

**Ways of Becoming: South Asian students in an
Australian postgraduate environment**

By

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Statement of Authorship

I, Waliul AKM. Islam hereby declare that the Ph. D thesis entitled *Ways of Becoming: South Asian students in an Australian environment* is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, and appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or part , for the award of any academic degree or diploma.

Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

The research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Victoria University (# HRETH.FOA. 0010/04 dated April 2, 2004).

Waliul AKM. Islam

Date 18-07-2008

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Abstract

The formation of student diasporas in western universities is a manifestation of the globalization and internationalization of higher education, and has necessitated studies about international students' adaptation to such universities. Statistics of the last decade show that there has been a significant flow of international students to Australian universities, and a large proportion of this student cohort comes from South East Asian and South Asian countries. Whilst there has been a good deal of research on international students from South East and Far East Asia, who share a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) background, there are relatively very few studies on South Asian students, particularly postgraduate students from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (defined as South Asian for this study). This qualitative study about the adaptation experiences of postgraduate coursework students from South Asian countries fills some of the gap that exists in the body of literature about international students.

The study, conducted at a cross-sectoral Australian university in Melbourne, referred to with the pseudonym Southern University (SU), has utilised a longitudinal qualitative approach to explore from an 'emic' perspective the adaptation experiences of ten postgraduate coursework students from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The students were studying in four faculties at SU, and participated in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions over their first two semesters.

The study considers the students' adjustment process in the Australian academic landscape from their pre-arrival expectations to their settlement after two semesters, and is structured to consider three phases of their experiences – initial, transitional and endpoint – in negotiating new academic norms and genres, including spoken communication.

The study identifies a number of dimensions along which differences are evident in the students' approaches and strategies in adjusting to their studies and lives as postgraduates. In academic adjustment, all the postgraduates demonstrated incremental progress which was marked by varying levels of perceptual and attitudinal changes in understanding the new academic culture.

Whilst the students shared a common goal of undertaking an Australian postgraduate degree to enhance their employment prospects, two broad types of strategists emerged: *initiators of self-development* and *system compliers*. The study also notes that the postgraduates, through their physical presence in Australia and becoming qualified with a western education, negotiated new, hybrid and empowered identities for themselves.

In its limited exploration about the students' social acculturation, the study notes that some of them followed a selective integrative approach while others adopted assimilatory process, and they all indicated a hybrid state of acculturation to Australian culture. The study also uncovers that, besides their academic goals, many of the postgraduates had a largely hidden agenda of long term settlement in Australia.

List of Abbreviations

AEI	Australian Education International
CHC	Confucius Heritage Culture
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
IAP	Introductory Academic program
ICAT	Information and Communication Technology
ICC	Inter Cultural Center
IDP	IDP Education Pty Ltd
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IIE	Institute of International Education
ILO	International Labour Organization
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NGO	Non- Government Organization
SU	Southern University
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

– Lao-Tzu [600 BC - 531 BC]

Background to the Study

Overview of the Internationalisation of Higher Education

One of the more remarkable consequences of the global movement of people has been the formation of student diasporas in different parts of the world, and particularly, the formation of such student diasporas in western English speaking countries like the US, Australia, the UK, Canada and New Zealand (IIE 2007b, p. 13; Li & Campbell 2006; Radclyffe-Thomas 2007; Thakur & Hourigan 2007). These student diasporas are indicative of at least two dimensions of the changing landscape of higher education – globalization and internationalization.

Though the two notions – globalization and internationalization – are sometimes used synonymously in higher education, they bear subtle differences. On the one hand, globalization, which Knight (2004) views as a process of worldwide transformation, and refers to Knight & de Wit’s (1997) definition of globalization as the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas across borders and emphasizes that it affects each country in different ways due to each nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities. Drawing attention to various perceptions of globalization as a process or processes – of the world getting smaller or/and of increased connectivity – Modelski (2008) considers globalization as a historical process of “emergence of institutions of planetary scope” (p.13). He views the resulting outcomes of globalization, connectivity and openness, both as causes and as consequences. According to him, globalization, has led the institutions, through which people relate to each other, to go through transformation at all levels: planetary, national and local. Furthermore, Modelski

(2008) argues that globalization is multidimensional, and prioritizes four dimensions: economic, political, cultural and intellectual. While Mok (2005, pp. 290-92) has highlighted the divergent views of three schools of sociologists of globalisation – the strong globalists, the sceptics and the transformationalists – his analysis similarly emphasizes the radical changes on a number of levels resulting from globalization.

On the other hand, the internationalization of education has been fuelled by the multidimensional processes of globalization. Whilst the meanings of internationalization are diverse, ‘contested’ and dependent on the particular context in which they are experienced (Mok 2005, p. 290), Knight (2004) has reaffirmed her earlier formulation (Knight 2003) that defines internationalization of higher education as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2003 in Knight 2004, p.11). She argues that internationalization of higher education is best understood “as a response to globalization”, in terms of: the growth and increasing influence of knowledge-based societies; information and communication technologies (ICTs) and systems; market-based societies; ‘trade liberalisation’; and new supra-national systems of governance in areas such as quality assurance, accreditation and students mobility (Knight 2004, pp. 6-7). She aptly draws an intertwining linkage between the two notions: “Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization” (Knight 2004, p. 5). Yang (2003), like sceptics such as Mok (2005), has viewed the impact of globalization on the internationalization to higher education with cynicism, and claims that higher education is economically and commercially motivated and ‘increasingly treated as a business’ (pp. 269–276). This he sees as creating more challenges than opportunities for non-western developing countries, even though it may bring about some positive outcomes, at least for individuals.

Globalization of education has a commercial dimension, and this has impacted significantly in the worldwide open market operations. As a result of “the evolution of the knowledge-based economy” (Mok 2003, p. 117) education providers, perceived to offer high quality education, are drawing students from all

over the world. Identifying an increasing new trend among the students to study in a country other than their own, Schneider (2000) notes that western countries – mainly English speaking countries – have attracted the greatest number of students. Schneider (2000) also notes that there has been a gradual shift ‘from an “aid” to “trade” rationale’ in the approach taken to attracting international students to study outside their home countries. An Australian Education International (AEI) report (AEI 2007a) indicates that in 2006 Australia (172,297), the USA (564,766), the UK (234,350) Canada (140,724), and New Zealand (42,652) together attracted more than a million students to their higher education sectors annually. On the basis of this 2006 figure, Australia’s annual growth of 5% in international students has been equal to that of Canada, but outstripped the growth of the other three English speaking countries (AEI 2007a, p. 1). Schneider (2000) has noted that while some universities in non-English speaking countries, like Germany and France, have introduced English medium instruction, Australia, Canada, and Great Britain ‘have developed clear national priorities and comprehensive strategies to attract a larger number of international students’ (p.2-3). As a consequence, in 2007 Australia, the U.K., the USA and Canada have been able to capture 4%, 13%, 22%, and 3% of the international tertiary student market respectively (IIE 2007a).

The academic and knowledge-enhancing quests of young people from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal), like those from other parts of the world, have generated an outflow of large numbers of students from that region into other countries. This trend has been fuelled by a growing and more affluent middle class in the various countries of South Asia, as well as the desire of families to position their children and/or themselves to be able to access opportunities for skilled migration and through this to well-paid professional employment in the more developed economies of the west.

The formulation of policies that promote opportunities to recruit international students has impacted significantly on Australia, and as a result, overseas students have taken up the opportunity to study in Australian universities in large and increasing numbers. Such students now constitute a significant part of their student population, such as Australian National University (16%), Monash

University (28%), the University of Melbourne (21%), RMIT (15%), Victoria University (24%) and Swinburne University (25%) (IDP 2007), and provide a significant proportion of their revenue. The total number of overseas students enrolled in Australian universities has risen from 40,000 in 1994 to 177760 (actual number may vary slightly because students may study in more than one sector) in 2007 (AEI 2008b). Between 2006 and 2007 alone the growth in higher education enrolments was 4% (AEI 2008c).

What this growth in international students in Australia means is that Australian education service exports constitute the third largest foreign exchange earning sector with 16% growth in the 2006-07 fiscal year on what it earned in 2005-06. This high growth rate has been fuelled by a number of factors, including the comparatively competitive pricing of Australian education (until recently), the deterrent effect of the 9/11 and other terrorism events on the attractiveness of the US (Andrade, 2006) and the UK, and the perceived greater accessibility of opportunities for skilled migration resulting from Australian education, in comparison with other English speaking countries (Colebatch 2005 in Andrade 2006; Birrell et al.2006; Charlton 2005).

Students from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan constitute a very substantial portion of the international student cohort in Australian universities. An AEI report (2006) shows that the student supply from these three countries, referred to as South Asia in this study, – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – has increased by 33.5%, 22% and 4.1% respectively in 2005 compared to that of 2004 . In 2007 India's input alone to the international student cohort in Australia was 62,593 students (AEI 2007). India's contribution to Australia's education service export revenue in 2006–07 was 11.3% of the total income of this sector, indicating a 348% increase over the previous year's contribution (AEI 2008c, p.1) In the higher education sector alone there were 26800 students from India, 2021 from Pakistan and 2940 from Bangladesh (AEI 2008a, p. A11).

