture and the home culture of international students in terms of cultural practices, language fluency and educational experiences,

geographical distance and dissimilarity between the two cultures (Zhang & Rents, 1996), and physical differences related to skin color and other facial features (Berry, 1997; Poyrazli, Arbona, Bullington, & Pisecco, 2001; Wan, 2001; Ward, 1996) For instance, European international students may adjust more easily to the United States because of their Caucasian features and color of their skin, whereas families from Africa, South America, and Asia are distinguishable by their physical features and skin color, and thus may experience subtle discrimination and prejudice that may not facilitate easy adjustment (Berry, 1997; Segal, 1998).

Research has indicated that international students from non-Western countries experience significantly more adaptation difficulties than those from Western countries (Surdam & Collins, 1984). For example, Yeh and Inose (2003) studied a group of interns from Asia and found that Asian international students, compared with their counterparts from Europe, Central/Latin America, and Africa, seemed to experience higher acculturative stress. This study also found that English fluency, social connectedness, and satisfaction with social support were predictive of lower acculturative stress experienced by international students. In another study, a sample of 274 Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrant junior high and high school students reported that communication difficulties were the most common problem, and the use of social support networks was the most frequently reported coping strategy (Yeh & Inose, 2002).

During international students' acculturation process, the amount of cognitive effort required to process information, communicate in a new language and behave appropriately in a new academic, physical, and cultural context can result in cognitive fatigue, mental exhaustion, burnout, confusion, and disorientation (Constantine, Kindaichi, & Okazaki, 2005; Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). When academic and social expectations are not met, negative thoughts about themselves and a sense of inferiority may begin to dominate their thinking and

have unfortunate repercussions such as withdrawal and increased passivity in their social interactions, academic performance, and mood states. As these students face demands to speak English, perform academically, and negotiate school, legal, or health care systems, they are likely to experience high levels of acculturative stress (Lafromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

Stress and Coping Model of Acculturation

Two main theoretical perspectives on how individuals manage the process of acculturation have received attention in literature. One is a “stress, coping and adaptation” approach; the other is the “cultural learning” perspective (Berry, 2006; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). The cultural learning approach implies that acculturation problems arise because sojourners have difficulties managing everyday social encounters. Therefore, adaptation comes in the form of learning the culture-specific skills that are required to negotiate the new cultural milieu (Bochner, 1986).

In contrast to the cultural learning perspective, the stress, coping and adaptation approach conceptualizes acculturation as a series of stress-provoking life changes that draw on adjustment resources and require coping responses. Berry (1997) presented a more explicit and elaborate stress and coping model of acculturation. As can be seen in Figure 2.1, this model highlights stress and features the central flow of life events, appraisal, coping and short and long term outcomes.

These processes are likely to be influenced both by societal and individual level variables. The macro level characteristics of society include social, political, and demographic factors, such as ethnic composition, extent of cultural pluralism, and salient attitudes towards ethnic and cultural out-groups. On the micro level, individual and situational aspects of acculturation exert influences on stress, coping and adaptation. Berry also distinguished between influences arising prior to and during acculturation. In the first instance, factors such as personality or cultural

distance may be important; in the second, during the acculturation process, acculturation strategies or social support may be more relevant.

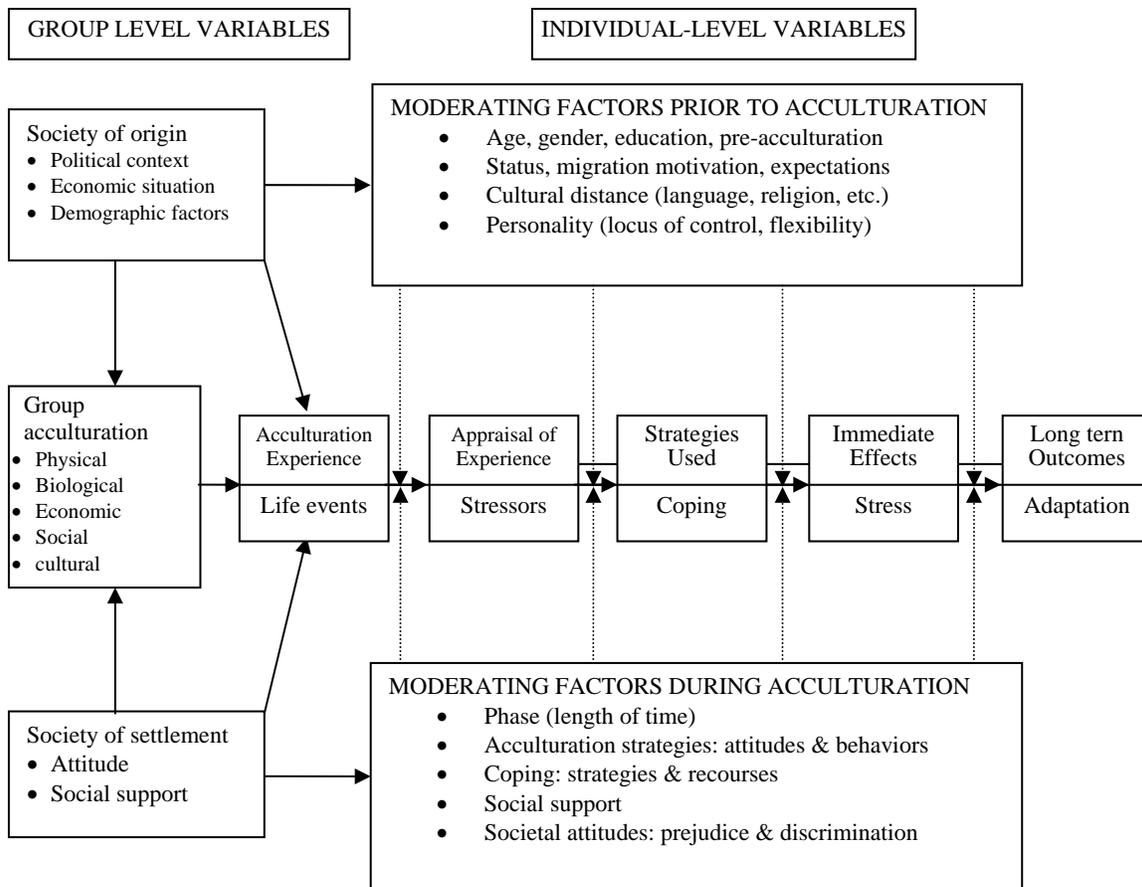


Figure 2-1 Stress and coping model for acculturation

The Role of Language in Acculturation Process

Language competence has a direct impact on a person’s learning and development due to its instrumental value in transmission of information and for regulating cognitive processes (Baker, 2001). As such, its role for learning and development during the acculturation process is evident and indisputable. When focusing on direct relationship between language proficiency and learning and development, the communicative function of language is emphasized. This communicative function is central to the notion that a person’s proficiency in the host language is a significant predictor of academic performance and social participation (Driessen, 2000).

Furthermore, language is instrumental in satisfying basic needs for bonding and security and, as such, also impacts a person's identity development (Vedder & Horenczyk, 2006).

Knowledge of the language spoken in the receiving community plays a central role within the cultural learning process, since language is viewed as the primary medium through which cultural information is communicated. Because language and cultural learning are intimately linked, miscommunications will likely result if international students do not acquire at least some fundamental verbal skills (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Studies have found that language fluency has a straightforward relationship to sociocultural adjustment; it is associated with increased interaction with members of the host culture and a decrease in sociocultural adjustment problems (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). For this reason, it seems important to examine the role of language barriers in facilitating communication competence, which include both effective and appropriate communicative behaviors (Spitzberg, 1988).

Studies on International Students' Language Barriers

There has been recent attention given to the internationalization (Leong & Ponterroto, 2003) and globalization (Leong & Blustein, 2000) of counseling as well as to the issues facing international students as they adjust to institutes of higher education in the United States (e.g., Komiya & Eells, 2001; Mori, 2000; Tatar & Horenczyk, 2000). Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Maschino, and Rowland (2005) found over a 10-year period (1990-1999) that international students composed 4% of the population in counseling research. This lack of inclusion is problematic because it reflects a lack of focus on international clients. Additionally, Delgado-Romero and colleagues stated that this finding potentially represents a confounding factor in research whereby international research participants might be "forced" into U.S. racial and ethnic categories rather than treated as a separate population. Pederson (1991) also pointed out that

research on counseling international students are not supported by a “grand theory.” In Yoon and Portman (2004)’s critical literature review on counseling international students, language barriers were addressed just as one of the personal factors on international students’ adjustment.

Therefore, it might not be surprising to find no academic work that has explored the nature of acculturative stress due to language barriers as well as counseling interventions specifically designed to address this issue.

Language deficits have been found to be a significant source of stress among international students (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2003; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Mori, 2000). Carr, et al. (2003) claimed that language deficits, a lack of traditional social support, high academic achievement pressure, and financial aid restrictions are a few of the critical stressors international students encounter. Therefore, the researchers implemented a support group for Asian international students at a large Midwestern university to help students feel at ease with American university life, address homesickness, language problems, and academic and social stressors. Kher, et al. (2003) conducted a case study on one international student's experiences as he undertakes his academic journey at a rural southern university. The author of the case study claimed that language barriers are one of the difficulties they are often unprepared to overcome. Kagan and Cohen (1990) found that fluency in the English language might have a direct effect on the adjustment process of international students.

In Jacob and Greggo’s (2001) study of a collaborative program for counselor trainees and international students, the issue of language barriers was addressed. He used a focus group to produce a list of concerns of international students. Specific areas of communication problems due to language barriers can be summarized as following: 1) fear of making mistakes when

speaking English, 2) need to have help to practice the language, 3) feeling left out in class, 4) feeling responsible for initiating contact with U.S. students, 5) difficulty speaking with or talking to university faculty members, and 6) difficulty to work on a group project.

According to Yeh and Inose (2003), English language proficiency is related to levels of stress for international students. In particular, those students who have strong language proficiency in English reported less stress in adjusting to the new culture. A higher level of language proficiency, that is, frequency of use, fluency, and degree of comfort using the language, may reduce the stress some international students have when engaging in conversations with U.S. students.

Barratt and Huba (1994) claimed that international students who have a high level of English proficiency experience less embarrassment and are less self-conscious about their accent or ethnic background. They also asserted that higher levels of English proficiency help international students in the academic setting because they are more likely to speak in class and participate in discussions.

One British study stands out in the area of international students' psychological distress due to their experiencing of language barriers. Luzio-Lockett (1998) argued that language restrictions hamper confidence in the speaker. Thus, this emotional strain in turn takes over the control of one's linguistic expressions and diminishes communication. International students may experience psychological distress such as feeling of being frustrated, humiliated, rejected, incompetent or inferior, as they cannot express themselves and the dominant language is the way in which one can represent academic knowledge. As language barriers interact with academic proficiency, students might face concomitant problems like lack of confidence, negative self-

concept, low self-efficacy, and fear of using English, which eventually can lead them to avoid communication in English.

Despite psychological distress due to language barriers, international students are unlikely to seek out counseling or psychological services (Pedersen, 1991; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003; Zhang & Dixon, 2001). Several factors may account for this, including a lack of familiarity with mental health services or counseling, stigma associated with psychological symptoms, cultural beliefs regarding the nature of symptoms and what constitutes appropriate help-seeking, and a misbelief that counseling services are only for U.S. students. When counseling is sought, international students tend to have a higher no-show rate after the first session compared with their U.S. counterparts (Anderson & Myers, 1985).

One reason for international students' underuse of counseling services may be the type of counseling that is available (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). Typical counseling sessions use a direct style of communication to identify and address personal problems with a professional who is usually a stranger. This format may be very foreign to international students coming from cultures with more indirect styles or those that rely on familiar social and religious supports, such as community leaders, family members, priest, Imams, or Shamans, for addressing such problems (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007).

Another reason for the underuse of counseling services by international students is language barriers. Communicating in English is difficult for any person who is not a native English speaker. Even in counties where English is the predominant secondary language individuals generally prefer to speak in their native language. Discussing complex emotional and relationship issues in language other than the primary one can be difficult even for the most confident of individuals whose second language is English (Pope, Singaravelu, Chang, Sullivan,

& Murray, 2007). The third reason can be the lack of availability of culturally competent counselors (Delgado-Romero & Sanabria, 2007). It cannot confidently be concluded that international students are averse to therapy in general when many lack access to bilingual and bicultural counselors with an international perspective who are competent to understand and work with the issues presented by these students.

University counseling centers might work with various campus departments, including the department of international student affairs, to help develop peer programs for international students if one is not available (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Likewise, Jacob and Greggo (2001) recommended that counseling centers consider developing alternative counseling programs, similar to peer programs, that would have graduate-level counselors work with international students in “non-counseling” environments. A less formal style of counseling may help international students feel comfortable while helping graduate-level counseling students develop a higher level of multicultural awareness.

Composition of Language Barriers

The concept of language barriers can be examined in detail by analyzing its key elements. Although factors related to language barriers overlap functionally, are interdependent, and operate simultaneously, the factors serve the present purpose of identifying elements that are crucial in international students’ language barriers.

English Language Proficiency Barriers

International students from non-English speaking countries enter into the new linguistic world of English as second language learners. This world is different than their native world. In some cases (e.g., with Korean or Japanese students), acquiring English as a second language requires an opposite cognitive process to produce words in a sentence. English language has word order that follows sequence of subject, verb, and object; Koreans or Japanese language has

a word order that follows the sequence of subject, object and verb. So, "I like you" in English is "I you like" in Korean in terms of word order in a sentence (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006). Due to this difference in the language-thinking process, English language is often difficult for international students to master (Reid, 1997). Having an accent can also distort effective communication (Lacina, 2002).

It is not uncommon to hear international students from non-English speaking countries report that they only understand a small portion of classroom lectures and discussions and, because of that, leave school everyday frustrated and exhausted. Language barriers have a significant impact on the students' adjustment as effective communication is required in almost every aspect of their new experiences in the United States (Sheu & Fukuyama, 2007).

Many universities provide ESL classes to assist with any language barriers that these students may face (Engel, Insalaco, Singaravelu, & Kennon, 2007). Counselors may find it is helpful to be a "coach" who encourages international students to make mistakes in speaking English in order to improve their language proficiency (Sheu & Fukuyama, 2007).