The significance of this 'South Asian Group' of students does not just lie in its large number. Whilst South Asian students may be found to be similar to other international students in some respects, they are different in many others. Students

from South Asian countries share a British colonial heritage that has left as its legacy some level of familiarity with English and Anglophone educational traditions, yet for most of these students English is either a second or foreign language. Although they may have undertaken a part of their undergraduate studies through the medium of English, their proficiency in English is generally not highly developed in comparison with Australian educated students. Their English is characterized with what Rampton (1995, p. 68) describes as distinct grammatical, prosodic and segmental features – such as “deviant verb form, and omission of auxiliaries, copulas, articles ... intra-sentential pitch”, and also reflects features of their regional variety of English (e.g. Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi English), distinct from Australian English and other world "Englishes" (Kachru, 1992). In addition, the academic culture in the majority of universities in South Asia is one that is teacher-centred and places a high value on the transmission of a body of knowledge and the reproduction of this by students, meaning that a high value is placed on skills, such as memorization and repetition. Borland and Pearce (1999, p. 58) quote an Indian student’s explanation of the learning style in India: “we just put what the book says ... but we did not put any ideas...”

Asia has been the home of many differing ancient cultures, yet in many published reports, the definition of Asian international students is confusing and misleading. Most of the studies to date that deal with international students, labelled as Asian students, are limited to issues related to students from South-East and Far East Asia, who share a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) (Arkoudis & Tran 2007; Ballard & Clanchy 1991; Biggs 1990; Green 2007; Kember 2000; Volet & Ang 1998). Despite the growing number of South Asian students in Australia, studies exploring their adaptation experiences are minimal and South Asian students remain largely invisible in the research literature. The research on this cohort that is available (e.g. Kashima & Loh, 2006; Ninnes et al., 1999; Singh-Ghuman, 2001) has been found to be either about a context different from higher education, such as school or college level (Singh-Guman 2001), or from a narrow perspective, such as the impacts of prejudice of in the acculturation process of the South Asian students in the US context (Rahman & Rollock 2004); the significance of social ties and needs for cognitive closure in the adjustment

process of Asian students (Kashima & Loh 2006); the overgeneralised stereotyping of Indian undergraduate education experience of students who come to study postgraduate courses in Australia (Ninnes, Aitchison & Kalos 1999); and the self identity issues of Indian students in the Australian school context (Singh-Ghuman 2001). In describing the learning orientation at undergraduate level that Indian postgraduate students in Australia come with, Ninnes et al. (1999) have noted that in spite of the apparent resemblance of rote learning and teacher centred learning, Indian students make autonomous interventions, and their degree of 'autonomous efforts' (p.338) depends on contextual factors such as, assessment practices of the institutions, teaching style and students' perception of the subjects they study. Again, most of the studies are etic in perspective (Ninnes et al. 1999) and adopt quantitative methods (Kashima & Loh 2006; Rahman & Rollock 2004; Singh-Ghuman 2001).

Motivation for the Study

The narrative that will be presented in this longitudinal qualitative study is set in an 'educational landscape' (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. 1) – the landscape of an Australian university, called 'Southern University'. Southern University is a large multi-campus urban university in one of Australia's largest cities, Melbourne. The protagonists or characters of this 'emic' narrative are postgraduate coursework students from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, whose journey we will follow as they make the transition from their studies in South Asia over their first two semesters at Southern University.

My interest in this area as a topic of research has been influenced by two of my personal experiences. The first of these was my experience as a student in an unfamiliar cultural context in the USA, and the second was as an observer of other international students as they coped with the cultural context of Bangladesh.

At Georgetown University, as a Fulbright scholar in 1987–90, I attended lectures, seminars, and worked on my daily academic activities preparing assignments and doing other library work. This kept me busy till five o'clock every afternoon. In July when there were still a few hours before nightfall, I had nothing to do and

nowhere to go, but to sit alone with a can of Coke on a bench between the library and the church and see other students, either in pairs or in groups slipping out the University main gate. I would feel lonely until one of my countrymen, who was teaching Russian there came out around 7 pm after preparing his material for the next day's lectures. Then we used to go out and walk around the Washington Monument, Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial and through Anacostia Park along the river. On the way back to the University dormitory, we would stop at a Hunan Chinese restaurant at DuPont Circle for a late dinner around 10 pm. While I was excited by the profoundly rich academic environment of the University in the beautifully planned city, and with my empowered identity as a Fulbrighter, at the same time I was overcome with homesickness and loneliness, and distressed by my very distinct otherness. A few weeks later during a morning tea break, when I was passing through a corridor of the beautifully glass-architected Inter Cultural Center (ICC) building, an elderly faculty member came out of his office and asked me if I would be willing to participate in a study about international students and write a few lines on my experience. As I agreed he passed me an A-4 sheet of paper and a yellow pencil and asked me to write a page about my experience during the first few weeks as an international student. What I jotted down included some of the experiences I mentioned above. I could not follow up on the outcomes of his research as I later moved to Temple University in Philadelphia, so I have maintained a curiosity to know more about how my experience related to those of other international students.

The second influential experience was my observation of international students' experiences at Dhaka University. At Dhaka University, alongside my regular teaching, I was in charge of coordinating international students from China, North Korea, South Korea, and Turkey and had the opportunity to see their adaptation process from close quarters. Sometimes I had been proactive, I can recollect, in supporting them – particularly when some of them were doing home-stay with my family at different times. At times, my otherness in the US revived, and being identical with these students' feelings, brought me closer to them. At that time I realized the need for better understanding of sojourners, like them.

On arrival at Southern University in Australia, I noticed the presence of a huge number of international students, some of whom I could recognize as belonging to the South Asian subcontinent, from their looks, the languages they communicated in among themselves, and the varieties of English they used to interact with the university staff. I was able to visualize their otherness as being akin to mine, and observe their awkwardness with an unfamiliar environment from a close quarter, sometimes standing in the same queue or at the checkout machine in the library. I thought about how things could be less stressful for them. Later on when I was choosing the topic for my research, the question of otherness became increasingly prominent in my priorities, and that motivated me to develop the research proposal for this study.

Assigning a position to myself as the researcher in the study became an issue of ethics and credibility, as my chosen subject-group belongs to the broader community to which I also belong. Being simultaneously a person experiencing similar conditions and researching others, I have had to carefully consider how and the extent to which I can compartmentalize my two egos – as a part of the others and as a researcher. In reporting the study, I have been careful in trying to bring out the voices of the postgraduates I have been researching, and I have been very cautious about maintaining some critical distance so as not to eclipse their perspectives by my subjective interpretations. When I have felt that my personal observation is necessary to highlight any issue, I have presented my view discretely saying that this is how I interpret the meaning of what has been said based on my own social background.

Aims of the Study

General Aims

The study aims to explore South Asian postgraduate coursework students' experiences in adapting themselves to Australian academic culture, with a particular focus on their experiences in adapting to the spoken language genres relevant to formal and informal academic contexts. The study will investigate not

only the most commonly adopted strategies that the students apply in coping with adjusting to stresses at the postgraduate level, but also variation among students in the strategies adopted and their experiences of their effectiveness. In essence it is a longitudinal qualitative study of 'ways of becoming' postgraduate coursework students in Australia.

Specific Aims

The specific aims of the study are:

- (1) To explore in-depth how non-native English speaking students from South Asia adjust to postgraduate coursework studies in Australia over their first two semesters.
- (2) To investigate the strategies used by non-native English speaking students from South Asia to cope with the cultural and linguistic stress involved in adjusting to studying at postgraduate level in a new academic culture, and to document the effectiveness of these strategies.
- (3) To document how the students in question experience and participate in spoken academic and non-academic interactions.

Most research to date on the stress experienced by non-English speaking background (NESB) students, their coping strategies and linguistic and academic acculturation in general, has been quantitative (Cassidy & Eachus 2000; Dao et al. 2007; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Kember & Gow 1991; Meyer & Kiley 1998; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000). While there are a few qualitative studies on international students (Biggs 1996, 1997; Biggs & Watkins 2001; Wang & Shan 2007; Arkoudis & Tran 2007) they are quite narrowly focussed, including dealing with student performance in a specific genre (Arkoudis & Tran 2007), or in classroom learning and teaching, specifically in English language communication skills classes (Biggs & Watkins 2001), most commonly with a cross-sectional design where the focus is on a group of learners at a particular time (Wang & Shan 2007). Comparatively, there is very little research that examines longitudinally the transition process to postgraduate coursework studies from undergraduate studies in a different cultural and linguistic context. This contrasts starkly with the large body of quantitative and some qualitative research on the

first year undergraduate experience and the transition from secondary school to university level studies for native and non-native speaking students. While Macaro and Wingate (2004) deal with the transition of first year students to a language course at Oxford University, Cheng and Alcantara (2007) focus on working college students' transition. In the Australian context, Leder & Forgasz (2004) consider both international and local Australian students' shift to their first year mathematics course in the university, whereas Kantanis (2001) highlights the transition of students to University in the light of the Monash transition program. Best's (2002) study explores another pertinent dimension of students' transition to university, i.e. transition while staying with family and transition while leaving the family behind. Although Evans' (2000) review study covers a wide range of contexts – US, UK, Canada, Australia, Israel and Hong Kong – and identifies some key aspects that influence students' transition to tertiary education, such as students' demographic variability, their psychological differences, their prior performance, social factors and institutional support services, the review does not include any focus on international postgraduate students.

Hellsten and Prescott (2004) in their study about international students in Australia have pointed out that international students' transition difficulties in adjusting to Australian university context are associated with communication that resulted from their limited English. Referring to non-availability of assistance when international students need help, Hellsten and Prescott note that the “ethic of care is an expectation” of international students (p. 347). In another study, Prescott and Hellsten (2005) have added that transition of on-shore international students (OIS) is impacted by their limited English proficiency, academic and social ‘cultural clashes’ between the students’ own and the Australian contexts, and students’ high expectations. Referring to international students’ perceptual differences about the system of the host country (Australia), Prescott and Hellsten (2005) observe that “students’ culture specific interpretations of the covert and overt working of the host system influence activities that are crucial in how students subsequently are able to cope with their transition” (p. 83). In considering transition in relation to language, as Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 348) have reiterated, most studies have focused on academic reading, writing,

and listening genres, whilst genres that involve spoken language in formal and informal academic contexts have received much less attention.

This study will determine if there is scope to treat the learning style and approaches of South Asian students, in the context of academic and academic-related spoken genres, as points of ‘difference’ rather than as a ‘deficit’, and to view the transitional process as one that Biggs (1996) has described as ‘constructive alignment’ between the students’ understanding of the learning context and expectations, and those of their teachers. Shuell (1986 in Biggs, 1996) has emphasized “what the student does is more important in determining what is learnt than what the teacher does” (p. 349), highlighting the value of an in-depth understanding of students’ perspectives.

This in-depth longitudinal research is the first to examine South Asian students studying in Australia in postgraduate coursework programs, and it will add a new dimension to our understanding of the experiences of South Asian graduate students making the transition from undergraduate study in their native academic, cultural and linguistic context to postgraduate coursework studies. The distinctive contribution of this approach lies in focusing on lived experiences and in researching them from a specific subject position: that of a person of similar background to the students who is facing some of the same acculturation experiences. As well as contributing theoretically to an understanding of the processes of academic and linguistic (re)acculturation, the research will contribute to the development of strategies that can enhance future students' acculturation and transition.

Structure of the Thesis

The study includes seven chapters all together. While this introductory chapter has presented an overview of the internationalization of higher education, and has introduced the international student cohort for this study and contextualized the need for a specific study of South Asian postgraduate students in Australia, it also has explained the original inspiration and shaping of the project. In Chapter two,

the relevant research literature is reviewed in two parts – first, literature dealing with key theoretical concepts relevant to the study and then, in the second part, the literature addressing international students’ adaptation experiences. Building from this, Chapter three considers the project’s methodology. Chapters four, five and six narrate the stories of the adjustment experience of the students. The adjustment stories can be best considered as providing a continuum of a process of the students working out a fit between themselves and their new cultural environment, moving from their pre-arrival expectations and initial experiences, their transitional experiences, and leading to their ‘ways of being’ postgraduate students after completion of their first two semesters. Chapter seven highlights the key insights that have emerged from the analysis and suggests some recommendations, as well as including reflections on the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research directions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”

– Isaac Newton (1675)

As the epigraph suggests and also because this study aims at exploring the adaptation experiences of South Asian postgraduates in the Australian context that involves some complex factors, the review of literature has covered a wide range of topics and will be presented in two parts. Whilst the discussion in both parts will proceed thematically, Part I will consider literature related to the key theoretical constructs that the thesis engages with, whereas Part II will review studies that have dealt with international students’ adaptation experiences in different contexts, such as at western universities on their home campuses, as well as their off-shore campuses in the students’ home countries.

Part I: Key Concepts for the Research

As has been introduced in Chapter 1, the study aims at exploring the adjustment process and experience of the South Asian postgraduate students in Australia, which involves acculturation both socially and academically. This has necessitated discussion of relevant theoretical constructs, such as those related to culture and acculturation. In order to discuss how the individual adjustment process is influenced, constructs related to individual variability in attitudes and behaviours, such as locus of control, motivation and sense of identity have also been included in the literature review. As the study also entails a focus on the students’ spoken communication, a discussion on constructs dealing with spoken genres has also been included in this section.

Conceptualising Culture and Acculturation

Culture

Culture, as an inclusively defined concept, is as old as human society, and the notion of culture has undergone continuous evolution. In course of this evolution, it has sometimes been conceived as whatever human beings have started creating and doing at the threshold point where their natural inheritance ends. Keeping this view in mind, Edgar and Sedgwick (1999) relate agriculture and horticulture to the early phases of culture. From this perspective, culture is seen as an oppositional term to the idea of nature. Over time, the notion has been viewed in different ways by various researchers, intellectuals and social scientists. For example, in the eighteenth century, culture was synonymous to civilization (Ulin 2001), whereas in the nineteenth, Matthew Arnold (1994 [1869]), English litterateur and critic, organized his perception of culture qualitatively along a binary opposition – culture and anarchy – and views culture as “the best that has been thought and said in the world ... an inward spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy” (pp.33-44). Arnold expected that men and women would endeavor to be cultured in order to know the best and then to make the best prevail. Although Arnold’s view of culture was regarded as the representative statement of his contemporary English society, the perception of culture has not stopped changing. While the notion of culture has, at different points of its history, been employed aesthetically, ideologically and socio-anthropologically, Williams (1994, p. 56) sums up the perceptual changes in the notion of culture under three major classifications. To him the first one is ‘ideal’, in which culture is a state or process of perfection in terms of some universal values, with reference to the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development of an individual, group or society. This notion, as per Arnold, is value-laden, and tends to designate someone cultured or uncultured (Arnold 1994). The second approach is ‘documentary’, in “which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work in which human thought and experience is recorded” (Williams 1994, p. 56). In a sense this usage of culture is synonymous with ‘the Arts’. According to Williams’ third category, which reflects sociological hues, culture is a description of a particular way of life, which “expresses certain meanings and values not only in

art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (Williams 1994, p.56). Culture, in this sense, designates the entire way of life, activities, beliefs and customs of people, groups or society, in general. People are also used to accept the ‘abusive extension’ of the notion of culture that allows it to be referred to the ‘smoker’s culture’ or ‘Australia’s beach culture’ (Hartman 1997).

An appraisal of the shifts in the notion of culture since late nineteenth century indicates the influence of two approaches – sociological and anthropological. While some researchers (Parsons 1997; Williams 1994) view culture from more a sociological point of view, a parallel trend of looking at culture more from an anthropological perspective is also present (Kluckhohn 1951). Kluckhohn (1951) provides an explicit, anthropological rendering of the notion of culture:

Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values (p.86).

Looking back at this brief discussion of the concept of culture – from its earliest perception to the present, the historical shifts from a neutral point of view to an elitist, value-laden one, and then again to value neutral, non-elitist anthropological and sociological approaches – it can be predicted that the notion of culture will continue to undergo further modifications. Although it is difficult to predict its ultimate direction, it is interesting to note that another trend which looks at the notion from a cross-disciplinary point of view has been in the horizon. For example, Hofstede (2001), using a sense of cognition and acknowledging contemporary computer-sensitivity, defines culture as:

the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.... Mind stands for head, heart and hands, which in turn represent thinking, feeling and acting respectively (pp. 9-10).

And Denning (2004), referring to 366 discursive definitions of culture he went through, adds his own – the 367th – and draws a line between culture and living:

Culture is talk. Living is story. (p. 226)

Considering the presence of human beings as the main protagonists in the world, I feel that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to label culture in an all convincing way from any particular angle and without overlapping one or the other.

Realizing the complexity of the notion of culture, I tend to agree with Freud (as quoted in Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, p.79) that “the fundamental concepts and most general ideas in any of the disciplines of science are always left indeterminate at first and are only explained to begin with by reference to the realm of phenomena from which they are derived; it is only by means of a progressive analysis of the material observation that they can be made clear and can find a significant and consistent meaning”. However, more sociologically and anthropologically informed notions have the closest resonance with what I am seeking to capture in this study.

I delimit my discussion about culture by saying that the study will use culture as a ‘collective programming of mind’ (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, p. 4) to examine how the adjustment process of South Asian students who came to Australia with their sets of ‘programming’ have been impacted on by the Australian sets of ‘programming of mind’, but without my approach being easily labelled as anthropological or sociological, because of the intertwined nature of the disciplines, as discussed earlier.