Communication Barriers

Language learning and the acquisition of broader communication skills are at the heart of cross-cultural effectiveness. Language proficiency and communication competence underpin effective cross-cultural relations, and increased contact with members of the host culture reciprocally reinforces and improves communication skills. Language, communication and social interaction skills, along with a wider knowledge of norms and values, all contribute to sociocultural adaptation (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

Although cultures may vary in general, Northern European and English-speaking societies tend to be individualistic, whereas Asian, African, Latin American, and Islamic societies are collectivistic. This social construction influences social relationship, and interpersonal

communication patterns widely (Chen, Brockner, & Chen, 2002). Students from collective cultural backgrounds may prioritize close relationship and may feel confused when interacting with U.S. students who tend to emphasize aspects of individualism (e.g. independence, assertiveness, and self-reliance). Consequently, many international students perceive social relationships in the US culture to be rather superficial (Cross, 1995) and may feel disappointed and discouraged with their interpersonal relationships while in the U.S. (Mori, 2000). However, international students may not necessarily feel that way if they were better informed of the differences between their culture and U.S. culture.

European international students are less likely to experience acculturative distress than students from the geographic regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin/Central America (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Since many U.S. cultural values are based on European norms (Carter, 1991) international students from Europe may experience less contrast in cultural patterns of behavior and value systems, as well as language, allowing for a smoother communication with Americans in their daily interactions.

Cross-cultural communication competence requires more than the learning of a language, and competent communication requires the learner to face a number of challenges (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). For example, social pragmatic differences can lead to breakdowns in communication. Thus, although language fluency is a significant part of communication, nonverbal forms of communication are also salient in the cross-cultural communication process (Masgoret & Ward, 2006).

There are numerous aspects of nonverbal communication, including activities such as culture-specific gestures, display of gaze, adaptation of preferred body gesture, the expression of emotions and the performance of ritualized routines such as greetings and leave-takings. Such

nonverbal acts often carry implicit messages that define the nature of relationships within a culture, and these messages can vary widely across cultures. In many ways, learning nonverbal forms of communication can present a bigger challenge to international students than achieving language fluency since it is often difficult to acquire the heuristic knowledge that is embedded within a culture (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Because nonverbal behaviors are essential to effective cross-cultural communication, it is important that they are in accordance with cultural expectations. Indeed, experimental research on cross-cultural interaction has shown that culturally congruent nonverbal behaviors are a more powerful predictor of interpersonal attraction than ethnicity (Dew & Ward, 1993).

Psychological Barriers

Language proficiency and communication capacity comes, in part, from self-confidence (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Second language confidence refers to one's belief in being able to communicate in an adaptive and efficient manner when using the second language (Clement & Bourhis, 1996). Language restrictions have been found to hamper self-confidence in the speaker (Luzio-Lockett, 1998). Thus, emotional strain impedes one's control of linguistic expression and diminishes communications. International students could experience psychological distress such as frustration, humiliation, rejection, incompetence, or inferiority when they are unable to express themselves in ways that best represent their knowledge. Because of their language difficulties, they might face problems due to lack of confidence, negative self-concept, low self-efficacy, and fear and avoidance of speaking English.

Related research has identified the goal of achieving effective cross-cultural interactions as an important predictor of language motivation and proficiency. For example, studies have demonstrated that an individual's success in learning the language of the host culture is

influenced by their willingness to communicate with members of that culture (MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998).

Self-reported (perceived) English language fluency predicts acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Specifically, international students with a higher frequency of language use and high language fluency level feel more comfortable speaking English, and develop lower levels of acculturative distress. International students with higher levels of English language fluency are related to be less embarrassed and less self-conscious about their foreign accent or ethnic background. They may be able to interact more confidently in their daily lives (e.g., asking questions, asking for help, ordering food). In addition, those who reported higher level of English language fluency acknowledge that they perform at higher levels in some academic classes because they feel more comfortable participating in class discussions. Yeh and Inose's (2003) research suggests that the ways in which international students perceive and feel comfortable with their English language fluency significantly influences their acculturative stress and academic performance.

A focus group used to produce a list of concerns of international students identified five dimensions, one of which was communication-related language barriers (Jacob & Greggo, 2001). Specific areas of communication problems due to language barriers included fear of making mistakes when speaking English, need to have help practicing the language, feeling left out in class, feeling responsible for initiating contact with U.S. students, difficulty speaking with or talking to university faculty members, and difficulty working on a group project.

Implicitly underpinning factors of international students' English language confidence are the past communicative experiences and future expectations held by the immigrants or sojourners. A study by Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (1994) has proposed that language

confidence, along with subsequent language achievement, is a function of the frequency and quality of contact require not only the willingness of the newcomer to communicate with members of the host culture, but also the willingness of host nationals to interact with newcomers (Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000).

Environmental Barriers

Non-acceptance by the dominant culture and the complexity of living in two cultures may lead these students to feel marginalized and alienated and to experience a sense of identity confusion and intrapsychological conflict (Chittooran & Sankar-Gomes, 2007). Because international students may experience initial difficulties adapting to the host social culture, there may be a tendency to stay within their own nationality and language groups as a response to a non-accepting environment. Unfortunately, some U.S. citizens may see this behavior as international students isolating themselves rather than a normal and expected reaction to unfamiliar surroundings. Optimally, the focus should be on improving the environment for international students rather than blaming the victim (Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Three basic conditions impact language learning are exposure to the language, interaction with other people or written language, and the need to communicate (Littlewood, 1992). International students need to communicate, but they sometimes experience negative interaction with host citizens due to others' insensitivity and lack of support. Negative responses or inconspicuous rejections of native English speakers to international students' different accents or choice of words, errors, or failures in communicating in English directly cause international students to experience shame, frustration, or sense of inferiority. Therefore, fundamental and common reasons for environmental barriers include the unintentional insensitivity of host citizens university personnel which cause experiences of embarrassment or frustration due to rather than international students' lack of English proficiency itself.

In one study, a training workshop for library staff was designed to help them communicate effectively with international students (Greenfield, Johnston, & Williams, 1986). Similar communication-based programs and other types of help for U.S. students, staff, and faculty could be made available on campus. It is critical that individuals within host cultures are also prepared to provide the appropriate assistance to reduce stress for international students. Therefore, university counseling centers can work with various campus departments, including the department of international student affairs, to help develop university staff's cross-cultural communication skills and competence.

Challenges due to Language Barriers

Academic Difficulty

Academically, international students experience difficulties with completing essay examinations and note taking during lectures due to limited language proficiency (Deressa & Beavers, 1988; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992). International students also have academic concerns that include understanding and comprehending the grading system, how to select course work, writing and speaking in English, and adjusting to the American classroom climate (Lin, 2000).

University professors have reported that their international students had great difficulty with listening comprehension, responding to questions, and class participation (Sun & Chen, 1997). Interaction between teacher and students in an academic classroom situation includes formal, planned lecture material, informal questions or comments from the students, and unplanned responses to students by the professor. During these give-and-take activities, students are expected to perform multiple tasks that may pose formidable challenges for international students.

Chinese students often report low confidence in English abilities particularly with listening, speaking, writing, pronunciation, and vocabulary (Huang, 2006). Their low confidence affects the amount of class lectures Chinese students believe they can understand. A total of 92.3% of the participants reported having challenges in understanding academic lectures (Huang, 2006). Therefore, the limited research available suggests that the perception and degree of comfort international students have with their level of English fluency influences their acculturative stress and academic performance.

Language barriers and adjusting to a different educational system can result in students receiving lower grades than expected, leading to a loss of academic self-efficacy, which in turn lower general adjustment (Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002). International students may not fully understand the U.S. educational system. They may have to adapt to differences regarding the grading system, expectations about class attendance, student-faculty interactions, selecting courses, and learning relevant study skills. Understanding lectures, deciphering instructor expectations, expressing opinions in class discussions, answering essay questions, writing research papers, and finding a supportive advisor requires a cultural and language know-how and sophistication that many international students do not possess (Charles & Steward, 1991; Meyer, 1995; Mori, 2000; Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992).

Interpersonal Difficulty

Students' ability to communicate in the host culture further complicates their adjustment to the loss of social support incurred by moving to a new country. Not surprisingly, one's English proficiency influence one's social interaction and adjustment (Pedersen, 1991; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984). International students who report higher confidence in using English upon arriving in the US adapted better (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Therefore, international

students' inability to speak English fluently may increase their social isolation and hinder their ability to obtain more social support in U.S. society.

International students find that the difficulty in communication permeates every aspect of their lives (Kher, et al., 2003; Mori, 2000). Because of the language impairment, students may experience social alienation. The lack of language skills also affects the students' daily living activities, including understanding housing procedures, organizing paperwork, and becoming familiar with registration and enrollment schedules (Kher, et al., 2003). Some international students may have minimal contact with the host culture outside of the academic setting, either because of a lack of opportunity or because of an inability or unwillingness to step out of their comfort zone, especially if lack of fluency in the English language is an issue (Chittooran & Sankar-Gomes, 2007).

Language skills are relevant to the performance of daily tasks and are important in establishing interpersonal relationships in a foreign country as they affect the quality and quantity of cross-cultural interactions. Few studies, however, have focused specifically on the relationship between variables related to second language acquisition and culture learning, though a number of researchers have suggested that one's level of proficiency or fluency in the language of the host country is associated with general adaptation to the new culture. This relationship has been often attributed to the newcomers' increased ability to use the language in interactions with members of the receiving culture (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1966).

Li and Gasser (2005) studied the cross-cultural self-efficacy of international students from 17 Asian countries and found that increased interaction with other American students facilitated international students' sociocultural adjustment process by assisting international students to develop local network, understand the local culture, and acquire social skills necessary for

adjustment to the new culture. Li and Gasser (2005) recommended that international students engage in cross-cultural social interactions, watch their peers' performances in social contexts, solicit feedback and encouragement for their own performances and focus on their own performance instead of their emotional arousal in social interactions to enhance their self-efficacy.

Psychological Distress

Being immersed in a foreign culture, language and communication styles can cause international students substantial psychological distress. The severity of the language barriers become exacerbated when international students face the insensitivity of native-English speakers. Because international students usually are sensitive to their language inadequacies and have a high desire to be accepted by their professors and peers, their full participation in classes often is difficult. They feel inferior because their English is not as good as native-born students and fear native-born faculty and students will not understand them (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000).

As a course of action, international students tend to increase anxiety and fear of speaking with or to them or may feel left out of the conversation, especially when others speak quickly. Accumulation of these unpleasant experiences may cause psychological disturbance and somatic symptoms (Lacina, 2002). Thus, language barriers are a main concern as they are often identified as one of the predictors of adjustment satisfaction (Surdam & Collins, 1984; Yeh & Inose, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In other words, the more language barriers international students experience, the less satisfaction they report during their acculturation process.

As stress accumulates, the ability to cope or readjust can be overtaxed, depleting their physical or psychological resources (Misra & Castillo, 2004). In turn, there is an increased probability that physical illness or psychological distress will follow (Misra & Castillo, 2004;

Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Yang & Clum, 1994). Excessive stress may induce physical impairments, and it is not uncommon to find international students afflicted with lack of energy, loss of appetite, headaches, or gastrointestinal problems (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Mori, 2000). In addition, some international students may somaticize their feelings of stress to avoid the stigma of seeking psychological assistance (Cox & Walsh, 1998; Misra & Castillo, 2004). As such, international students use college health centers more frequently than American students do for stress-related problems (Carr et al., 2003; Mori, 2000).

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHOD

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the stress and coping experiences of international students with language barriers during their acculturation process in the U.S. and to take critical steps toward generating a theory to explain the process of stress, coping, and adaptation that international students may undergo to deal with their language barriers. Grounded theory methods were used to pursue the research purpose.

This chapter is organized into four primary sections: description of grounded theory methods, subjectivity statement, data collection and analysis process, and pilot study. The section on the method description reviews critical elements of grounded theory methods such as theoretical sampling, stages of coding, theoretical memo. The second section, subjectivity statement, presents the researcher's own knowledge and experiences of language barriers to reveal possible bias and predispositions. The process section describes sampling, participant demographics, data collection procedures, steps of analysis, and efforts to ensure trustworthiness. The final section addresses the pilot study and its relevance to the current study.

Grounded Theory Methods

Grounded theory methodology, as put forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1978), employs research procedures that permit the fusion of empirical observations and theory generation. That is, grounded theory methodology is a way of conceptualizing data as the essential elements from which theory evolves. Glaser (1978) states:

Grounded theory is a detailed grounding by systematically analyzing data sentence by sentence by constant comparison as it is coded until a theory results. The result is that all data is conceptualized into categories and integrated into a theory.

Using grounded theory methods, a researcher becomes the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and the researcher's theoretical sensitivity allows him or her to develop theory grounded based on the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory data analysis is fueled by a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that can be described as comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An inductive analytical process is used to form a constant interplay between data collection and data analysis. Using this microanalysis method, the researcher continually makes theoretical comparisons between and within data, incidents, indicators, contexts, concepts, codes, and categories to delineate the dimensions, properties, and variations of each different condition (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The use of constant comparative methods allow one to describe the different dimensions or properties of the developing concepts and categories and to analyze the similarities and differences within and between concepts and categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical Sampling

In qualitative research, participants are to be recruited using purposeful, selective sampling methods (Glesne, 1999; Kruzel, 1999) because the focus is not on finding truth and generalization but deeper understanding of phenomenon and transferability (Patton, 2002). Sampling in grounded theory methods is guided by the emerging categories and themes in a process called theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling is flexible and therefore is not determined rigidly before beginning the research to allow for maximum comparisons between concepts that emerge from the analysis and to encourage creativity (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result, criteria for selecting participants may change as categories emerge from analysis of data and interview questions will become more refined with each interview.

Therefore, the use of sampling and analysis methods in the grounded theory methods occurs simultaneously and continues until no new information emerges, a point called theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “Saturation is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the ‘new’ that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time” (p.136).

Theoretical comparisons use evidence reflecting similarities, differences, and/or varying degrees of the observed incidents’ properties as tools to better understand the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, after initially interviewing five international students with language barriers, this researcher may compare and contrast the participants, relying on the data guide these comparisons. Furthering this example, if results of preliminary data analysis indicate that previous experience with native-English speakers emerges as an important issue related to the degree of language barriers they experience, then the researcher may group my participants into two categories: experienced and inexperienced international students. Then, the researcher may examine the implications for them to have and not have previous experience with native- English speakers and how students in each group feel, think and/or act. This theoretical comparison process may lead to further theory construction or further drive data collection.