Acculturation

With the movements of population from one place to another because of globalization, through voluntary or involuntary migrations, and the formation of new student diasporas, consideration and study of acculturation has become important. Acculturation, in its broader sense, can be defined as a learning process in which individuals adopt attitudes, values, and behaviors from another culture in areas such as language familiarity and usage, cultural heritage, ethnic pride, ethnicity, and interethnic distance (Berry et al.1986). As my study is about the adaptation experiences of international postgraduate students in the Australian postgraduate environment, and since adaptation and acculturation are closely related, I have included these two issues for in-depth discussion. The discussion on acculturation will start with some key perceptions of the term ‘acculturation’,

and will consider, in brief, the scope and limitations of those perceptions. The discussion will include the factors that control the acculturation process, and acculturation models that are most relevant to my study.

Drawing on a wide range of relevant literature, Berry (2003) has attempted to cover a variety of issues related to acculturation. He examines acculturation at both cultural and psychological levels. Berry (2003) drawing a comparison between the two classic definitions given by Redfield et al. (1936) and the Council (Social Science Research Council – SSRC) (1954). At the cultural level, as he sums up Redfield et al's definition of acculturation, four distinct features of acculturation come up:

- (a) Acculturation is a phenomenon of change of cultural patterns when two or more identifiable cultural groups come into long-term contact.
- (b) Acculturative changes are different from culture change, which is a broader concept.
- (c) Acculturation is different from assimilation, which is only a single phase of the whole process.
- (d) Acculturation may take place in either or both non-dominant and dominant groups.

The SSRC definition, further to Redfield et al., includes a few other issues such as:

- (a) Acculturation may bring changes both culturally and ecologically.
- (b) The acculturation process is dependent on psychological factors and cultural sensitivity of the individuals involved.
- (c) The acculturation process may be reactive and resistance can be witnessed.

Berry (2003), referring to Graves (1967), emphasizes that the acculturation process impacts on the acculturating individuals' psychology in different ways when they are located in a host culture and as the original culture that they brought with them undergoes changes. For better understanding of the complexity, Berry (2003) insists on the linkage between the acculturation of a group and the psychological acculturation of individual members of the group,

and explains that when two or more cultural groups come in contact, some changes take place in those groups at a cultural level, and at the same time the individuals of those groups are psychologically affected demonstrating behavioural shifts and, in some situation, disruptive tensions often termed as acculturative stress. As an ultimate result, adaptation takes place among the members of the participating group, both psychologically and socio-culturally.

Theorists and researchers (Berry 2003; Berry et al. 1989) using different terminology – like ‘modes of acculturation’, ‘relational attitudes’ ‘varieties of acculturation’ – has identified four acculturation strategies from the non-dominant acculturative group’s perspective. These strategies relate to the attitudes and behaviours of the acculturating individual. The selection and application of strategy depends on some antecedent factors, which may be both cultural and psychological. Different strategies bring different levels of results in the extent and nature of acculturation. These strategies are dependent on the acculturating individual’s awareness of their own culture and self-identity and also on their attitude towards relationship with the dominant culture group (Berry 2003; Padilla 1980). From the ethno-cultural group’s standpoint, four strategies can be identified. The first is evident in a situation where the acculturating individuals have a high level of awareness of their original culture and self-identity, and at the same time are eager to have a relationship and extended contacts with the dominant group, it is called an integrative strategy. As a result of this strategy, the acculturating group maintains the main features of their original culture but also adopts the host culture. The second strategy is evident when the non-dominant cultural group are reluctant about their own culture and want to establish frequent and extensive contact with the dominant group, and is called an assimilation strategy. In the third separation strategy, ethno-cultural group members show a high level of awareness of their own culture and maintain a low level of relationship with the dominant group. This strategy leads to poor adaptation. Finally, in a context when the acculturating group shows indifference to its own culture and original self-identity, but also maintains a low-level of relationship with the dominant culture, the strategy is one of marginalisation. A marginalisation strategy may arise if the acculturating group fails in their attempts to be assimilated.

As locus of views about acculturation, Berry (2003, p. 23) has identified two major domains – the dominant larger society and non-dominant ethno-cultural groups. As he further goes into the domains, he observes that the larger domain, on one hand, may contain national policies, multicultural ideology and an attitude of having a uniform or pluralistic society, which influences the acculturation process. In the domain of non-dominant groups, on the other hand, he identifies three factors that impact on acculturation – such as group goals, the acculturation strategies they adopt, and their levels of expectation towards having diversity and equity in the host culture. Berry also detects that these factors operate in three tiers: (1) national level where national policies, for example, are formulated, (2) institution level where the national policies are implemented, and group goals and attitudinal matters of the non-dominant groups are decided, and (3) at the individual level the policies and principles are practised (Berry 2003, p. 25).

Another dimension of acculturation that Berry (2003) considers is the active role of the dominant cultural group, identifying another set of four strategies in their approach. When the retention of cultural identity of the non-dominant group is seen in a positive way by the dominant group, meaning that the non-dominant group has sanction and is given the right options for how and what it maintains from its own culture, then the strategy is one of multiculturalism. While in multiculturalism the dominant group demonstrates their positive attitudes by adopting policies that can accommodate the differences of the non-dominant group, the non-dominant group also adopts the basic values of the dominant group. In an alternative situation when the dominant group encourages positive relationships and non-dominant group has neither the option to choose nor are willing to maintain their original cultural identity, this is referred to as a strategy of melting pot. In the third context, when the dominant group does not encourage positive relationships with the non-dominant group, but the acculturating group is willing to retain their cultural identity, a strategy of segregation can be considered to be occurring. The fourth strategy, exclusion, is one in which the dominant group shows negative attitudes towards the inclusion of the non-dominant group and the non-dominant group is also very passive as to maintaining their original cultural identity.

Referring to marked physical differences, Berry (2003) has noted that sometimes individuals of a non-dominant culture having different physical looks may use a strategy of reluctance to assimilate, lest they are discriminated against. Berry has also taken Padilla's (1980) bidimensional model into consideration, in which Padilla suggests that strategies are decided on the basis of the cultural awareness of the acculturating group about their own traditional culture, as well as the host culture, and also their ethnic loyalty.

Another issue about the notion of acculturation is the complexity of measurement of acculturation. Acknowledging the multi-layered intricacies associated with individuals of both dominant and non-dominant groups in any acculturation context, as a social psychologist, Berry (2003) emphasizes designing and using separate scales for measuring acculturation outcomes at different levels – like the individual level and the group level – in different dimensions of acculturation (e.g. ethno-cultural group, and larger society).

The outcome of acculturation process depends on a range of factors. The most important of these is context, which is a composite state encompassing the dominant culture, in which the acculturating group is embedded, the protagonists – the members of the both dominant and non-dominant groups – and the 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1984) the acculturating group brings with them. Other factors that influence acculturation are perceived prejudice in social, educational and occupational contexts (Sodowsky et al. 1991), gender roles among the cultures (Rahman & Rollock 2004), and cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty (Padilla 1980). Group and individual variables like ethnicity, age, world view, religion, purpose and duration of stay are also influencing factors towards acculturation (Sodowsky et al. 1991; Trimble 2002). In line with Padilla (1980), Berry (2002) expresses that self-awareness about one's own culture as well as the host culture, and the level of loyalty to one's original culture play significant roles in an individual's acculturation process.

As acculturation of people from a non-dominant groups is dependent not only on factors related to the acculturating individual and group, but also on factors

associated with the dominant group, this study will embrace this complex dimensionality of acculturation to explore how the acculturation process of the international postgraduate students in question is impacted not only by both their own strategies and attitudes but also by how they perceive the roles of their fellow Australian classmates and university staff.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is another notion that is pertinent to an understanding of acculturation, particularly in academic contexts. Cultural capital is a concept that Bourdieu has coined to explain the impact of social classifications with their available non-material resources on the learning outcome of children of such social classes. Rather than viewing cultural capital merely from economic perspective, Bourdieu (1984) has conceived it as a hidden value which is attached to learning and plays the role of a capital in the acquisition process. Revisiting the notion later, Bourdieu (1986) has attempted to explain academic success of children of different social classes in the light of the cultural capital they have gained in their family background:

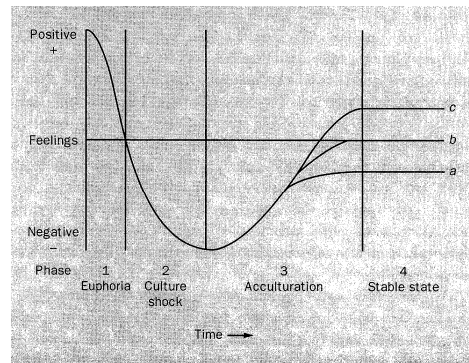
The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, ... as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (Bourdieu 1986, p. 243)

Whilst Bourdieu's concept was developed to address inequities resulting from social class differences in children's socialisation, it is also relevant to those whose capital is different because of growing up in a different ethnic and academic cultural context, and to considering how exposure to different contexts through travel can produce cultural capital. Desforges (1998) suggests, that "the main way travellers convert 'collecting places' into cultural capital is through a narrative of personal development and authoritative knowledge about the world" (p. 190). Audiences can conspire with this narrative, even gaining cultural capital themselves, through sharing a respect for travel. Bennett (2005) notes that people – particularly young people – evaluate cultural capital not only as travelling experience, but also as means of self-development (p. 158).

The study will consider the impact of the cultural capital the respondents have brought with them on their adaptation to Australian culture, in general, and Australian postgraduate environment, in particular, and also how their cultural capital gets remoulded through their experiences associated with their transition, living and learning in a new place, Melbourne.

Acculturation Stress and Culture Shock

In any acculturation process, feeling stressed at the cultural differences is a common phenomenon that is experienced by many sojourners. Hofstede (2001 p.423) suggests cultural stress precedes cultural shock. Calori et al. (1996) take acculturative stress as the disruptive tension that is felt by members of one culture when they are required to interact with a second culture and to adopt its ways. Calori et al (1996) also note that the potential for acculturative stress is greatest when large differences exist between the cultures involved. Terms such as "cultural clash" have become popularized as meaning acculturative stress. Acculturative stress represents a key obstacle to strategic changes in cultural merging and reconciliation. When the foreign students/expatriates are all of a sudden exposed to an alien culture without any empathy, they experience acculturation stresses which accumulate into culture shock (Hofstede 2001). To explain such stress further, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 323) note that the expatriates and migrants come to the new culture with their individual 'mental software' that contains 'basic values' of their original culture, and despite their ad-hoc attempts to learn some 'symbols and rituals of the new environment' they feel culture shock drawing a falling curve in the process of acculturation that ultimately creates a U-curve. Their acculturation U-curve starts with an euphoria state followed by culture shock (represented by a fall in the curve), then by the third phase, acculturation and finally by the fourth phase, a stable state, which has three possible levels: a negative state compared to home level stability, a bi-culturally adapted state, and then 'gone native' like state. The following diagram represents their acculturation U-curve:



(Hofstede and Hofstede 2005, p.323)

Among other situations, intercultural communication contexts often contribute to development of acculturative shock. Intercultural communication is often associated with both truth and unfounded stereotypes. Assumptions and “unfounded stereotypes” are likely to “affect people’s perception of actual events”, and often lead to offensive approaches to communication causing distress on the part of the expatriates (Hofstede 2001, p. 424). Such sufferings may result, in extreme cases, in “hostility”, hatred about and more commonly, in resistance to the host culture, slowing down acculturation (Hofstede 2001). Acculturative stress experienced by expatriates can be reduced through intercultural training, which can create “awareness among the foreigners of their own cultural baggage ... (as well as of) other cultures” (Hofstede 2001, p. 423).

Adaptation

Adaptation, a term closely associated with acculturation, refers to changes that take place in individuals and groups to meet the environmental requirements. How much and in what ways a person or people from a particular group will adapt depends on different factors, such as personality, sense of self-identity, age, duration of stay, motivation, and also on the context (e.g. existing environment in the dominant culture). Berry (1997, p.14) observes that sometimes there is “increased fit between the acculturating individual and the new context”, such as when “assimilation or integration strategies are pursued and when the attitudes in the dominant society are accepting of the acculturating individual or group”. He also notes that when a fit is not achieved, as in separation, segregation and marginalized situations, the adaptation takes a conflicting pattern resulting in

“acculturative stress or psychopathology” (Berry 1997, p.14). Interpreting adaptation as a dynamic and interactive process that takes place between the person and the environment, and is aimed at achieving a fit between the two, Anderson (1994) has provided a sociological model of adaptation that also fits with the concept of the acculturation U-curve. Her model of adaptation is represented as a continuum with four phases of adaptation: cultural encounter, obstacles, response and overcoming. After adaptation, which, according to her, is more than a ‘sum of subadjustments’, a sojourner may be ‘reborn’ (p. 293) displaying a different set behaviours. While both Anderson (1994) and Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) see four phases in the U-curve process, Anderson does not indicate whether her ‘encounter’ phase is necessarily associated with euphoria.

Students – particularly international students – experience acculturation stress (Rahman & Rollock 2004), what Bochner (2006) calls “disorientation, anxiety and confusion”, as the result of exposure to an unfamiliar cultural environments (p.189). The respondents of this study are international students from South Asian countries, and that makes the issue of acculturation very relevant. These students from three nations, in spite of sharing some common cultural features and belonging to a limited age group, differ in terms of their cultural capital, motivation, worldview, religion and gender. The study will examine their adaptation experiences taking the above-discussed issues into consideration.

Conceptualising the Individuals

Locus of control

Locus of control is a psychological concept that refers to the degree of an individual’s dependence on his or her internal and external factors for an expected outcome. Rotter, who first operationalized the concept in 1966, has revisited his formulation (Rotter 1971, 1990) and in a major review of the concept in 1990 he discussed its history and on-going importance at length and referring to it as “control of reinforcement” (Rotter 1990, p. 489). He defines the concept as:

the degree to which persons expect that a reinforcement or an outcome of their behavior is contingent on their own behavior or personal characteristics

versus the degree to which persons expect that the reinforcement of outcome is a function of chance, luck or fate, is under the control of powerful others, or is simply unpredictable (Rotter 1971, p. 489).

Expectancy, which involves future events, is an important factor in locus of control, and is grounded in ‘expectancy–value theory’ (Maddux 1995, p. 21) that describes human behavior as determined by the perceived likelihood of an event or outcome occurring contingent upon the behavior in question, and the value placed on that event or outcome. Expectancy-value theory proposes that if someone values a particular outcome, and believes that taking a particular action will lead to such outcome, then the person is likely to take that action.

Rotter’s (1966, 1990) conceptualization of locus of control is basically a unidimensional one with internal and external loci of control at either end of a single axis. In other words, the more an individual has internal control the less is their external control. People with a high external locus of control (referred to as externals) believe they are dominated by external forces like fate, luck or powerful others, factors that are beyond their control, whereas people with a high internal locus of control (referred to as internals) believe that they are the ones who control their behaviors to decide the outcome. Although earlier studies (e.g. Lefcourt 1981; Rotter 1990) conceptualized internal and external loci of control as mutually exclusive, in an important quantitative study of psychiatric patients, Lavenson (1973, p. 397), argues that there are three components of locus of control – internality, chance and powerful others, and asserts that an individual may attribute outcomes to more than one of these components at a time.

Studies about locus of control have been quite diverse and have highlighted different aspects of behavior. Research suggests that ‘internals’ have certain characteristics, including tending to be better educated (Lachman & Leff 1989), being more action oriented and superior in risk taking, and having higher incomes (Hoffman et al. 2003). Drawing partially from Hoffman et al. (2003), Blau (1993), and Lam and Mizerski (2005), in their attempt to compare the behaviour patterns of the two types: internals and externals, have noted from business perspectives that internals are likely to do well in communication with out-groups that involves more “social risk such as the risk of information transmitted uncontrollably and the social risk of a negative remark” (p. 219) made by the

participating interlocutors, whereas externals are more likely to engage in word-of-mouth communication with their in-groups.

Culture and its intersection with academic outcomes have also received some attention in research on locus of control. A number of studies (Gifford et al. 2006; Marks 1998; Stam 1987) have observed that locus of control varies from one culture to another, and Marks (1998) has further emphasized that locus of control is a construct that aligns with the western cultural philosophy of personal autonomy, which also supports Lefcourt's (1982) assertion: "Man must come to be more effective and more able to perceive himself as the determiner of his fate if he is to live comfortably with himself" (Lefcourt 1982, p. 3). Referring to the complex relationship between locus of control and religion, Fiori et al. (2006) in line with Fiori et al. (2004) and Pargament & Hahn (1988) have noted that religion may increase external control, but at the same time "reliance on God, may actually improve one's sense of internal control and thereby improve psychological outcome" (p. 241).

Locus of control has been applied to academic contexts too. For example, Gifford et al. (2006) has researched US university first year students from both white and minority background and shown that students who are high internals have done better academically and been able to retain success in their sophomore year. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2005) and Janssen & Carton (1999) have noted that high internals procrastinate less in their academic activities than do high externals, and also that high internals are better academic performers. While Gifford et al's (2006) study covers a relatively wider cultural range (the white and minority students), Janssen and Carton's (1999) finding is limited to Caucasian students only. Most studies on locus of control are mostly quantitative and have little focus on postgraduates (Park & Kim 1998). Park and Kim's study about Korean, Chinese and Korean-Chinese tertiary students has found cultural (Confucius Heritage) influence on locus of control and that the highest academic scorers were Chinese and Korean students who were high internals. However, the low performance of the Korean-Chinese students, who also share the same cultural tradition, were accounted for by their assigned as well as assumed unequal social status in the context in question.