Stages of Coding

In grounded theory analysis, data are coded during three phases: open, axial, and selective (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each phase has specific goals aimed at developing emerging themes, processes, relationships, and dimensions of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Open coding: Open coding refers to the process of acquiring a better understanding of the data without benefit of a specific theoretical orientation. When conducting opening coding,

the researcher is interested in starting to ground the data by broadly coding each data source, proceeding line-by-line, constantly comparing the basic codes and properties of the codes, and moving beyond the concrete to the more abstract and generalizable concepts reflected in the data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Axial coding: After completing open-coding the interview transcript, a researcher groups the open codes based on the nature of their perceived relationship and forms higher level of categories (axial codes). This immediate level of data analysis process helps a researcher make connections between and within emerging categories to specify the categories' dimensions, properties, and ranges (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During axial coding, a researcher is concerned with examining the phenomenon of study structure (context) and process (actions/interactions over time and their consequences) (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective coding. In selective coding, the axial codes are grouped into a “theoretical structure that enables us to form new explanations about the nature of the phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.103). The goal of selective coding is to incorporate all categorical dimensions, properties, and relationships, thus leading to the development of a cohesive theory validated by further data collection and comparison (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical Memos

Glaser (1978) defines theoretical memos as “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (p.83). Theoretical memos in grounded theory are analytic reflections from the researcher when coding, comparing, and developing a theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They are meant to capture the ideas stimulated by the data, not to describe the data. A researcher records whatever ideas that

may serve to clarify the concepts, an incident in the data, counterexamples to an incident, and the relationship of the researcher's ideas to the ideas of others.

Theoretical memos have four different functions: to work with ideas, allow freedom of thoughts, develop a memo bank, and sort the memo bank (Glaser, 1978). When using theoretical memos, the researcher may conceptualize ideas from the data, explore relationships between and within categories, and integrate the different ideas and categories. When writing memos, the researcher should maintain an open mind and not judge what he or she is writing to keep the ideas flowing.

Subjectivity Statement

A qualitatively oriented researcher never is separated from the study (Lincon & Cuba, 1985). Admitting up front that research is presented as interpretations of the data and that the researcher is an instrument of data collection and analysis seems to be a hallmark of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Because biases never can be set aside fully, a researcher's own rooted knowledge, experience, and insights seep in. Qualitative inquiry often produces unique interpretations of what is studied. Such unique interpretations are highly valued in qualitative inquiry because their use may uncover the complexities of the studied phenomenon and provide introspective and critical explanations. However, the researcher's bias and predispositions based on his or her knowledge and experiences also may mislead data interpretation and understanding about the phenomenon. The subjectivity inherent in this process poses potential threats that may weaken the quality of the study. Thus, a researcher's subjectivity, including personal experiences and beliefs, should be stated in order to help minimize such influences. Such subjectivity statements help readers understand the researcher's position and viewpoints toward international students with language barriers. Researcher subjectivity is stated in the following section.

The researcher of the proposed study is an Asian female, 34 years of age, with a background in mental health counseling. I am an international student who came to the United States five years ago to pursue a doctoral degree, at which time I began my own process of acculturation. When I began my doctoral study, language barriers hit me as the first and foremost challenge. When recalling my first year, I can summarize it as anxiety and headaches. In class, my body always was tense resulting from my efforts to understand what my professors and classmates were saying. Participation in discussion was only a dream because I understood dialogues more slowly than native English-speaking students. Sometimes I had something to say but I missed the timing while translating my thoughts into English. Then others moved onto a different issue. After hours of class, I felt exhausted and had headaches probably because of an over-load of brain functions and tension. I also felt alone and left behind.

In later years, I became a better English speaker as a result of a lot of help and patience from faculty and fellow students and exposure to the English language. However, I continued to experience difficulty presenting myself in an articulate and expressive manner in academic and interpersonal settings. My fear of making mistakes in front of people kept me from communicating with others. Moments were very embarrassing and dreadful when I tried to say something but what I said didn't make any sense due to grammar errors or awkward use of vocabulary. My individual supervisor in the second year told me that I looked like a 'deer in the headlight' to describe that I looked alert all the time. The experiences were very frustrating and tiring experience. Most of all, they adversely affected my academic self-efficacy and self-image as a student.

My interactions with other international students I met in class or support groups outside of classroom lead me to the belief that many international students also were under stress due to

language barriers. I also observed that some international students were actively participating despite their language barriers. Although they made mistakes and had a strong accent, they focused on the messages they wanted to deliver. I became more curious about language barriers as I observed different attitudes that international students showed as to their language barriers.

Because of my vivid experiences of suffering and limitations due to language barriers as an international student, I became anew to the importance of language just like we do not acknowledge the importance of air every moment we breathe until it is taken away. After experiencing my language barriers, I view language as a key instrument for structuring my thinking process and expressing who I am. As Bernstein (1971) states, “Language is one of the most important means of initiating, synthesizing, and reinforcing ways of thinking, feeling and behavior which are functionally related to the social group (p.43)”.

Therefore, language has power, in part, because it carries information and is essential for participation in all social settings. This is not a new idea to communication and sociolinguistic specialists. Saville-Troike (1989) stated that one of the most important general functions of language is to regulate boundaries between and among people. This idea was called the ‘boundary functions’ of language. That is, language regulates interaction by “unifying its speakers as members of a single speech community, and excluding outsiders from intragroup communication” (p.14). International students with language barriers may feel excluded and marginalized due to these boundary functions of language.

Data Collection and Analysis

Sampling

Using grounded theory methods, the total number in the sample is determined based on theoretical sampling until the researcher reaches the point of theoretical saturation. Twelve participants were recruited throughout two rounds of sampling procedures until I found no new

information or questions concerning international students' language barriers and stress and coping experience during the acculturation process.

Initial open sampling included six participants through criterion sampling (Kruzel, 1999). Criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet some outlined criteria. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of international students from non-English speaking countries in terms of language barriers, the criteria are set in terms of three major categories: demographic criteria, perceived English use criteria, perceived stress level criteria.

The ideal participant was an international students from non-English speaking countries, excluding international students from the countries whose first language (e.g., England, Australia) or official language (e.g., India, Pakistan) is English and is enrolled for at least two years in the U.S. higher education institutes to pursue a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree. In addition, she or he would have perceived their stress experiences due to language barriers and believe that they have overcome their language barriers. Gender, age, race, or culture were not considered at this stage of initial sampling. The complete inclusion-exclusion criteria are found in Appendix A. Base on the inclusion-exclusion criteria, pre-interview questions were developed to discern the appropriateness of the participants. The pre-interview questions are found in Appendix B.

The analysis of the data from the initial sampling yielded new questions in regards with major studies of participants. Six initial participants expressed different degrees of stress experiences and perceived pressure from demand in English language use depending on the fields of their major studies: strong expressions for stress and pressure by students from education and social science study and mild expressions by students from engineering, science, and music. Some participants pointed out during their interviews that international students with

language barriers from a certain field may require a higher level of language ability for an academic success than other fields. Thus, the second round of sampling focused on international students with language barriers from the fields of education and social sciences in order to expand the data. Sampling criterion for this step was the same as initial sampling criterion with the added condition of their field of study. Another six participants were recruited for the second round.

The initially sampled participants were recruited via email (international students' list serve). Then, to find participants who met all criteria, each international student who showed interest in participating was contacted individually to obtain information regarding the inclusion criteria via email or in person. The quest to find information-rich cases for the second round participants lead to my using insider knowledge of the participants' degree programs to select participants whom I felt had a lot to contribute to my study. The researcher visited targeted department offices to contact student coordinators, student presidents, or faculty members to attain recommendations or referrals to possible candidates. The targeted departments included sociology, anthropology, criminology, law, education, and communications. All relevant University of Florida IRB regulations were followed precisely during the recruitment and interview process.

Interview

Individual interviews were used to collect data. Interviews were semi-structured, with each beginning with pre-prepared questions and intended probes, but were not limited to these questions. Questions were adaptable to the changing conditions of the interview process. Thus, their exact wording sometimes could be altered, some questions were not used, and other questions were added extemporaneously. The interview process was mostly participant-guided and took about 60 ~ 80 minutes. The main intent of the interviews was to encourage participants

to discuss their perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts about stress and coping experiences due to language barriers in the U.S. higher education institute.

The interview questions were intended to explore the following elements: general experience using English in the beginning of their study in the United States, immediate psychological and/or physical responses, thoughts and feelings related to any difficulties, coping strategies to overcome the difficulties, barriers faced in coping, and the indication of adaptations. The initial interview questions are listed in Appendix C and the second round interview questions are in Appendix D. These questions are designed to elicit two types of information. First, information was gathered concerning participant's memories about incidents involving stress experiences of language barriers and coping strategies that they have adopted. Second, information regarding the participant's perception and beliefs about language barriers was gathered.

Participant Demographics

Table 3-1 summarizes the demographic qualities of the total sample. They will be identified and referred to by pseudonyms only to protect the identity of study participants. All participants chosen for this study were international students at the University of Florida, a university located in the southeastern with a student population of approximately 50,000 enrolling annually. The initial participants voluntarily responded to the email recruitment while the second round participants were contacted by the research after their colleagues or faculty members made referrals.

All participants have met the inclusion-exclusion criteria. All participants presented themselves as international students from non-English speaking countries who suffered from challenges due to language barriers to find a way to cope with stress. When recollecting their memory in the beginning of the study, all reported most difficulty in listening, speaking, and

writing. Reading also was an overwhelming task due to the length of reading assignments. They perceived language barriers as a source of stress despite of different degree of stress experiences. They also believed that they have coped with the stress to overcome language barriers and were willing to share their successful coping stories. In the table 3-1, the first 6 were participants for the open-initial sampling and the remaining 6 were for the second round sampling.

Table 3-1. Participants of study.

	Participant	Gender	Age-range	Major	Country of origins	Years studied in the U.S.
1 st round interview	Anne	Female	35-40	Chemistry	China	2
	Bob	Male	30-35	Ecology	Bolivia	3
	Chris	Male	30-35	Environmental engineering	Taiwan	3
	Danny	Male	25-30	Physics	China	2
	Emily	Female	35-40	Education	Korea	2
	Fran	Female	20-25	Music	Japan	3
2 nd round interview	Grace	Female	25-30	Advertising	Taiwan	2
	Henry	Male	25-30	Criminology	Thailand	3
	Irene	Female	30-35	Sociology	Taiwan	4
	James	Male	30-35	Anthropology	China	2
	Kate	Female	30-35	Law	Japan	3
	Lauren	Female	25-30	Communications	Korea	2

Steps of Analysis

Interview data were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcripts from each participant were 35~45 pages long. After the transcription process, the researcher again read the interview transcripts to do open-coding by paragraph. All the open-codes for each participant were compared and contrasted to generate conceptual categories. The first round data collection and analysis produced one comprehensive list of open-codes. After labeling the open codes, the codes were analyzed in terms of their relationships to each other and clustered into broader, mutually exclusive categories for identifying axial codes and selective codes. The data from the second round of data collection were also audio-taped and transcribed, with transcripts a similar length as the first round. Then the second phase of data was open-coded to generate axial and selective

codes. The researcher continued writing memos about the data to record her thoughts on similarities and differences of the data. Then, the researcher integrated the two different data sets from the different data collections and ended up with the final data list of 373 open codes, 22 axial codes, and 5 selective codes. Theoretical memoing throughout the data analysis process produced hand-written memos in a quantity of a legal pad and helped the researcher find relationships between open and axial codes and to draft different illustrations for a theoretical model.

Trustworthiness

Researchers create trustworthy qualitative work by making their methods of data collection and analysis transparent and showing how they arrived at their conclusions. Creswell's (1998, p.201-203) methods for creating trustworthy and transparent research are numbered below. These methods can be implemented in the following manner: 1) triangulation, using multiple sources, theories, investigators, or methods to develop conclusions, 2) peer review and debriefing, 3) inclusion of subjectivity statement, 4) member checking, participants' reviewing transcripts and providing feedback for accuracy.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, three methods among four listed above were utilized by the researcher to increase the trustworthiness. The subjectivity statement was presented in the earlier section in this chapter. After completing the transcription and open coding process, member checking was followed so that participants could confirm, question, or refute the researcher's interpretation of the data and understanding of the contents and contexts that participants were describing in the interview. After hypothesizing the components of emerging theory during axial and selective coding, this researcher adopted a peer review process by sharing the findings from the data with a group of other international students who had not participated in this study, as well as with one college counselor, and one faculty member who offered academic language courses for international students.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted using the grounded theory method and procedures for data collection and analysis. The study consisted of three interviews. The data analysis of open, axial and selective coding process was conducted with the data from the initial sampling. The purpose of the study was to generate the description of international students' stress experience due to their language barriers and the factors around their experiences.

Participants

Study participants were selected based on their ability and interest in explicating and articulating their stress experiences due to language barriers. The inclusion criteria were 1) international students speaking English as their second language, 2) being in the United States for more than one year, yet less than five years, 3) being from a non-European country. The third criterion was set based on the assumption that students from European countries undergo less language stress because of cultural and linguistic similarities between American and European countries. The participants were recruited via email advertisement through the international students' list serve.

Adam is a 35~40 years old Hispanic male from Mexico. He studied science in the beginning of his study in the U.S. and later changed his major to social science. It is 4 years that passed since he came to U.S. to earn his Ph.D. degree. He said that he started learning English formal education when he was 5 and continued until he became 18 year old. He also has had chances to learn and practice English with direct interaction with English native speaker in his home country. Beth is a 30~35 years old Chinese female from the mainland China. She is also a doctoral student in social science and has been 3 years in the U.S. She studied English for about 6 years through formal education and has never had any direct interactions with English native speakers. Carl is a 30~35 years old Chinese male studying in social science as a doctoral student.

He came from Taiwan five years ago. He received about 10 years of English education in schools yet had minimal interactions with English native speakers before coming to the U.S.

Table 3-2. Participants of pilot study.

Participant	Gender	Age-range	Country of origin	Years studied in U.S.
Adam	Male	35-40	Mexico	4
Beth	Female	30-35	China	3
Carl	Male	30-35	U.S.A.	5

Data Collection

Interviewing was the data collection method for this study. It was a semi-structured interview taking about 60 ~ 70 minutes. The interview process was mostly participant-guided process through the researcher used some probing questions. The interview questions were as follows:

- What was it like to study in English in the beginning of your study in the United States?
- Explain your perceptions and feelings related to those difficulties
- Describe some reasons why you experienced those difficulties
- How about now? Do you still have those difficulties?
- What are your coping strategies to overcome those difficulties?
- What barriers have you faced in the course of that?
- What suggestions do you have for your school and other international students from your experiences?