This brief overview of locus of control suggests the concept has some relevance for further examination in this study of students from South Asian backgrounds. The study will also consider how the postgraduates account for their behaviours and experiences in their engagement in postgraduate academic discourses in a cultural context that is different from their own.

Identity

The identity of a person in a social context is defined in terms of his or her position in a given social setting. Hofstede (2001, p. 10) explains that “identities consist of people’s answer to the question: Where do I belong?” Identity involves “a set of dynamic, complex process by which individuals define, redefine, and construct their own and others’ ethnicity or culture ... (in other words) recognition, categorization, and self-identification of oneself as a member of one ethnocultural group” (Ward 2004, p. 196). People may have a multi-faceted identity that varies as the context changes. For example, when I am at home, my identity may be as a father, husband or the head of the family, but the same ‘I’ when at the sports event, for example, as a supporter of a football team, the part of my identity that is foregrounded is that of a Western Bulldogs supporter. Norton (2000) observes that identity is entangled with how power relations between individuals, groups and communities “impacts on life chances of individuals at a given time and place” (p. 124). Identity is very much associated with subjectivity, which Weedon (1997) within a feminist framework defines as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (p. 32). Drawing upon Weedon’s (1997) differentiation of the concept of individual in traditional Western philosophy from that of post-structuralism, Norton (2000) suggests that identity, as a result of the dynamic nature of subjectivity, is non-unitary rather than unitary, decentered rather than centered, and changing over historical time and social space. While we shift our identities in different contexts, Friedman (1999) observes the trend that shifting of identities relate to a transition from a vertical social order that is hierarchical and inflexible to a relatively more flexible horizontal social order that is negotiable and agency driven.

To differentiate the two concepts – identity and subjectivity – Hall (2004) has viewed identity as a flat and single dimensional concept, but subjectivity as broader and more multifaceted than identity. Subjectivity is an entity – a creation of negotiation between social and personal factors (p. 134). Hall further notes that a person can have multiple identities based on his /her position in a context like race, class, or religious orientation, but his or her subjectivity is comprised of all those facets.

This study takes into consideration the application of the dynamic nature of subjectivity and the non-unitary principle of identity, and examines how the subjectivity and identity of the postgraduates influence them at different stages of their adjustment process.

Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness is a concept of social relationship that significantly influences a stranger or a newcomer to adjust to the new society/culture. Kalantzis and Cope (2000) have defined inclusiveness as “a relationship of diversity to access. Inclusiveness necessitates treating the knowledge and experiences of people from all groups in society as valid and relevant. Teaching, learning and assessment cater for a variety of styles and values”(p.36). Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) and Osterman (2000) in their work on inclusiveness have indicated how a positive sense of inclusiveness impacts positively on the adjustment process. This study will also explore whether the sense inclusiveness, in other words, belongingness to the Australian academic culture as well as to the Australian society, has affected the postgraduates being researched in the study.

Motivation and Learning

Motivation is generally understood as an inducement or incentive to attain something. In the field of language learning – particularly second language acquisition/learning – the concept of motivation is associated with a complex human behavior towards certain action(s). Csizer and Dornyei (2005, p. 20)

observe that motivation answers the question “why humans think and behave as they do”. They also believe that motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, or, more specifically the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it. Gardner (1985) distinguishes ‘instrumental motivation’, which occurs when the learner’s goal is functional, such as passing an examination or getting promoted or a higher salary, from ‘integrative motivation’ which takes place when a learner’s goal is to be included and integrated into the target language/culture group. Making deeper sense of the integrative motivational orientation, Dörnyei (2003) has observed that integrative motivational orientation “implies an openness to, and respect for, other cultural groups and ways of life; in the extreme, it might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one’s original group)” (p. 5).

Viewing motivation from a slightly different perspective, other motivational theorists (e.g. Ramburuth & McCormack 2001; Macaro & Wingate 2004) have distinguished between motivation that is intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is viewed as an impulse to something that has been triggered by internal factors, such as interest and excitement. Macaro and Wingate (2004, p. 471) have observed that intrinsically motivated students apply themselves to something because of their deep interest in the topic, while the extrinsically motivated ones apply themselves for the extrinsic reward they perceive will result (e.g. good grade). To illustrate further, motivation for making some financial contribution to an organisation that helps disabled children may be termed as extrinsic if the driving force behind this contribution is gaining a social reputation and recognition, rather than a desire to have the personal satisfaction of having helped a fellow human being.

Referring to Dörnyei (1998), Macaro and Wingate (2004, p. 472) have viewed motivation as “a continuum, ranging from external regulation, the least self-determined type, which is completely dependent on external sources, to integrated regulation, the most self-determined type, which is choiceful behaviour that is fully assimilated with the individual’s other values, needs and identity”.

As students in their learning process employ certain strategies to translate their motivations into practice, drawing on Biggs (1987), Ramburuth and McCormack (2001) have identified three types of approach to learning: deep, surface and achieving. According to them, the deep approach is characteristically an intention to understand what is being learned that involves critical engagement and expenditure of effort, and is associated with understanding meaning (Ramburuth & McCormack 2001, p. 335), whereas, the surface approach is characterized by the learner more passively undertaking to meet requirements without engaging deeply in the subject of study. This approach involves memorisation of facts and reproduction. In the third approach, the achieving approach, students focus mainly on ‘obtaining the highest grades’ without real engagement in the subject (Ramburuth & McCormack 2001, p. 335). It is strategic and involves the application of learning techniques that are perceived as being the most direct means to getting a good grade.

Conceptualising Key Aspects of Communication

Communication, an activity of sharing information, is one of the most basic means through which human societies have evolved. In the modern context, communication skill is considered as a core qualification for almost everything. For successful communication, while people develop communicative competence, they also make selection of communication strategies.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence has been viewed differently by different linguists. To Chomsky (1965, p. 3) communicative competence is “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language” and thus entirely linguistic, while for others (e.g. Hymes 1971), communicative competence consists of both knowledge of linguistic rules and knowledge of using these rules to communicate meaning. Widdowson (1983, pp. 23-5) prefers the term ‘communicative capacity’ to communicative competence and defines it as “the ability to use a knowledge of

language as a resource for the creation of meaning”, and in a later amplification he notes that such capacity or competence is

“not something that is directly taught but something that learners fashion for themselves by recognizing the need ... in the interest of better communication ... (it) comes as corollary to effective communication” (Widdowson 1984, p. 250)

Communication Strategies

As this study entails an exploration of the students’ spoken communication, a discussion on communication, in general, and communication strategies, in particular, becomes pertinent.

Drawing etymological reference to the concept of strategy, Oxford (1990, p. 8) defines strategy as a “plan, step, or conscious action toward achievement of an objective”. Williams, (2004, p.587) has viewed strategy, in almost identical words, as a “conscious procedure carried out in order to solve a perceived problem”.

Analysing some definitions of communicative strategies by some linguists (e.g. Corder 1977; Tarone 1980; Faerch & Kasper 1983 and Stern 1983) technically, Bialystok (1990, pp. 2-7) considers communication strategies from a broad perspective that integrates communication strategies both in L1 and L2 with general cognitive problem solving strategies. Her analysis of the definitions brings out three features of communication strategies: problemacy, consciousness and intentionality. Problemacy initiates the need to employ strategies. Strategies are devised by an interlocutor only when he/she foresees some problem in the course of a communication situation. The consciousness of a user of communicative strategies is active when he/she employs a strategy. Users of communication strategies are “aware (to some extent, in some undefined way)” that they are using some strategies for some reasons (p. 4). The third feature, intentionality refers to the user’s “control over a repertoire of strategies” from which he/she selects and uses (p. 5).

Highlighting interactional approaches, Tarone (1977 cited in Ellis 1994, p. 397) has provided a list of five categories of communication strategies that L2 users make use of: (1) avoidance including topic avoidance and message abandonment; (2) paraphrase including approximation, word coinage and circumlocution; (3) conscious transfer including literal transfer, language switch/language borrowing; (4) appeal for assistance including seeking help from native speakers or using dictionary and (5) Mime including use of non-verbal codes (Tarone 1977, adapted from Ellis 1994, p. 397).

Siegel (2003) referring to Rampton (1991, p. 239) has reported a unique type of strategy, in the context of communication in the second language, in which L2 users opt for not demonstrating a native speaker-like proficiency or prefer not to use L2 at all – in other words, apply a strategy of avoidance. Siegel (2003) views this as another kind of communication strategy.

The essence of strategy is careful planning. If we put this into the context of South Asian students studying in Australia, communication strategy is taken to mean the specific action(s) these students undertook in order to communicate with local native English speakers, as well as with other international students.