Data Analysis

Interview data were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcription was 40 pages long. After the transcription process, I read the interview again to open-code each paragraph and produced 155 open codes to generate conceptual categories. Common themes of international students' stress experiences due to language barrier were identified that provided the context to meanings, circumstances, and conditions of what it was like to study and live while learning the

second language. Once all the open codes were labeled, the codes were analyzed in terms of their relationships to each other and clustered into broader, mutually exclusive categories for identifying axial codes and selective codes.

Data Story

Findings were organized and presented as a theoretical schema depicting one core category (Lack of communication) and three peripheral categories (locus of language stress, factors around the language stress, and managing stress). The core category, lack of communication, explains the nature of international students' stress experiences. Lack of communication with host nationals in both academic and social settings was identified by participants as the core problem in their stress experiences. This core concept becomes a fundamental theme bridging the three component categories: Invisibility, losing self, and separation.

Participants described experiences of being Invisible, which means that people send out verbal and non-verbal messages as if the participants are not there. This would happen with or without intention of host nationals in various settings such as in class discussion, in group activities, in interpersonal relationships with other classmates, or outside campus.

The experience of losing self has been explained in the literature. Upon coming to the US, international students tend to feel a deep sense of loss when leaving their families and friends behind (Sandhu, 1995). Simultaneously, international students may become deprived of social support systems that typically validate their sense of self-concept and self-esteem, and provide emotional and social support (Pedersen, 1991; Snadhu, 1995). Given the situation that they already feel vulnerable, the feeling of losing self might be exacerbated when they experience lack of communication in the new environment.

A final peripheral category was determined to be Separation. Not surprisingly, English proficiency has been found to be an important factor in social interaction and adjustment

(Pedersen, 1991; Schram & Lauver, 1988; Surdam & Collins, 1984). Inability to speak English fluently is a primary inhibitor to becoming socially involved in the American society. Hence, separation occurs in the social milieu of international students in the U.S. When stress is severe, a complete separation occurs when students quit and go home to their home country. Those international students are not available for this research but one participant spoke of students who were so stressed they quit and went home. Identifying people who might have severe stress due to language barriers and related difficulties at any earlier stage is important so that stress management intervention can be made available to them.

Relevance to Dissertation Research

The pilot study conducted for this proposal study served the purpose of discerning the plausibility of data collection and analysis techniques and the appropriateness of applying grounded theory to the research question. The pilot study revealed that the technique of conducting an individual interview and using a combination of both preconceived and extemporaneous questions was indeed effective. The interview also proceeded smoothly and proved useful in later data analysis. The process of data analysis used in the pilot study established the appropriateness of applying grounded theory to the research question. Several themes and sub-themes were generated, grounded in the participant's actual words, and validated by related research.

The findings of the pilot study helped the researcher expand the idea of language barriers to the related issues of language proficiency and communication competency. Thus, the researcher conducted literature reviews on cross-cultural communication competence as well as second language confidence. Lastly, discovery of two peripheral categories related to language stress and management, led the researcher to a stress and coping model of acculturation (Berry, 1997), which was adopted as conceptual framework for the proposed research.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

A Theoretical Model

Data analysis using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) yielded five major categories of stress and coping experiences among international students with language barriers: perceived stressors, immediate stress responses, stress-moderating variables, coping strategies, and adaptation. The twelve participants recognized three components of stressors: the time-consuming nature of language barriers, academic activity limitations, and a strong need for language use. Immediate stress responses were sub-categorized into physical and psychological manifestations. Two types of stress-moderating variables (environmental and psychological) are identified as factors helping participants deal with the stress experiences. While utilizing these environmental and psychological variables, participants made efforts to an active and direct management with their stress experiences, that recapitulated to three major coping strategies: cognitive reframing, emotional release, and behavioral exposure. Later, the students reached an adaptation stage in which they perceived themselves as better communicators and attained personal growth.

Based on these findings, a grounded theory has been developed to hypothesize relationships between the categories and their components (see figure 2). The theory presents three linearly ordered phases to explain the students' stress and coping experiences in conjunction with changes in the meanings of language barriers to them. The first phase occurs as international students with language barriers perceive stressors; they report immediate stress responses that include physical and psychological manifestations. In this phase, students tend to perceive their language barriers as personal defects accompanied by a strong emotional response of shame. The second phase begins when international students with language barriers

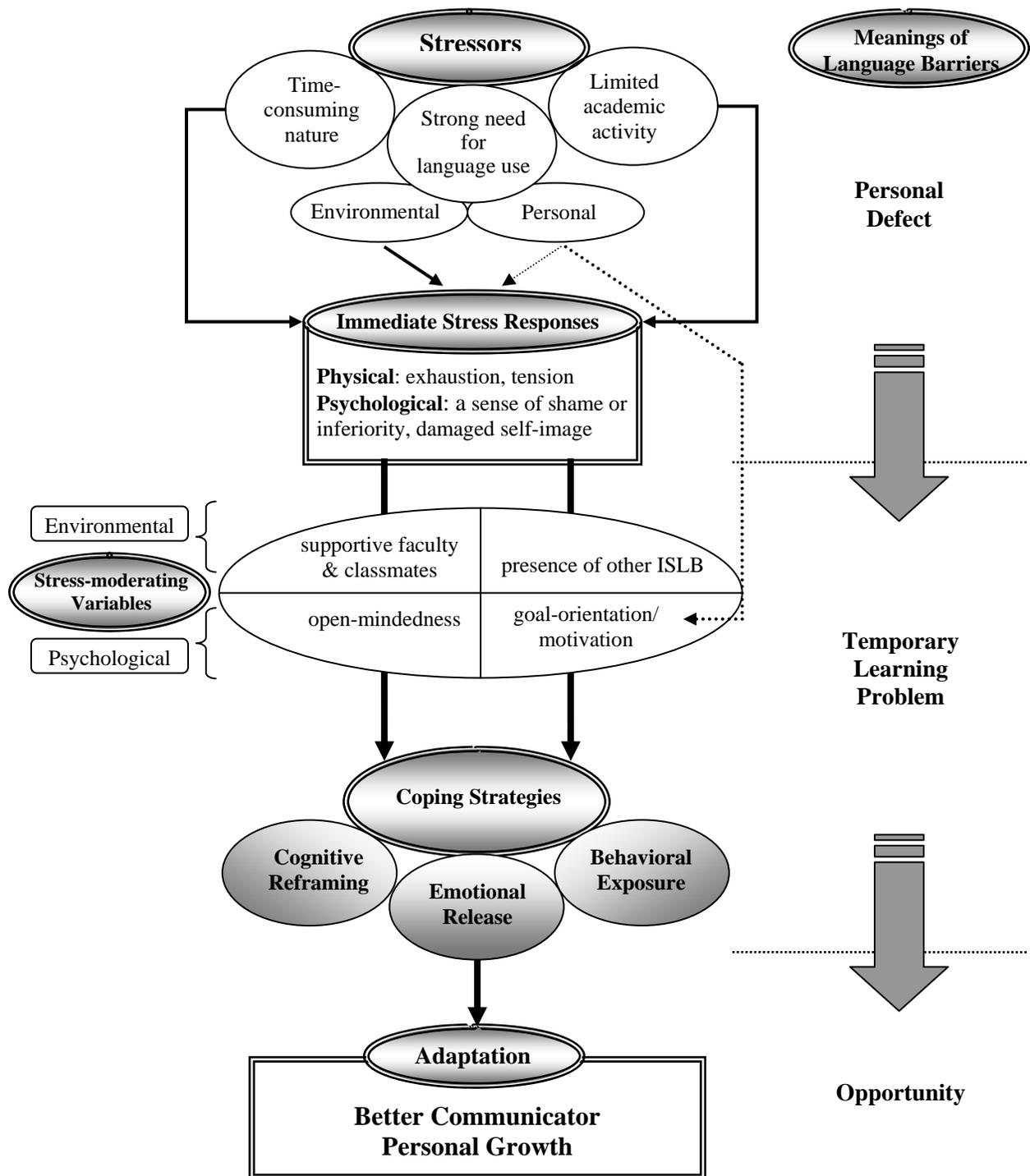


Figure 2-2. Theoretical model for stress and coping experiences of international students with language barriers

acknowledge and employ stress-moderating variables and start to adopt coping strategies. In this second phase, students tend to view the language barrier as a temporary learning problem rather than a personal defect. Thus, their emotional responses may attenuate from shame to frustration. Adaptation occurs during the last phase, when the students define the language barrier as an opportunity and finally arrive at self-acceptance. Though the sequence of the three phases determined by this research and described in this theoretical model suggests a course of changes in participants' perceptions of language barriers, it does not imply that all participants proceeded through these stages at the same or similar rate or timing.

Perceived Stressors

Upon arrival in the U.S., international students with language barriers are surrounded by a variety of possible stressors. International students come to the U.S. with a clear priority: to obtain a higher education degree within the designated time period specified on their Immigration and Naturalization Service I-20 form. They are obligated to maintain full-time student status and are forbidden to work off-campus. Given this situation, their focus naturally falls on academic activities. Thus, international students may encounter stressors in their academic environments that range from formal activities such as coursework or practica to informal such as studying in the library or preparing group presentations. Accordingly, this study recognized three major stressors that directly relate to academic activities: the time-consuming nature of language barriers, strong need for language use, and limitations to academic activities.

Time-consuming Nature of Language Barriers

Language barriers often discussed as an emerging and significant source of stress among international students (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2003; Misra & Castillo, 2004; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Mori, 2000). Similarly, participants in this study perceived language barriers as one of the biggest obstacles to academic goals, primarily

because of the time-consuming nature of language translation. Participants said that at the beginning of their studies, they required more time to read and write assignments in English than they would have needed in their native languages. This was especially common for students in the social sciences. Irene said:

Like reading, probably, I don't have to spend so much time for reading in Chinese. Here, for me like, Oh my god! For me like, a whole week I am going through a dictionary. For writing one or two page reflection papers, my American cohorts, they begin, if the class was 3 O'clock, they begin at 2 O'clock to write. For me, no way. Impossible. (Laugh).

Henry stated that at first it took him a couple of weeks to read 300 hundred pages, but now he can finish within a couple of days or an hour if he skims the text. Lauren said she felt overwhelmed by the increased diligence required to digest her reading and writing assignments every week. For Bob, writing in English consumed most of his study time. He needed more time to write because he initially wrote papers in Spanish, translated them into English, and then carefully corrected grammar and appropriate word choice errors. Participants who studied science and engineering said they did not have as many reading or writing assignments as other participants, but when they did they struggled for the same reasons. Overall, most participants said that they were overwhelmed by the additional time and effort necessary for English-language assignments.

A similar problem occurred with oral presentation assignments. Grace stated that, although she carried out many successful presentations in Chinese, English presentations presented a challenge. She added that spontaneous communications in class were even more difficult because she couldn't prepare her responses in advance. She explained:

In Chinese, just outline I can tell whatever in my mind. But it doesn't happen like that in English. First time, I wrote down every single word even like, "HOWEVER", that kind of a conjunction word. I couldn't just say...or improvise expressions. So I had to put more efforts for preparing my presentations. But the discussions in class, I can't prepare like that. So in my first semester, I wasn't really getting involved with discussions in class.

In regard to listening and speaking ability most necessary during in-class discussions and conversations with professors and classmates, participants felt that they were slower to understand situations and to come up with responses. Grace described:

I would say language barriers made my encoding and decoding process more slow and hard. There are more steps, like listening to English, understanding it, thinking in Chinese and translating into English.

At the most basic level, communications rely on encoding and decoding information.

Participants said that their encoding and decoding process included an extra step to translate English to and from their native language. When asked whether they think in English now, all participants said they still think in their native language for their studies, although most become accustomed to routine English conversation (such as daily greetings) without thinking in their native language. As long as they think in their native languages, participants have an additional step to slow their encoding and decoding processes. As Grace explained, non-routine communications further delay encoding and decoding due to lack of preparation and practice.

Strong Need for Language Use

The second stressor identified by the participants was the need for English language use for various academic activities in and outside of classrooms. Some participants reported that daily life activities at restaurants, banks, or driver license offices were simpler and easier to learn than the language used for academic purposes; they found that language within higher education circles required a higher level of articulation and fluency.

Such claims were more common from participants in departments that utilize spoken and written language as the primary means of academic expression and communication. For example, violin major Fran felt grateful to have an alternative way to prove her academic merit other than speaking or writing in English (i.e., by violin performance). Likewise, Anne, a chemistry student, could demonstrate academic competence via experiments in the lab. In contrast, Emily found

language was the only way to express her opinions, ideas, and abilities for her major, education. Irene believed that her thoughts appeared less persuasive because of limited vocabulary or awkward wording in class discussions or written papers.

Among 12 participants, only 4 from chemistry, physics, environmental engineering, and music reported their academic performance and expressions did not entirely depend on linguistic expression. Chris, who studies environmental engineering, said that in his field there was “not much need for spoken communication, as compared to other studies.” More importantly, Chris reported that he probably experienced less stress than international students in other departments. Physics major Danny supported Chris’ comments about hard science departments, stating that there were few American students in the department and, thus, less verbal English interaction. Nonetheless, the four participants who encountered less English usage in their academic environments still presented with strong personal aspiration and motivation to communicate more effectively in English.

The remaining 8 participants reported that they faced a strong need for language use in their department activities to be successful. Thus, international students with language barriers may experience different degrees of needs and demands for language use depending on their major field, which may lead to different levels of stress. Thus, the second stressor identified in this research, strong need for language use, appeared to have two different sources of pressure for language use: environmental and personal.

Environmental need for language use. Eight participants from law, social science, education, and communication disciplines reported heavy demand for spoken and written English and expectation of language mastery. Kate, in law school, pointed out:

Some departments magnetize persons who have good language ability and communication skills and law school is one of them for sure. Learning law is very demanding in language.

You have to be very precise, especially when you write. You wouldn't want to go to a law school if you are not good at language in the first place.

These participants viewed language as the most important and sometimes the only means to perform and prove their academic ability. Their reported environmental needs for language use comprised reading assignments, papers, class discussions, oral presentations, and lectures, many of which are designed to elicit academic interactions.

Lectures by professors in their departments usually claim only a fraction of a three hour class; thus, class time features a greater proportion of participatory (verbal) activity. For example, Grace said that her major, advertising, “highly depends on oral communication” and “a lot of interaction between professors and students, discussions, presentations.” Thus, she felt the need for “a high level of language ability” to keep up with discussions in class. She described the relative stress levels of her Chinese friends to her own:

My other Chinese friends who are in engineering department used to say “if I were you I would die!” They say they have a presentation one time for the whole semester but before the presentation they come to me and share how anxious they are. I do my presentation more than 10 times per semester! If you are going to study advertisement, you definitely have to know how to communicate with others. I think engineering fields less require this language and communication skills than us. You have to talk in my department!

Talking is only part of language usage needs. These eight participants also reported pressure to complete reading assignments to prepare for class discussion. In the beginning for Irene, reading posed the biggest challenge when her coursework included many reading assignments to supplement class content. Later in graduate school, writing and speaking took precedence in the form of research papers and teaching undergraduate classes.

In addition, class participation was usually listed in the syllabus as a criterion for evaluation. Henry said, “In the first year, I tried to say anything, even though something stupid. I had to say something in the class to show that I prepared.” Most participants said that they

received relatively negative feedback in this area compared to other evaluation criteria. For example, Irene said:

I remember the second semester. My grade for being a discussion leader was B+ or B. I think one of the reasons why is the professor thought I'm too quiet. I don't speak, I guess. If you don't speak in class, sometimes, professors don't know really it's because you didn't study or because you have nothing to say.

In law school, class participation took a different slant. Kate said that there was no grade for class participation but some professors would give extra credit for voluntarily participation. Alternatively, in almost every class professors would pick out particular students to answer questions, which required listening and speaking ability. Kate emphasized that law school exams and legal writing demand extensive language use. According to her, the exams are usually 4-5 hours of multiple choice and essay questions. The time pressure is so severe that professors excuse some mistakes in writing even for American students; stricter standards apply to other legal writing. Another main stressor for Kate was law school students' competition for grades and jobs. She believed that her language barrier detracted from her status in the competitive rankings.

Personal need for language use. Personal needs drove the second source of demand for participants' language use. All participants intended to work internationally as scholars, researchers, activists, or corporate figures. They perceived English language ability as critical in international work.

In some cases, participants felt driven to seek opportunities to practice beyond the academic world. Anne said, "I have a passion to getting myself to new environment and practice my English and enhance my communication ability internationally." Chris said he was always interested in foreign language and likes English. He thought that studying in the U.S. would be an excellent chance to improve his English but couldn't find enough opportunities to interact in

his department (Engineering). Thus, Chris sought direct exchanges with native language speakers off campus to practice his English, which added more weight to his academic load. Chris's experiences contrast with those of the eight participants who faced a great need for language use in their departments.

Beyond academic requirement, effective communication in English closely tied to participants' career goals. Participants reported that these personal needs for language use have contributed to stress experiences and at the same time boost motivation and goal-orientation to overcome language barriers during their adjustment to U.S. academic and cultural life.

Limitations in Academic Activities

Over and above the strong need for language use to conduct their academic activities successfully, the participants reported that they felt limited in various academic activities because of their limited English mastery.

The first limitation involved listening and the ability to comprehend what is going on in or outside of class. Communication is blocked when one person does not understand what the other says,. Anne described the stress of not being able to understand when taking classes in the first semester: "Of course you would not feel comfortable in the first semester because there are a lot of stresses there. You are trying to understand but you can't." This kept students on the periphery of class discussion. Emily relied on intuition to follow instructions in her early classes because her understanding of instructions was vague and incomplete. Even participants Grace and Lauren, who believe they began studies with better English ability than most other international students, couldn't fully understand what professors said until a certain amount of time passed. Lauren said, "First semester was the worst time in terms of language barriers. I know probably they are talking about something during the class discussion. But I wasn't sure for 100 percentage."

The most common complaint among participants was that they could not express themselves in an articulate and precise manner like they could in their home countries. Emily said, “I was afraid that my professor or classmates would think that I have no idea or opinion about the issue because I do!” Despite confidence in her intelligence and thinking abilities, Emily worried that she might appear inferior to American students merely because of her poor linguistic ability. Kate addressed the subjective discomfort of language limitation when she said, “One thing I thought was, maybe I would enjoy more the debates in class if I am doing it in Japanese, in my own language.” Grace recalled she was quiet all the time during her first semester, even though she knew answers or wanted to comment. She said, “I wanted to say something but I wasn’t equipped with proper terminology and expressions in English.” In Irene’s words, “my mouth can’t really follow my mind.” Anne elaborated:

It’s not chatting about today’s weather. The stuff that they discuss is highly intellectual topics. The most difficult thing because it seriously involve the ways of thinking about the problems, the ways of approaching to the problems, the ways of solving the problems. I had received a certain types of educations in my country. In my mind, there are already something built up. The most difficult thing to improve my English, it’s what’s in my mind. I have been taught, I have lived in China more than 20 years. It’s kind of how to communicate at that level. That’s the most difficult.

Bob emphasized his frustration when he failed to express his thoughts and opinions clearly. He said, “To have a nice talk with people daily basis is not a problem. The real problem is to do research, to talk with people academically and intellectually.” Bob gave the example of when he asked a question to a presenter:

When I ask some questions, they say something else like they didn’t understand my questions. Then, there is another person who ask the same question as mine, the speaker understand and give right answer. Then I go like to myself, there! That was my question!

Bob figuratively described his feeling of language barrier limitation as “being stuck like a nail on the wall.”

In addition to intellectual topics, participants cited the fast speed of conversations or discussion in class as another obstacle to involvement. Emily hesitated to speak up because she was afraid that her slow speech might impede the flow of the discussion. Irene couldn't time her comments to the fast pace by the time she organized and translated her thoughts into English, the discussion had moved on.

Participants reported the most difficult situations to deal with were those for which they could not prepare in advance, which made them anxious and nervous. Anne had a hard time following whenever a professor introduced questions to generate a new topic in class. Anne said:

The worst situation is when you are standing in the stadium. And the professor and other students ask you some questions and you can't understand what they ask. Presentation can be ok if you prepare, but the questions, you are not sure about it. Privately you meet someone, maybe you quite don't understand. But you don't want to ask again and again. Then, you can pretend to understand what they say. But it's not working in the stadium. Everyone is looking at you. Sometimes, it's good to have other Chinese students standing behind you. They are not so nervous as much as you. And they will tell you in Chinese what was asked.

Language barriers also affected participants' interactions with American classmates in less formal situations. They found themselves less active and initiative with American students than with their co-national students or other international students. As Anne explained, "I notice the difference because I can communicate easily and happily with Chinese students. It's not like I don't want to talk to American students. I don't want to make mistakes."

Bob felt most limited expressing his thoughts in writing: "Writing is more difficult than speaking to me. It's more academic. It takes loooong time. Hard to find right expressions. It's worse. It's terrible." Bob was not the only participant to complain of limitations in writing. Grace sighed and said simply, "My writing sucks."

Immediate Stress Responses

Participants presented a different degree of stress depending on their major study. International students with language barriers from engineering and music seemed to have less pressure of English language proficiency while students from social sciences, law, and education claimed higher pressure. Although stress levels varied according to their major, the core experience of stress and responses was similar for all participants: physical tension and fatigue and psychological distress such as damaged self-image and a sense of shame or inferiority.

Physical Responses

Most participants complained of exhaustion from long hours of study because language barriers extend their degrees of work effort and exam preparation, especially during the first semester. Thus, finding time for relaxation and enjoyment was difficult for them. James said, “I didn’t have a life for enjoy. Very tired.” Studying itself was not difficult but it became hard due to language barriers.

Some participants said they would become physically tense in class due to anxiety, especially when trying to speak. Bob remembered moments that he was tense before speaking in class. Although his classmates told him to take a deep breath in attempts to help him relax and encourage his efforts, he remembered that breathing did not work for him at that time. Anne described her most stressful time as when she was taking questions from the audience after her presentation. She said, “I am so nervous at those times. It’s seems like there is no brain in my head. It’s just stop there. It doesn’t work. I can’t respond to what other said. I feel frustrated.”

Emily was so alert during class that she could feel the strain in her muscles. In her words, “every single cell” in her body was restless to understand the class despite her limitations. Henry recalled that he even went to a hospital once because he “was very pressured from my study. I had to go to hospital instead of classroom. I had to catch up with my American classmates.”

Psychological Responses

A sense of shame or inferiority emerged as the main theme of participants' immediate psychological responses. They usually experienced these emotions in situations when they felt like others underestimated their intelligence and academic ability. Such experiences may seriously damage the self-image that they had established in their home countries, which can lead them to lose self-confidence and to withdraw from course-related behaviors.

Irene adopted the "little mermaid" fairy tale metaphor to express her psychological status in her first semester. She stated:

I am the speechless mermaid. She wants to become a human being so she exchanged her voice with a witch so that she can be a human being. I feel like I am the mermaid because I want to get my study. So I exchanged my voice to study. I feel that way....and I feel like, in my private time, I miss my language so much. I miss Chinese so much. I began to write a lot in Chinese and read a lot in Chinese because I feel, here, especially in university in the first year, I had so many things in my mind but I didn't have the outlet at all...and I feel confused, why people think like I probably more like stupid, because, simply because my English's not good enough....My emotions were like, I was upset, depressed, so frustrated. But there was nothing I could do. I didn't know who to talk to.

In these statements, she described her language barriers as a seemingly inherent defect that left her "voiceless," which could be understood as a sense of loss and damaged self-confidence. Irene felt also embarrassed when unable to articulate her ideas as fluently as her classmates. This sense of shame implanted unverified beliefs that her classmates felt uncomfortable with her English and wanted her to stop speaking. Bob felt similarly to Irene and confessed that he had irrational beliefs that people would want him to stop talking. He described:

When people don't understand me, then, I feel like I should be quiet. Just stop talking. Sometimes I keep myself quiet and I don't want to talk any more because I feel so frustrated. I feel like I have no energy to say something.

Other students had similarly strong reactions to the stress of voicelessness. On the first day of class, Kate was singled out by her professor for a Socratic exchange. When repeatedly called

on, she burst into tears in front of everyone because she could not understand the question in the first place. She recalled that moment to be the worst time for her:

I kind of hit the bottom when I was called in the class. I read the case. I was really prepared. I just didn't understand what he was asking. And other people jumped in, and, I knew, I knew the answer, but I just couldn't understand his question.

Chris talked about how degrading and painful it was for him to feel left behind when he could understand only about 10% of what his professor was saying. Grace described her feelings this way:

Definitely I was frustrated. I thought my English suck. When discussions going on, I say nothing and just sitting in there, I felt bad. Because I have my own opinions. I want to say something. But I couldn't speak up as much as I want.

She added that she could not muster up confidence in the beginning to break in to the fast speed of class discussions.

Emily seemed to struggle the most among the participants. She suffered mainly from a damaged self-image. In the beginning she felt that she was no longer the excellent student she was in her home country but rather a burden who needed special treatment from her peers and professors. Although she was grateful for the special treatment, but it hurt her pride when she felt unable to keep up and attain important knowledge. She was most disappointed in herself when lack of understanding prevented her from participating in class activities. Prolonged sense of disappointment developed into sense of inferiority and self-hatred. She blamed herself and wondered, "How can I call myself a doctoral student when I don't even understand what's going on in class? I am like a baby learning a language! I made myself a fool by coming to US with my terrible English." She emphasized that these negative thoughts and emotions arose despite how helpful and kind her classmates and professors were. In that way, she has lost the fun and excitement of studying that she has been longing. Sometimes she cried and felt depressed for days at a time.

Stress-moderating Variables

Some variables may serve as a buffer that help them endure as international students with language barriers go through physical and psychological stress responses in the beginning of their studies. These variables are differentiated from coping strategies in terms of how participants come to benefit from or utilize them. These stress-moderating variables were part of their environmental elements (e.g. faculty and classmates) given to the students or a part of psychological predisposition (e.g. motivation). In comparison, coping strategies were the result of their choices and decisions in order to reduce the stress level on their own. Four variables were identified in this study and categorized into two sub-groups: environmental and psychological. Environmental variables included supportive faculty members and classmates and the presence of other international students in their academic settings. Psychological variables were an open-minded personality and goal-oriented attitude.

Environmental Variables

All participants reported that having supportive and understanding faculty members and classmates made it easier to endure their stress experiences. “Supportive and understanding” manifested in several ways. Some people gave practical support to international students by helping with proofreading, editing papers, or allowing them to use an electronic dictionary in exams. However, the most shared meaning of being supportive by participants was the “awareness” of their professors and classmates that language barriers hindered international students’ spoken and written communications and a willingness to accept that they needed reasonable accommodations.

For example, Emily recalled one of her professors who reminded students to speak more slowly for the sake of international students. The professor also invited Emily to speak up by asking about examples of her home country that related to a discussion topic. Emily considered

this invitation a thoughtful act by a professor who was aware of how hard it could be for an international student with language barriers to jump into fast-paced discussion.

Henry commented that a supportive advisor was critical in dealing with language barriers. Because he was limited in spoken and written communication, he felt a great deal of difficulty when he explained his research ideas to his former advisor. That advisor lacked compassion and patience for Henry's limitations. Henry felt distanced from and uncared for by his former advisor. After transferring to his current department, he met his current advisor and experienced a totally new relationship. Henry said:

When people don't understand what I say they might think I am stupid or not really smart but my advisor was different. He saw what I had in my idea. He gave me a lot of chance to talk about my idea and help me develop it from very abstract thing. Because he knew that what I wrote for him was not the final thing, so he just overlooked my language problem and tried to see the big picture of my idea, the possibility of my idea. He taught me extra-intellectual strategies like how I present myself or how I communicate with others in academia.

Like Henry, all participants emphasized that the other speaker's response in communications made a big difference in their ability to overcome their language barriers. They felt less pressured and communications went more smoothly when they had supportive faculty and classmates around. For example, Grace appreciated her classmates for being patient and making efforts to communicate with her. They helped by asking "Is this what you mean?" or paraphrasing ("So what I hear is that...") to clearly understand what Grace meant in conversations when she couldn't precisely express her opinions and thoughts. Similarly to Grace, Irene pointed out the importance of the other speakers' responses. It seemed to her that the inviting attitude of professors and classmates influenced her to "feel definitely more comfortable" to talk. She elaborated:

It depends on the class atmosphere. When the professors are more encouraging, if there are my cohorts who are kind and understanding my situation, then I speak a lot. It makes a big difference depending on who you talk to.

Zack recalled that, when he asked questions, no one refused him and he never received any negative feedback about his language abilities. He believed that the positive interaction experience helped lessen his stress due to language barriers and shaped his confidence. Most participants stated that they, too, had supportive faculty and classmates in their department.

However, one participant shared her difficult experience with her graduate coordinator, who said, “You have a language problem. Go and take some English classes.” She said that she felt nervous enough to forget words in front of the coordinator because his non-verbal and verbal messages felt evaluative and critical.