Cross-cultural Communication and Intercultural Competence

The terms cross-cultural communication and intercultural communication are frequently used interchangeably to refer to communication that takes place between interlocutors from two or more different cultures. Communication involves not only verbal codes of communication (i.e. languages), but also non-verbal codes, which vary from one culture to another culture both in terms of their forms and the messages that they carry. Interlocutors may use the same verbal language as a second language/ lingua franca, but may lack shared appreciation of its linguistic nuances resulting in misunderstanding. To avoiding misunderstanding, people from different cultures communicating with each other need to have an understanding and tolerance of cultural difference, a skill sometimes referred to as intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is

“the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is dynamic, developmental, and on-going process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively” (Paige et al. 2003 in Crichton & Scarino 2007).

Emphasising the range of knowledge and skills involved in this process, Byram (1997) has summed up intercultural competence as the “knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ value, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self” (p. 34). Deardorff (2006, p. 247) has identified three key common elements of intercultural competence that all definitions contain: (1) “awareness, valuing and understanding of cultural differences”; (2) “experiencing other cultures”; and (3) “self-awareness of one’s own culture” (p.247). I think one’s awareness of others’ world view is instrumental to his or her intercultural competence, and for better understanding and mutual interest people develop intercultural competence through immersion process or/ and formal studies (e.g. literature and orientation sessions).

The notions of high and low contexts affect intercultural communication. Drawing on Hall’s *Beyond Culture* (1976), Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) designate high-context to a culture in which in communication “little has to be said or written because most of the information is either in the physical environment or supposed to be known by the persons involved ... very little is coded, explicit part of the message (p. 89). On the other hand, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005, p. 89) refer low context culture as one in which in communication “the mass of information is vested in the explicit code ...”. Condon (1984), referring to Hall (1976)’s concepts of low and high context cultures attributed to Americans and Japanese respectively, has observed that while Americans rely more on explicit language, Asians – more specifically the Japanese – rely more on context than on text to express their intended meanings. Referring to the intertwined relationship between individualism versus collectivism and high versus low uncertainty avoidance, Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) classify India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as high context cultures (pp. 189-191). Analyzing high and low context of cultures from a business perspective, Raval and Subramanian (2000, pp. 189-90) also note that India with “Dharmic values” comes under the high context culture classification.

An understanding of the notions of intercultural competence, and high and low context cultures may provide an insight when analyzing the postgraduates' spoken communication and considering their impressions and responses to the communication of others.

Genre and Spoken Genre

'Genre' is a concept for which an all-agreed definition is almost impossible to find. In a broader sense, genre is a mode of categorization, which according to Edgar and Sedgwick (1999, p. 160) denotes a set of shared characteristics, which allows for the grouping together of different forms of artistic expression or cultural production.

Indicating the ever increasing horizon of genre as a notion, Swales (1990), who at one point defined 'genre' as a "class of communicative events, members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (p. 58), and also as "a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written, with or without literary aspirations" (p. 33), is reluctant to define genre in his recent writing, on the grounds that any given definition of genre would delimit its scope and fail to encompass its increasing dimensions. In his most recent formulation, Swales (2004) defines genre very flexibly as a metaphor of 'frames of social action' (p. 61).

Diversity and shifts of interest in different aspects of genre – such as from a social and cultural approach to literacy – is also evident among the researchers (Freedman & Medway 1994b; Giltrow 1994; Hunt 1994; Miller 1994; Zimmerman 1994). In a survey of the field of genre studies, Freedman and Medway (1994a) have distinguished between the Northern American and Sydney schools, which they see as having developed independently. Swales' perspective is characteristic of Northern American tradition that uses a social constructivist approach, which focuses on "unpacking complex relations between text and context" and lays emphasis on the "dynamic quality of genres" (Freedman &

Medway 1994a, p. 9) and sees knowledge as “something that is socially constructed in response to communal need, goals and context” (Freedman & Medway 1994a, p. 5). For this tradition, genres evolve, develop and decay as a result of social and technological changes (Freedman & Medway 1994a, p. 9).

In contrast, Freedman and Medway (1994b) characterize the Sydney School, influenced by Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics, as having a stronger focus on forms and an approach that is marked by prescriptivism and a more static vision of genres. Reflecting on this focus in relation to teaching, Johns (2002b) sees teachers, seemingly following a grammar-translation method, first model texts from a specific “genre and then discuss the text features and then assist the students to explore the genre’s social purposes”, and at later stage assign the students with the task of dealing with text-type independently (Johns 2002b, pp. 5-6). Despite these differences in emphasis, Freedman and Medway (1994a) argue that both the traditions recognize the ‘primacy of the social in understanding genre’ and ‘the role of context’ (p. 9). New Rhetoric, a perspective that has evolved recently, strongly focuses on context and its embedded ideology (Johns 2002b, p. 9).

Another difference in orientation among the researchers is in viewing genre as a product or as a process, and this is captured by their different semantic expressions such as, on the one hand, Miller (1984) depicting genre as “an action it accomplishes” (p. 151); whereas, Campbell and Jamieson (1978) have been very explicit in their view about genre as a form:

A genre is a group of acts unified by a constellation of forms that recurs in each of its members. These forms, in isolation, appear in other discourses. What is distinctive about the acts in a genre is a recurrence of the forms together in constellation (p20).

Freedman and Medway (1994a) have summed up the traditional formulation of genres as ‘(a) primarily literary, (b) entirely definable textual regularities in form and content, (c) fixed and immutable, (d) and classifiable into neat and mutually exclusive categories and subcategories’ (p. 1). In contrast, for Martin (1985), genre is “a staged goal oriented social process of how things are done’ (p. 25), and to Lyotard (1988) genre is a way of linking incommensurable linguistic elements together.

While the ‘product’ and ‘process’ approaches to the notion of genre are dominant, a variant of form and focus is the adoption of the concept of ‘frame’, as in the work of Bazerman (1997), who, allowing some semantic space, considers genres as “frames of social action ... the location within which meaning is constructed” (Bazerman 1997, p. 19), and Beaufort (in Swales 2004) who presents genre as a frame: “a shattering to provide a communicative effect” (p. 62). Ongstad (1993) sums up genres as “one of the main frames for all socialisation” and also as a “culturally determined part of the habitus” of each person (pp. 36-37). What we can draw from the consequence of using different terminology in defining genre is that the use of different semantic expressions and their associated semantic gaps have led to further diversification of the notion to the extent that the notion is being applied to discourses without any literary aspirations – such as “the genre of the Presidential Press Conference”, “the new genre of the music video” (Swales 1990, p. 33).

To understand the domain attributed to genre, differentiation between genre and text-type, which is sometimes used interchangeably, may be useful. Genre is referred to as “named socially constructed discourses” (Johns 2002b, p. 6) conventionalized forms often labelled as ‘external features’ (Pilegaard & Frandsen 1996) and text-type refers to internal “organizational patterns within a more complex discourse” (Paltridge 2002, p. 73). In this distinction, genre and text-type denote macro level and micro level aspects of a discourse respectively. Although a text-type is an internal feature within a discourse, it is not restricted to any specific genre. For example, in a genre like parliamentary debate different text-types such as argumentation, narratives, and reporting may be used. On the other hand, the same text-types may also be utilized in other genres, say, academic presentations or the board meeting of a company (for details see Bazerman 1998; Paltridge 2002).

When researchers have difficulty in defining boundaries of genres, it would be futile to attempt to draw an exhaustive list of genres. Different researchers have classified genres in different ways. For example, in macro level categorization of genres, Flowerdew’s (2002) classifications are simply based on the considerations

of text and context, but Grabe's (2002) classification of genres, which has drawn on William James's notion of dichotism of human thinking, presents two types of genres – narrative and expository. Bhatia (2002), at the same time, arguing flexibility and fluidity of boundaries within genres has identified more than two mixed and embedded genres which he classifies under three major headings:

- i. Genre group that is independent of any grounded realities of social context.
- ii. Genre Colonies, which are loosely grounded in broad rhetorical contexts and have overlapping of generic boundaries.
- iii. Individual genres, which are typically and narrowly grounded in typical socio-rhetoric contexts (Bhatia 2002, p. 282).

An interesting facet that is common with the different schools and traditions is that they all perceive that genre is grounded in social context, and that is why the notion is relevant to this study

Like many other concepts and notions (e.g. culture, acculturation) the scope of genres, which initially referred to only written texts, has widened to encompass both oral and written texts. Referring to significant contributors in the field, such as Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), Halliday and Hasan (1989) and Purves (1991), Johns, (2002b) iterates her interest in seeing 'genre' in a wider context – beyond written text, and refers it to "complex oral and written responses by speakers or writers to the demands of the social context"(p. 3).

A noticeable tendency in the study of genre is the increasing interest since 1980s in looking at genres in academic settings (Long & Richards 2004). While the focus of interest covers both speech events and written text types in general, there are at least three specific areas within academic genres that are attracting increasing attention from researchers (see for example, Johns 2002a; Paltridge 2001; Swales 1990, 2004): (1) academic genres as social constructs that require demonstration of specific linguistic, discoursal and rhetoric skills; (2) academic genres in relation to culturally diverse international students with different understanding of academic genres, and (3) genres from pedagogical point of view – how those specific skills can be taught and learnt.