Another participant explained how systemic support made her department experience positive. Kate said that law school policy allowed international students whose first language was not English half or quarter extra time for exams. She commented that the policy compensated for the time-consuming nature of translating thoughts from her native language to English.

In addition to supportive faculty and classmates, the presence of other international students with language barriers in their academic settings was an important variable that mediated participants’ stress experiences. Despite different countries of origin, all participants indicated that international students naturally bonded with each other as they shared the stress of life as non-native English speakers. Kate shared her thoughts on this bond:

Especially in law school here, students are not so diverse. Fortunately, I met some international students here and also American students who are interested in other culture. I have a group of 9~10 people. We hang out together. I feel comfortable with them and I talk more and better.

Anne said that international students comprised one third of her department, many of whom were from the same country of origin. Fellow Chinese students in her department networked to support each other without verbalizing the request. She said, “We help out with translation when

one person is not understanding what is being said. We discuss a lot about the class topics to digest what we just learned.” For her, having other international students around gave her a comfort zone as well as a model to reassure her self-image:

Yes, I was nervous in the beginning but you know I met some other students in the same situations as mine. Most of them had same English level at that time so that made me feel a little bit less nervous because we are all same. Why can't I? If they can do, I can do.

Psychological Variables

All participants expressed passion for their major subjects and strong motivations to learn more about them in the U.S., where they believed that they access knowledge closer to the source (i.e., not translated). As Grace mentioned, “(Sociology) theories are in English by a lot of American scholars. It is original stuff.” James also chose to study in U.S. because he believed that he could learn something original in his field of anthropology. He explained that when an English textbook written by an American scholar is translated into Chinese, sometimes meanings are lost. Such motivations dovetail with intentions to become scholars in their fields, as described in the “strong need for language use” section above.

With this goal-orientation and motivation to learn something original, the participants are willing to tolerate the painful experiences of “losing their voices” as metaphorically described by Irene. In Kate’s words, “I could deal with it because one thing...the bottom line is I love law. That’s what I have been doing for my entire career. I love it. I can always enjoy studying law.”

Most participants saw open-mindedness as another psychological buffer to their stress experiences. They perceived themselves as active and initiative people who felt a genuine curiosity toward new things. They believed that such open-mindedness helped them decide to come to the U.S. to study in the first place and, once here, increased their tolerance for the hardships of limited foreign language skills and a new environment. Emily and Lauren

emphasized that they wanted to learn about their major field of study as well as American culture, history, and people with an open mind.

Coping Strategies

At the beginning of their studies, when participants realized stressors due to language barriers and experienced immediate stress responses, they perceived language barriers as personal defects. Mitigating variables such as positive interaction with supportive faculty and classmates; presence of other international students; and psychological qualities like goal-orientation and open-mindedness worked to counteract shame, embarrassment, and physical discomfort. These variables helped change their perceptions of language barriers as personal defects to a kind of temporary learning problem that would lessen over time. As this perceptual change in the meaning of language barriers progressed, participants needed to choose how to deal with their negative emotions in a more active and conscious way. In this study, such active and conscious decisions by international students comprised three possible coping strategies: cognitive reframing, emotional release, and behavioral exposure.

Cognitive Reframing

When frustrated and stressed out by language barriers, most participants tried to think about their experiences consciously and rationally. They said that it was painful for them to ruminate on unpleasant situations and emotions. However, after a distressing encounter, they usually took solitary time to think about why they felt and reacted the way they did. Such thought processes led them to cognitively reframe, i.e., to take an alternative point of view on their language barriers or to generate rebuttals to the original negative thoughts. Positive self-talk was the most common technique. In Irene's self-talk, she transformed disappointment through thoughts such as these:

I may not be speaking English like a native speaker. But I am just like, you know, ok, I can speak Chinese, I speak Japanese, French, now I speak English. I have, at least, four different language ability. I even speak Chinese dialect.

She tried not to focus on the negative aspect of her language limitations; rather, she highlighted the positive fact that she worked hard to speak four different languages. She also arrested negative self-image with self-talk like, “I am not that bad. The miserable past already gone. I am not a, I am no longer the person who people say like you have language problem.”

In a similar way, Kate countered negative thoughts and feelings via observation of other students, rational thought, and self-respect. When she cried in class after failing to answer a professor’s question, she felt like she hit the bottom of her life in the U.S. However, social observations led her to conclude that she was pushing herself too hard. She stated:

After I calmed down, I looked around. I found that, hmm, if American students seemed not understand the question when they are nervous. Maybe I just pushed myself too hard. After that, I got better, I just got more relaxed.

In addition to reasoning, she intentionally reminded herself of positive aspects of her self-image—such as capability and awareness of her abilities—that she had established while working in Japan.

Anne’s cognitive reframes helped her escape the pressure of perfectionism. Rather than feel dismayed and overwhelmed, she tried to remain positive about her limited language ability.

She said:

I know I am not good enough now but I can be better. Not getting myself a pressure about ‘have to be better’ made a lot of foundation to actually move on in my past 2 years. It actually helped because I do not press yourself, then, I am not getting anxious too much, just looking for an opportunity. If there is an opportunity that I can get, I’ll get it. If there is no, then there is nothing I can do about it. That’s my way.

Like Anne, Bob tended toward perfectionism regarding his English communications. He speculated that such a tendency may come from the gap between his perceived efficacy in Spanish versus English. In Spanish, he was an eloquent and confident speaker; in English, a

stutterer. Formerly, Spanish-language presentations and audience interactions provided him with a sense of accomplishment and happiness. Thus, his English difficulties came as a shock. At first, he was so disappointed with himself that he withdrew from communications in English. Later, he wanted to regain the joy of academic interactions and started thinking differently. To cope with the stress of language barriers, he judged that he should deal with his anxiety first because mental anxiety seemed to contribute to physical tension and stammering. He said that in the transition he repeated to himself:

I should enjoy my academic work of doing presentations and writing papers...but I can't now. This stresses me. It may be difficult but I am able to do that. I have the decision inside to say I'll do it. I uphold my willingness to say I can!

Emily was another participant who alleviated negative emotions and stress from language barriers with cognitive reasoning. She did not want to be remembered simply as a shy and quiet girl from Asia. Therefore, she consciously decided to take initiative and overcome language barriers by modifying her daily attitude. In her words:

I decided to change my way of thinking. Let's not make an excuse of language barriers even though I have them and it is very difficult to me. I hate that I have a language barrier so let's change it. And then, it even changed my personality. I become more extravert.

Grace described a similar conscious choice to face her problem:

I just faced my problem. Not avoid. Take a responsibility. I owned my problem. And start doing something. Stop worrying about making mistake. Just open my mouth and say something. At first, I used to feel embarrassed when I made a mistake. But later I realized that people still understood what I meant. And they didn't care as much as I did. They understood that I am a second language speaker. One professor said "don't be embarrassed. If someone makes a big deal out of your language barriers, then you should ask to the person like this: Can you speak your second language as fluently as I do?" The professor was the advisor of Chinese students' organization. What he said just made me think differently. It's my second language. I don't need to be ashamed of it. Then it became easier to me to open my mouth. It was me who cared too much about my mistake.

She was self-conscious about her English and worried about other people's imagined responses, while in reality they did not care about her mistakes. Henry, Fran, and Emily concurred with

Grace's comments about self-consciousness. They realized how self-conscious they were about their English after suffering for several semesters. Such self-awareness empowered Henry to reason with himself to change his thoughts. He concluded:

The first two years was terrible. I cared about my language barriers a lot. Sometimes, when you can't express well your thoughts and opinions into a language you may feel confused about your intelligence. I have lost my confidence in that way. But think this way. My language just can't catch up my thoughts and ideas. After recognizing this, I have gained my confidence and no longer cared about my language. It's like I had to realize by myself.

Emotional Release

The second coping strategy derived from the data was to release negative emotions by sharing them with someone they trusted. Almost every participant had someone willing to listen. Fran counted herself lucky to be able to talk about anything with her roommate and best friend. Anne and Danny, in engineering, shared with co-national students in the department. Chris talked to his wife. Grace joined a Chinese student association where she could be honest about how she felt about language barriers. Kate befriended her international classmates. Emily had no contacts in the U.S., so she made an international phone call to a friend in her home country just to share her tears in silence. Talking about feelings without being judged seemed important to these participants. Apparently they preferred co-national confidants with whom they could speak the same language or, at least, other international students whose first language was not English. In that way, they felt more secure because they did not need to worry about how the other person might think of their English.

Behavioral Exposure

In addition to cognitive reframing and emotional release, the participants also managed stress about language use by taking a more active and initiative role to improve their English. The principal behavioral strategy was to expose themselves to four different types of language use as much as possible: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

All participants mentioned television as a good resource for standard American English. They turned on the TV subtitle function to learn unfamiliar vocabulary and idioms used in real situations. This provided an easily accessible and fun way to practice listening and reading.

Many participants wanted to maximize the language use of speaking but found it was not as easy as exposure to listening sources because it required a conversation partner (unlike reading, writing, and listening). As a solution, Anne, Grace, Bob and Chris enrolled in Academic Spoken English classes offered by university. Anne explained in detail how this class helped her:

The teacher did a video coaching to let me know what kind mistake I make when speaking and what are the better ways to say things. Customized teaching only for you. And in class, there are a lot of international students and most of them were first semester students. So we discuss about our pressure that we feel. The teacher listened to us and gave some suggestions. The teacher did a really good job to improve my confidence.

Chris and Irene gained speaking practice by teaching undergraduates. In class, they were forced to have plenty of conversations with their students. Chris recalled that it was very difficult to teach in English at first, but ultimately teaching offered him the biggest opportunity to improve his speech.

Danny, whose classmates were often Chinese, made a point not to interact only with other Chinese students. Fran actively sought a welcoming environment in which people showed patience with her language barriers. She said, “A lot of people in my department are really nice and they would like to talk to me. But, of course, not all of them. If they are not, I would find another environment that welcomes me.” With similar intention, James looked for people who would help and interact with him. He opened up to his advisor about his language barriers so that his advisor could comment on and correct on his speech.

Chris and Lauren extended their circles beyond campus so that they could meet and converse with native English-speakers who were open-minded about foreign students. Chris visited book and yard sales in town where he could talk with local residents. Lauren was a

Christian, so she attended a Bible study group in a local church where she could ask questions and express her opinions without feeling judged. They both appreciated off-campus interactions, preferring to learn from real life situations rather than books.

Adaptation

Adaptation occurs during the last phase, when students define the language barrier as an opportunity and finally arrive at self-acceptance.

Better Communicators

Self-acceptance. After years of making a transition from stress to adaptation, all of the participants view themselves as better communicators in English. This change in self-image was not necessarily connected to fluency and rather emerged as participants internalized attitudes of acceptance and confidence and focused on how to communicate more effectively within their limitations.

Like some other participants, Kate admitted that her English became “a little better” but still had “room for improvement.” Chris had a similar opinion about his level of English fluency, saying that his English had not changed dramatically. Instead, participants perceived themselves to be better communicators as they gained greater confidence in their language and communication abilities and accepted the inherent limitations of speaking English as a second language. In Emily’s case, acceptance of her strengths and limitations brought a sense of inner peace. Similarly, Anne’s comfort, confidence, and “just being myself” defeated her embarrassment due to language barriers. She elaborated:

I am not going to say I’ve improved a lot of my English but there is a change in my attitude. At first, I feel embarrassed in the difficult moments, but now I feel it’s normal. Feel not so embarrassed. You just say, ‘Sorry, I can’t understand. Could you say that again?’ I feel comfortable to say that. Because that’s what I am. I may still have language barrier, but I don’t feel bad about it.

Irene, too, explained that her sense of language confidence came not only with better language ability but also when she accepted the notion that a language barrier is not a personal defect.

Although Henry admitted that he still has a problem with pronunciation because there are sounds that his tongue cannot create, he acknowledged “a dramatic change” in the attitude of being more assertive and expressive in any relationships. Henry said, “When students have arguments in class discussion, I dare to come out and present my idea that might argue with them. It’s a lot of improvement.” Henry added that he also felt more in control of what he was saying.

Acceptance of one’s limitations in English freed participants from the pressure to be perfect or near perfect. Chris once thought that his English would never be good enough. However, now he is comfortable with the idea that as a second-language speaker he is unlikely to speak like a native English-speaker. Irene said that acceptance of her limitations as normative allowed her to feel comfortable asking, “Can you say that again?” when she didn’t understand. Grace developed the strategy of “not trying to be a native speaker.” She previously struggled to incorporate difficult vocabulary into her speaking and writing. But now, to improve communications, she prefers simple words and gives an example if others don’t understand what she says. She observed that “there is a big difference. I think people understand me more, I see them nodding their heads.”

For Danny, self-acceptance meant that he normalized his feelings and made the most of his abilities. Danny said he expects to still be “far away” from mastering the English language even after he lives in the U.S. for 10 more years. He reasoned that English acquisition would be difficult because he was over age 30 when he first came to the U.S. Given this comparatively late start, he said his strategy would be to “try my best” and “focus on academic English.” He stated that “if I keep working on it, I could master academic English at least.” In this way, he discarded

the perfectionism that many participants reported during their early language development in favor of modest and realistic goals.

Learning American communication styles. Another aspect of participants' adaptation was learning American communication styles as they apply to formal and informal relationships with American professors and classmates. Anne recognized a big difference between American and Chinese professors in terms of communication with students. She found that American professors maintained less hierarchical, more egalitarian relationships with students than Chinese professors, including granting students more independence and freedom in terms of what to study and research. Emily also noticed the egalitarian tendency of American communication, such as calling other students by first names regardless of ages. Once she became accustomed to such communication customs, she found it easier to approach others. Grace felt similarly to Emily in that she experienced a more open and reciprocal communication style between professors and students in the U.S. She gave the following example:

Here, professors have office hours and open doors, everybody can come in and talk, and oh, they always greet with you, some professors even say, call my name but it never ever happen in Taiwan.

In this example, Grace found the relationship with professors in the U.S. more egalitarian and casual as opposed to more authoritarian relationship with professors in Taiwan.

Grace remembered that at first she misunderstood direct confrontations by her classmates.

She explained:

If they don't agree with you, they just like directly talk to you. For me, that's kind of shock. People say something to me, well, I was like, should I take it personally? Or this person doesn't like me. But now I know this is not because of me.

By learning about differences in cultural communication styles, Grace learned new communication skills like assertiveness and negotiation. She felt that the U.S. culture encouraged her to express herself and allowed her to speak according to her preference.

Personal Growth

All participants expressed that they do not regret their decision to come to the U.S. despite the difficulties and struggles the process entailed. In Grace's unambiguous words, "Even though I have to go through all this, I'd do it again." A new environment that required a new language set certain obstacles in their paths and at the same time stimulated learning and creativity. Such experiences expanded participants personally as well as academically. Thus, participants viewed language barriers as an opportunity for challenge and stimulation that motivated them to work harder. Anne declared, "What I know is that I am better than me in the past. And I will become better compared to me now." There was clear agreement among participants that language barriers helped them to better themselves on a personal level.

For Kate, her painful crying experience (illustrated earlier) was humbling but also offered enlightenment. She now sees her public tears as an emotional low point when she realized she couldn't sink any lower; this view from the bottom helped her see things differently.

I think you have to hit bottom in order to start learning something. And also, at that time, I definitely not as smart as I thought I was. So, but at the same time, I also realized I was too much focused. So maybe I should open up my view, just a little bit more flexible. It was a good experience mostly."

Emily described her language barrier experience similarly as being "born again" into a new self. When she felt like a baby learning how to speak, she was embarrassed at first. But later, when she let go of hurt pride and wistful thoughts of what an excellent student she had been in Korea, she could see her situation as a humble platform for personal growth. In facing difficulty, she gained a more acute awareness of her strengths, weaknesses, and possibilities. She became more active and initiative in relationships. Emily identified another element of personal growth: she became more caring and sensitive regarding others' barriers. She appreciated other people's care

and understanding of her language barriers and recognized that she could help other people in need. These new changes in herself fill her with hope.

Like Emily, Henry saw the bright side of overcoming language barriers and said, “I learned a lot from my sufferings.” Such positive reframes built a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence, a can-do spirit. He noted that “I feel like I became stronger” and that his mind stabilized. He added that he would share his story to honor himself for what he accomplished and became. He believes that many international students with language barriers endure the same difficult situations but do not have a chance to speak out about their experiences. In a sense, he had his chance to speak out in this interview.

Irene felt a sense of accomplishment and happiness, saying, “About my improvement, I am, of course, happy. I feel really proud of myself going through all these.” Irene’s attitude toward communications had the biggest impact in overcoming language barriers. She learned the lesson “don’t be submissive.” She said she fought traditional stereotypes about Asian women as passive and unable to express their opinions. Irene stated:

Compared to before, I see...huge differences. The way I talk. I feel more confident now. I let people know that, here is my weakness in the very first place, then I feel, ok, people won’t charge me simply because of my language. Then I begin to feel more comfortable talking. I already acknowledge that, you know, I don’t have to feel ashamed.”

Irene took a proactive stance, too. She opened up to her students about her language barriers to help them better understand her. And it worked. Although admitting her weaknesses up front was not easy, self-acceptance and newfound courage made this possible.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This study employed grounded theory methods to develop a theoretical model to describe and understand stress and coping experiences of international students with language barriers during their acculturation process in U.S. higher education institutes. Utilizing Berry's (1997) stress and coping model of acculturation as a conceptual framework, this study explored the five sets of phenomena of international students' experiences due to language barriers: life events, stressors, coping, stress, and adaptation. This study revealed five major categories representative of the perceptions, emotions, and experiences of participants in relation to language barriers: perceived stressors, immediate stress responses, stress-moderating factors, coping strategies, and adaptation. Chapter five presents a conclusion, implications, study strengths and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusion

The essence of students' stress and coping experiences due to language barriers was a self-induced multiphase developmental process for the study participants: three linearly ordered phases in conjunction with changes in the subjective meanings of language barriers over time. The first phase was characterized by participants' perception on language barriers as life event that impeded their adaptation process and created immediate stress responses. Perceived impediments to adaptation and stress responses were closely related with participants' perception of language barriers as a personal defect or fault accompanied by a sense of shame and embarrassment. The second phase involved participants' acknowledgement of environmental and psychological stress-moderating variables that helped two participants modify their interpretations of language barriers to a sort of temporary learning problem that might be

overcome, rather than a personal flaw and source of shame. In the last phase, participants fully implemented coping strategies and reached a state of adaptation in which they viewed the language acquisition period as an opportunity to grow and become better communicators. Participants also recognized the relationship between negative thoughts and negative feelings about their language barriers and themselves. Some found they held unrealistic expectations for their language abilities; others realized they were overly self-conscious about pronunciation and other mistakes in spoken language. Such awareness came through self-reflection, observing other students' similar behaviors (normalizing), or after considering advice from co-national students and faculty who had similar language barrier backgrounds.

While all participants suffered from stress, none of the participants reported utilizing counseling services or professional help to cope with stress responses. This may be because participants tended to perceive their language barriers as a personal defect accompanied by shame and embarrassment. The participants struggled alone during the beginning of their adjustment period, when stress was most salient. They possibly believed only their co-national students or other international students would understand their feelings yet were too overwhelmed to act in those early days. However, even without professional guidance, a form of self-remedy emerged as time passed. Participants began to implement coping strategies that included cognitive reframing, emotional release, and behavioral exposure.

Interestingly, their most common self-remedy choice shares some elements of the cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) approach and implies a process similar to that of narrative therapy. CBT is an empirically supported treatment that focuses on patterns of thinking that are maladaptive and works to challenge the beliefs that underlie such thinking. The goal of CBT is to help understand how certain thoughts cause distressful emotions and make the symptoms worse.

The client learn to identify thoughts about the world and her/himself that make them feel afraid or upset, and learn to replace these thoughts with more accurate and less distressing thoughts as more effective ways to cope with feelings such as anger, guilt, and fear (Sharf, 2000). In this study, participants identified the negative beliefs and thoughts behind their emotions; they ascertained that shame and embarrassment were linked with a belief that language barriers are an inherent defect that necessitated an immediate solution and that miscommunication due to language barriers carried with it self-blame. In an actual CBT therapy session, a counselor may guide a client through the process of debating and rebutting maladaptive thoughts. In this study, many participants utilized a similar process that included positive self-talk to invalidate maladaptive thoughts and beliefs. Their cognitive reframing strategies brought about changes in their subjective experiences and behaviors surrounding language barriers. Rather than remaining passive, they sought more opportunities for language use in spoken English mostly.

The stories told by participants in this study about experiencing language barriers illustrated how the participants looked at their problems of language barriers from different points of view and altered their perceptions of the problems. Such a reauthorizing process is a key element of change in narrative therapy. Narrative therapy, based on a constructivist point of view, attends to a person's perception of reality rather than trying to define reality itself (Sharf, 2007). Narrative therapists encourage and examine clients' stories to learn how clients view their lives and, eventually, help them see their own stories in different ways (Sharf, 2007). Participants in this study unfolded their stories related to language barriers from the beginning of their study in the U.S. to the current point of time. In these stories, participants retold their experiences of language barriers and shifted the stories from a problem focus to stories with more positive outcomes. Participants' stories about language barriers tended to evolve from viewing them as

personal defects, to temporary learning problems, and finally as an opportunity for enhancing communication and personal growth.

Participants valued interactions with native English speakers highly, especially supportive faculty and classmates. Although the presence of other international students contributed to participants' ability to manage stress, participants spent more time describing the importance of native English speaker support. This finding could be related to prior observations made by Littlewood (1992) who claimed that language learning can be facilitated or hindered by the affective filter of a learner's attitudes toward the second-language community and learning situation. That is, a learner's feelings about the second-language community and learning situation impact his or her language learning. Participants indicated that their feelings of efficacy and emotional responses to feedback from others impacted their attitudes to overcome language barriers. Specifically, when they felt ashamed and embarrassed of their language barriers they were more passive and withdrawn. In contrast, when they felt confident and accepted they took initiative and contributed more freely.

Participants reported they overcame their language barriers not just by improving their English language ability, but also by revising their mindsets. They eventually developed the perspective to view language barriers as an opportunity to become better communicators in English and to achieve personal growth. Participants described high levels of contact, involvement, acceptance, and affiliation with both their co-national and U.S. cohorts on campus. This result is in line with the most effective acculturation strategy, integration (Berry & Kim, 1988), through which individuals can acquire the skills and psychological flexibility to function effectively in both their culture of origin and in the U.S.

Implications

This section examines possible implications of this study's findings for three different populations on campus: counseling professions; U.S. students, faculty and other administrative staff; and international students with language barriers.

Counseling Profession

Findings from the present study suggest four primary implications for counseling international students with language barriers. Because all participants indicated that the first semester or year was the most stressful time in terms of language barriers, the first implication for clinical practice is that this population may benefit from early intervention. Before the semester starts, an orientation for international students should include information on stress and coping with language barriers in the context of the acculturation process. During the first year, counselors may want to offer psycho-educational groups about language barrier-related academic stress; communication skills to overcome limitations due to language barriers; coping skills; and cultural connotations of verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors in American culture.

A second implication is that counselors need to advocate for international students with language barriers. Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2003) suggest that counselors have two roles: healers and social change agents. From a social justice perspective, international students should be recognized as members of U.S. society because they contribute to American science and technology and contribute about 13.3 billion to the U.S. economy yearly (Institute of International Education, 2005). However, international students apparently utilize fewer counseling services and are more likely than domestic students to fail to show up for their appointments (Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). They seem relegated to shadowy positions on campus, in which they may feel left behind and guilty because of their language barriers. Counselors on campus should be encouraged to take a more active role to reach out to these

peripheral students. At the same time, counselors should expand beyond a sole focus on international students. Counselors can educate and consult with American staff, professors, and students to help them understand different aspects of the international students with language barriers experience and how to interact with them supportively.

Findings related to participant coping strategies in this study suggest that international students who seek counseling may benefit from CBT. In this study, participants said that their stress abated when they recognized their maladaptive thoughts and made efforts to rebut such thoughts. First, using cognitive-behavioral methods as their framework, counselors can guide international students with language barriers to understand that (a) they don't need to be ashamed of their imperfect English because it is their second language, (b) learning American communication styles and skills can be helpful, and (c) there are positive effects of the adjustment to language barriers. Second, counselors can help these students express their negative emotions. Interpreters might facilitate expression of feelings in a student's native language; however, this may not be practical. Thus, the use of attending skills such as paraphrasing and summary are especially vital to enhance communication in sessions with non-native English speaking clients. Another possibility is to incorporate alternative/nonverbal means of expression, such as creative arts, to supplement verbal exchanges and compensate for language barriers. Counselors also can help international students with language barriers to plan and rehearse behavioral adaptations. These strategies may build confidence and self-efficacy regarding English language use and facilitate achieving students' communicative potentials.

In addition to a CBT approach, counselors may find narrative therapy approach in helping international students with language barriers useful. With narrative therapy as a framework, counselors can help students identify characters, plots, and themes in their stories related to

experiencing stress due to language barriers and the shape meanings of each element so that they can overcome stress due to language barriers. Then, counselors can help students work through the problems of language barriers by exploring their perceptions of the problems or emphasizing different aspects of these stories and thus, re-authoring stories. Since narrative therapists believe in the power of words to affect the way individuals see themselves and others, counselors using a narrative therapy framework can help international students frame their problem in such a way that they can see alternatives or avenues open to them. Then students may become ready to pursue a resolution for stress due to language barriers. Additionally, counselors can ask students to look into the future and at potentially positive new stories to help them maintain these therapeutic changes.

A final implication for clinical practice pertains to counselors' attitudes about work with international students. Language barriers are both a critical issue that students believe they need to "fix" immediately and an embarrassing topic that students may feel ashamed to discuss. Additionally, discussion of complex emotional issues in a secondary language can be difficult even for confident individuals. Thus, counselors may need to confront students' ambivalent emotions— a sense of urgency to remedy language barriers and the inclination to avoid the topic and its associated discomfort. Participants felt supported when others communicated with them in a patient way. Counselors should speak slowly, clearly, avoid slang and idioms, and be sensitive to any confusion international students may experience because of language barriers. Moreover, counselors may coach and encourage students to risk making verbal mistakes in sessions to prevail over fear and perfectionism. Most of all, counselors need to listen beyond the limits of words, grammar, and vocabulary to hear the meaning of what students express. Non-verbal sensitivity can forge emotional connections.

U.S. Students, Faculty and Administration

Berry (1997) asserted, “Integration can only be freely chosen and successfully pursued by international students when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation toward diversity” (p.10). Host cultures should be prepared with the appropriate social and psychological tools to reduce stress for international students with language barriers. Toward this purpose, U.S. students, faculty and other staff on campus can endeavor to create a culturally and linguistically open and tolerant university environment. They can increase awareness and sensitivity to language barriers and the challenges faced by international students. As participants in this study emphasized, supportive faculty members and classmates created a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere when they invited international student perspectives in class discussion.

U.S. higher education students and professionals should understand the multifaceted nature of language barriers to better help international students with language barriers. Many universities provide ESL (English as Second Language) classes to assist with language barriers. However, findings from this study suggest that language barriers involve a lack of linguistic capability as well as psychological challenges. In this sense, ESL class may not meet the needs of international students. Rather, awareness of the psychological aspects of language barriers enables higher education and student affairs professionals to customize services to fulfill international students’ holistic needs. Based on the findings of this study, it would seem that more systemic efforts are needed. University administration may consider policy and regulation changes to provide further support and accommodation to international students with language barriers. Examples of systemic changes in universities to accommodate international students with language barriers are rare. In fact, only one article was found in which a program was targeted to address the university community. At one university, a training workshop for library

staff was designed to help them communicate effectively with international students (Greenfield, Johnston & Williams, 1986). Similar efforts at communication-based training programs and other types of support are needed not only for international students but also for U.S. students, staff, and faculty. These programs should be made available on campus through systematic efforts at the university level.

International Students

International students should be aware of potential stressors and stress responses and how to deal with them. The way they think, feel, and behave in relation to language barriers will impact their stress levels and adaptive processes. For example, pressure to attain immediate English fluency and self-consciousness about accent or grammatical errors are counter-productive. Instead, reasonable expectations for language learning pace and performance enhance the likelihood of a positive academic experience.

The effective coping strategies derived from the experiences of participants in this study can in turn improve the survival and success of other international students with language barriers. Additionally, international students may adapt best when they actively learn new customs for daily life in the U.S., U.S. university procedures and regulations, and American communication styles specific to the academic setting. Most of all, it is important that international students with language barriers know that nervousness, discomfort, and fear of making mistakes or having an accent are normal and can be overcome.

Strengths

This study may be the first to examine the stress and coping experiences of a subgroup of international students whose first or official language in their home country is not English. Its value lies in an examination of more personal issues associated with language barriers, an area that remains under-represented in literature even though it has been identified as one of the

biggest obstacle to acculturation. This research has the potential to contribute to the limited literature on international student language barriers by elucidating their subjective stress and coping experiences. Previous research on international students focused on how cultural variables are associated with personal psychological well-being. This study aimed to contribute a richer perspective to the current literature by applying a qualitative research method. As a result, this researcher discovered that international students with language barriers often develop sophisticated coping strategies that echo existing cognitive, behavioral, and emotive therapies: cognitive reframe and rebuttal, behavioral exposure, and emotional release. Moreover, this study revealed that participants' stress and coping experiences led to the fruitful outcome of transformative self-learning and growth. Such findings endow international students with language barriers with positive and self-empowering authority. Of equal importance, this study highlights the developmental resourcefulness of this group.

The use of grounded theory research methodology permitted investigation into details of the data to find similarities and differences regarding personal experiences of language barriers. Furthermore, these methods led to an emerging theory that outlines how international students with language barriers strive to overcome language barriers during the acculturation process. Although a tentative framework, this theoretical model may be an important evolutionary step toward a development of more refined theory of stress and coping.

Previous studies showed a positive relationship between acculturation level and host-nation language fluency (Senel, 2003) and a negative relationship between acculturation and psychological strain (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). Such relationships may simplify the issue of language barriers as a matter of linguistic preparation. Yet these studies do not investigate how international students from non-English speaking countries could achieve a

higher level of language proficiency in their acculturation process. This study moves toward an understanding of the psychological aspect of overcoming language barriers.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Researcher engaged in qualitative research are the main analytical tool. As a result, personal subjectivity may influence findings and conclusions. Although my personal experiences as an international student with language barriers was the starting point for this research, I tried to remain neutral and open to the stories of participants. I was careful to disclose my subjectivity in the beginning of the research and kept a written record of my personal reflections throughout the process to prevent biases from filtering into my research. The subjectivity statement is available for audiences to read in chapter 3, and a sample of my theoretical memo including personal reflections appear in Appendix E. The researcher's personal background as an international student with language barriers contributed toward the establishment of a good rapport between the researcher and the participants in the interview process such that they seemed to feel more comfortable unfolding their stories. However, though rapport between researcher and participant could be seen as positive, the data might also be influenced by the strength of this working alliance in ways that affected interpretation of the results.

This study deliberately elicited the success stories of international students. Thus, the data in this study are from participants who believed they had actively dealt with their language barriers to reach to the point of adaptation. The core themes for stressors, mediating factors, and coping experiences would likely differ for students who have spent similar amounts of time in the U.S. and did not achieve relief from language barrier stress.

The study's limited participant pool prohibits confident application of study conclusions to other international students. Although the finding from this study would provide insights to understand the phenomena of international students with language barriers, it should not be

generalized to the population of all international students in the U.S. The inclusion/exclusion criteria (Appendix A) were designed to recruit international students from various countries of origins to explore the core themes of stress and coping experiences that all international students with language barriers share. However, the final sample consisted of international students from Asia and one Latino. Such partiality in participant demographics may reflect the high ratio of Asian international students compared to international students from other continents. According to the Institute of International Education (2006), in fact, international students from Asian countries comprised more than half (58%) the international student population in the academic year 2005-2006. In terms of universality, this study may not reflect the original intent of the researcher to study common themes across culture-of-origin boundaries. For example, the feeling of shame, frequently mentioned by most Asian participants, has been identified as a culturally specific concept bounded to Asian collective culture (Gilbert, Gilbert and Sanhera, 2004; Mesquita, 2001)

Therefore, to continue development of a grounded theory, future researchers are encouraged to study a more heterogeneous mix of ethnic groups. Discovery of the extent to which ethnicity affects stress and coping experiences due to language barriers could be beneficial. For example, Latino international students may perceive stressors differently and rely on coping strategies that did not surface thematically in this study. Data collection should include important issues such as participants' perceptions on their ethnic identities and degree of acculturation. A comparison between ethnic subgroups would also allow further confirmation or modification of the theoretical model.

In addition to ethnicity, focus on participants' fields of study can contribute to the theoretical model's specificity. Future research can examine relationships between the extent to

which major studies demand high language proficiency and the intensity of immediate stress responses. As with ethnicity or level of acculturation, the theoretical model may be refined by differentiating between core stress responses and relevant coping approaches according to field of study.

Findings of this study tentatively suggest that meanings participants attribute to language barriers progress through three linear phases. However, there is no information presented regarding the general timing of each phase or individual difference in terms of the timing. In this study, participants were asked to recall past experiences, thus relying on the accuracy of participants' recollections. In contrast, longitudinal data collection methods would allow stories to be collected as students move through the phases. Furthermore, a research design with a focus on individual differences might elicit vivid stories from participants at each stage and contribute to a better understanding of the timing by which individuals progress through the stages.

Alternatively, based on the findings of this qualitative study, next steps may include development of counseling or psycho-educational groups that focus on language barrier issues. These interventions may address a particular psychological aspect for overcoming language barriers or educate students about the nonverbal and subtle aspects of communication in the U.S. Other population-specific prevention and intervention programs that target particular ethnicities may be another avenue to consider in counseling-related research. These proactive steps may attract international students with language barriers to counseling services.

This study was undertaken to understand stress and coping experiences of international students with language barriers. Interviews were conducted at a large southeastern university with twelve international students whose home country native or official languages are not English. Results of this study provided a tentative model of the stress and coping experiences of

international students with language barriers. Though conclusions drawn from this study's findings offer additional information concerning the process by which international students perceive, experience, and overcome their language barriers during the acculturation process, further study is needed to develop a grounded model. Implications also were provided for a broader systemic response to the needs of these students in U.S. higher education institutions. Not only do international students benefit from a broader understanding of their language barriers, so do the institutions and counselors that help them succeed. Therefore, research related to prevention and intervention programs that address the needs of this population also are recommended.

APPENDIX A
INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE INITIAL SAMPLING

Demographic Criteria

- International students from non-English speaking countries, excluding international students from the countries whose first language (e.g. Canada, Australia) and official language (e.g., India, Pakistan) is English.
- Excluding naturalized immigrants.
- Excluding international students from European countries based on two reasons. First, many non-English speaking European students tend to be familiar with the English language, having had to learn it as early as in elementary school (Nilsson, Lucas, Khamphakdy-Brown, & Sveinsdottir, 2007). Second, English language is also inextricably linked with culture. Since many American cultural values are based on White, European norms (Carter, 1991) international students from Europe may have experienced less of a contrast in cultural patterns of behavior including communication styles, European international students are found significantly less likely to experience acculturative distress than students from the geographic regions of Asia, Africa and Latin/Central America probably because of language and culture closeness between European and the United States (Yeh & Inose, 2003).
- International students who are enrolled in the U.S. higher education institutes to pursue a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree.
- 2~ 5 year length of residency in the U.S.
- Excluding international students who experienced more than 1 year residency in the English speaking countries.

Perceived English Use Criteria

- Experiences of difficulty in using English in the following area: listening, speaking, and writing in the beginning of their study.
- Their perception on the change in terms of their use of English: International students who perceive the changes in their use of English in terms of frequency of use, the degree to which participants feel comfortable communicating in English.

Perceived Stress Level Criteria

- Change of stress level: international students who experienced changes of stress level from higher stress level in the beginning of their study in the U.S. to relatively lower current stress level.

APPENDIX B
PRE-INTERVIEW SCREENING QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

- What is your country of origin?
- What is your first language?
- What degree are you seeking in your current school?
- How long have you been in the United States for your currently seeking degree?
- Have you ever been to other English-speaking countries (e.g. England)?

Perceived English Use Questions

- Have you experienced difficulty in listening, speaking, and writing in the beginning of your study?
- Have you had difficulty with English language for your social and academic interactions in the beginning of their study?
- How has your use of English changed since you began study in the U.S. in terms of frequency of use?
- How has the degree to which you feel comfortable communicating in English changed since your study began in the U.S.?

Perceived Stress Level Questions

- How stressful were you when you had difficulty in listening, speaking, and writing in the beginning of your study?
- How has your stress level changed since your study in the U.S.?
- In the beginning of your study in the U.S., which of the following area did you feel stressed about?

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (INITIAL)

1. When did you start your study in the U.S.?
2. How did you decide to come to the U.S. for your study?
3. What kinds of academic and/or personal goals did you have when you came to the U.S. for your study?
4. How did you prepare your English to live and study in the U.S.?
 - a. What kind of concerns did you have in regards to your English ability?
 - b. How well do you think your English prepared you to live and study in the U.S.?
 - c. Did you expect to have language barriers in the course of your living and studying in the U.S.?
5. Describe the differences between your first language and English?
 - a. What are the differences in the ways to communicate between two languages?
 - b. What are differences in thinking process between two languages?
 - c. What was the most difficult aspect in learning English?
6. Think back to the beginning of your studies in the U.S. Describe your experiences of living and studying in English.
 - a. Describe your first day on Campus.
 - b. Describe your experience of the first class.
 - c. Describe your experience outside of campus.
 - d. What things have been the most problematic for you to live and study using English language?
 - e. Tell me about any difficulties that you had due to your language barriers at that time.
 - f. Under what situations did you experience language barriers the most?
 - g. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings related to language barriers at that time?

7. How did your language barriers impact your daily life in the beginning of your study in the U.S.?
 - a. How about your ways to communicate with others?
 - b. How about your class participations?
 - c. How about your thinking process?
 - d. How about your motivations to study?
8. How have you been coping with your language barriers?
 - a. How have you adjust yourself to overcome the barriers?
 - b. What has been your biggest support system?
 - c. What kinds of professional help, if any, did you get?
 - d. Describe the ways that you could have experienced fewer difficulties when you began your studies.
 - e. What obstacles have you faced in coping with your language barriers?
9. What changes have you noticed about the ways you use English since beginning your study in the United States?
 - a. What changes have you noticed about the ways you study in English?
 - b. What changes have you noticed about the ways you communicate with others in English?
 - c. What changes have you noticed about the ways you participate in class discussions?
 - d. So far, what changes have been most important to you?
10. Describe to me the differences in the ways you feel about yourself since you have been here.
 - a. Describe any changes in your emotions since you have been here.

- b. How have your efforts to overcome language barriers affected the way you feel about yourself?
 - c. How have your efforts to overcome language barriers affected the way you think about language use for intercultural communications?
11. So far, what have you learned most about yourself and the ways to best overcome your language barriers?
 12. We have been discussing about your experiences of language barriers, stress and coping. What else can you tell me about these three qualities in your life?

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (2ND ROUND)

1. What is your major study? When did you start your study in the U.S.?
2. How did you decide to come to the U.S. for your study?
3. How did you prepare your English to live and study in the U.S.?
 - a. What kind of concerns did you have in regards to your English ability?
 - b. How well do you think your English prepared you to live and study in the U.S.?
 - c. Did you expect to have language barriers in the course of your living and studying in the U.S.?
4. What is your perception on your language barriers?
 - a. Do you believe that you have language barriers?
 - b. Why do you think you have language barriers?
 - c. Where do you think language barriers come from?
5. Describe about the coursework in your department in terms of the need for language ability and communication skills.
 - a. What are the courses that require most your English language ability and communication skills?
 - b. What are the extra curriculum activities that require most your English language ability and communication skills?
6. Among 4 areas of language use (speaking, reading, writing, & listening), which area is most needed in your major study?
7. How important the language ability and communication skills in your major study? And Why?
8. Describe the most difficult area in your study as an international student with language barriers.
 - a. What things have been the most problematic in your study using English language?
 - b. Under what situations do you experience language barriers the most?
 - c. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings related to language barriers?

9. How did your language barriers impact your daily life in the beginning of your study in the U.S.?
 - a. How about your ways to communicate with others?
 - b. How about your class participations?
 - c. How about your thinking process?
 - d. How about your motivations to study?
10. How have you been coping with your language barriers?
 - a. How have you adjust yourself to overcome the barriers?
 - b. What has been your biggest support system?
 - c. What kinds of professional help, if any, did you get?
 - d. Describe the ways that you could have experienced fewer difficulties when you began your studies.
 - e. What obstacles have you faced in coping with your language barriers?
11. What changes have you noticed about the ways you use English since beginning your study in the U.S.?
 - a. What changes have you noticed about the ways you communicate with others in English?
 - b. What changes have you noticed about the ways you participate in class activities?
 - c. So far, what changes have been most important to you?
12. Describe the differences in the ways you feel about yourself since you have been here.
 - a. Describe any changes in your emotions since you have been here.
 - b. How have your efforts to overcome language barriers affected the way you feel about yourself?
 - c. How have your efforts to overcome language barriers affected the way you think about language use for intercultural communications?
13. So far, what have you learned most about yourself and the ways to best overcome your language barriers?
14. We have been discussing about your experiences of language barriers, stress and coping. What else can you tell me about these three qualities in your life?

APPENDIX E
EXAMPLE OF THEORETICAL MEMO

Language Barriers as a Source of Stressor

Language is the vehicle of the narrating process: We use it to construct, to organize, and to attribute meaning to our stories. Meaning and action cannot be separated. The limits of our language constrain what can be expressed and how it can be expressed--our stories, and thus, our futures. In this sense, what does it specifically mean international students have language barriers? If they speak broken English, they have a broken tool for communication in their daily life and academic performance. Moreover, language use is an important component of acculturation. International students generally cannot avoid limitation inherent in mastering English to the level of native speakers since the majority of international students come to U.S. for their studying in their adult years. It might be a possible reason why international students struggle with language even after a couple of years of living in the United States unlike children learn English pretty fast. Since language ability is perhaps the aspect of acculturation which has the greatest direct impact on academic and personal interaction, international students might perceive language barriers as a strong maker of stress during acculturation. Thus, focusing on language would appear to have considerable utility. Then, what nature or aspects of language barriers really produce stress to them? Several participants said that they had to spend majority of their time on preparing and studying. They complained they didn't have a life that they used to have back in their home countries. Why is that? Using a new linguistic tool in the encoding and decoding process of study required more steps, hence more time and energy.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jungeun Lee is originally from South Korea and will remember Florida as her second home forever. The completion of this work is considered the end of her first half in life, summarized as a long period of study and preparation for what she wants to do with the rest of her life. She is currently working as an assistant research professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. She wants to broaden her research interests in adjustment issues of persons after acute or chronic stress experiences. She plans to continue work as a counselor educator and researcher in the university as and hopes to be a writer near her retirement.