Academic genres as a social construct are changing and new varieties of genres are being added to the traditional repertoire of academic genres – in both written

and spoken discourses. With the increasing penetration of educational technology and associated multimedia and computer software (e.g. Power point, Endnote), genres like class lectures and conference presentations are taking on different forms. This challenges the more prescriptivist and static notion of genre. For example, within academic spoken genres, Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) discover another sub-genre in the introduction section of conference presentation, which is featured with a “rhetorical structure markedly different” from the presentation of the rest of the article (p. 45).

Similarly in written discourse, electronic texts are also using hyperlinks bringing significant changes. While the major academic disciplines follow their own conventions, they have also tended to introduce variations in their generic conventions. For example, the problem based learning tutorials in professional courses follow different genre styles in classroom interaction that includes a problem or trigger for solution within the group through dialogic and collaborative learning and the teacher plays the role of a facilitator rather than a content expert (Kelson & Distlehorst 2000; Woodward-Kron & Remedios 2007), and the requirements for written portfolio follow different conventions in presenting how learning outcomes have been achieved (Victoria University 2007).

As more students from culturally diverse local communities are enrolling in the western universities, an important concern about providing students and international students, in particular, with academic literacy includes understanding and application of academic genres (Bush 1997; Pearce & Borland 1997). Academics, mostly based in western English medium universities, have different views about the role of intercultural influences on international students’ realization of academic genres. Johns (2002a, p. 246), for example, argues that students’ ‘rich, complete’ theories of genres based on ‘their own cultures’ have a positive function and such understanding may “assist them to apply social constructivist views to academic and professional genres”. However, at the same time Johns raises concern about how incomplete and limited theories of genres that international students might bring with them may pose problems further in adopting the genres in their new context. She suggests that in assisting these students to learn the genres of the Australian academic context it is valuable to

start by destabilizing the limited understanding they have brought with them (p. 246). Other academics (e.g. Ferguson 1997; Reid 1997; Hird 1997) have raised their concerns about the cross cultural factors that affect performance in regards to academic literacy development, and have observed students' non-fulfilment of generic conventions of written academic genres because of the absence of "personal voice" resulting from of different cultural constructs (Hird 1997, p. 120).

A third area of focus in academic genres is associated with their pedagogy. The diversity in academic genres and the needs for students to cope with them have resulted in pedagogical quandaries in the field. While scholars have consensus on the importance of improving students' control over genres, they differ in their approaches. Whilst many, such as Adam and Artemeva (2002), Dudley-Evans (2002), Paltridge (2001, 2002), Swales (1990), Swales and Lindemann (2002), have supported the idea of prescriptive teaching within the broader frameworks of ESP and EAP, others have been sceptical about the efficacy of such prescriptive teaching (Cope et al. 1993). Again within those frameworks, there are variations in the degrees of focus on lexico-grammar and context. Flowerdew (2002) notes that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs as well as the Sydney School pays more attention to lexico-grammar and rhetorical issues and the New Rhetoric group is more focused on situational context.

As the focus of this research is on the experiences of adaptation of South Asian students to their Australian postgraduate environment, certain insights from this overview of the concept of genre are particularly pertinent. Having been recognized that any given genre whether in academic or non-academic context, is socially and culturally constructed, the respondents of this study before coming to Australia had different orientations about academic genres (both written and spoken) based on their individual social and cultural contexts. In Australia they are being expected to comply with the new forms and standard of academic genres customary in Australian postgraduate academic settings. In this context, the study will consider genres more from a social constructivist point of view, rather than a pedagogical perspective, and examine how the respondents in question report adapting to relevant academic genres, both written and spoken texts, and the level

of their reported competence in the application of those genres to Australian standards.

Part II: Research on International Students in Higher Education

This part of the literature review will review studies related to international students' adaptation process focussing on two main themes: a) aspects of students' experiences across various background groups, and b) methodology. Some studies have dealt with international students' cultural differences and the influence of these on their adjustment to the western education system, whereas others have considered how students' L2 English affects their coping with English medium instruction, and communication in an all-English environment. Whilst some studies have focused on international students as a broad group, others have concentrated on those from specific backgrounds (e.g. Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC)). A few compare the adjustment experiences of local and international students.

With the formation of student diasporas, particularly in western universities, as highlighted in the first chapter, research interest in international students and their adaptation to university life in another country has grown (Andrade 2006; Wang & Shan 2007). In a review paper that has covered a wide range of literature about international students in English-speaking countries (primarily in the U.S.A, the U.K., Canada, Australia) from 1987 to 2005, Andrade (2006) has identified five broad themes in considering the experiences of international student that need close attention: international students' adaptation experiences, their challenges in the new academic settings, academic staff perspectives about international students, differences in adjustment between local and international students, and institutional support services. In characterising the adjustment difficulties of international students as being mainly due to cultural differences and 'English-related' (p.139), Andrade (2006, p. 151) suggests that institutions that "host international students or prepare students for study abroad experiences" should consider the students' adjustment issues and "enhance mutually rewarding practice of international study", including augmentation of support services.

Because of the rapidly growing student-diasporas in the English-speaking world, many of the studies have dealt with local issues in these national contexts. For example, Britton et al. (2003), Cheng and Alcantara (2007), Janssen and Carton (1999) and Zhang and Xu (2007) have all focussed on international student issues in the U.S., whereas Burnapp (2006), Radclyffe-Thomas (2007) and Wu et al. (2001) have focused on international students in the U.K. The growing student migration to New Zealand and Australia in the recent times, has also led to a significant amount of research about international students in these two southern hemisphere countries. To mention a few, Mills (1997), Youn and Kirknes (2003) and Li and Campbell (2006) have focussed on international students in New Zealand, whereas Arkoudis and Tran (2007), Borland and Pearce (2002), Jones (2005) and Kashima and Loh (2006) have explored issues of the international students in Australia. Other Australian studies, such as Biggs (1997), Grebennikove and Skaines (2007) and Kember and Gow (1991) have undertaken comparative analysis of experiences of international students and local Australian students.

Cultural difference and the International Students' Experience

The impact of cultural difference has been identified as an important factor in influencing international students' adjustment in a new country, both academically and socially. The Markedness Differential Hypothesis (Eckman 1977) and Contrastive Analysis (Lado 1957 in Ellis 1994) in second language acquisition – that assert that the greater the differences between a learner's L1 and L2, the more difficult it is to learn the L2 may be a relevant analogy in the case of differences between international student's own culture and their host culture (Shupe 2007; Triandis et al. 1994). However, some research has shown that when two languages are similar, learning and using nuances correctly can be problematic (Ellis 1994), suggesting that if this analogy were also applied to culture, cultural similarity may mislead by making the discrimination of nuances of difference more difficult.

A mismatch between what is expected from international students by academics in western universities and how those students understand expectations and perform as a result of cultural differences has been observed in many studies (Ballard & Clanchy 1997; Feast 2002; Pearce & Borland 1997; Wu et al. 2001). This approach to making sense of student experience has been to recognize cultural differences in learning and teaching styles and the impact these have on students' performance when they move from one context to another. For example, the body of research on students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) (Lee 1996; Zhang 2002) is premised on the concept of a Confucian way or culture of learning. However, Biggs (1997) has critiqued the simplistic assumption that Asian students of CHC have a rote learning style as being a western misunderstanding of the values and approaches in learning in the Asian context, especially in CHC. The impact of cultural differences on teaching and learning outcomes have also been discussed in the other studies (Crichton & Scarino 2007; Kember 2000; Kember & Gow 1991) and these will be reviewed later under the broader themes they deal with. Cultural differences have been attributed to have impacts on international students in different ways – such as in their adjustment process, their learning styles, the construction of their identity and on their learning outcomes. All these will be discussed in greater detail below.

International students' Adjustment Process

International students' overall adjustment has drawn attention from many researchers (Burnapp 2006; Li & Gasser 2005; Shupe 2007; Thakur & Hourigan 2007; Townsend & Lee 2004; Townsend & Wan 2007; Volet & Tan-Quigley 1999; Wang & Shan 2007; Yourn & Kirkness 2003). Looking at international students' adaptation experiences as a process of transformation, a number of researchers (e.g. Berry 2006b, Bochner 2006, Ward 2004) have drawn on the notion of the U-curve of acculturation. Drawing on three major approaches relevant to acculturation process: Culture learning, stress and coping and social identity, Ward (2004, p. 201) reiterates that individuals when exposed to a new culture experience enormous impact of stress, often referred to as culture shock, and emphasizes the need for “stress management skills and constructive coping mechanism”. She also suggests that a culture learning approach should highlight

culture specific knowledge, fluency in the language of the new culture, and observes that sojourners' learning of culture increases over time indicating a rising learning curve (pp.188-189). Her third approach, social identity, includes "intergroup perception and relations" (p. 204).

Drawing an analogy between international students' adjustment process and a journey from known context to unknown context and then in transforming the unknown context into a known context, Burnapp (2006) discusses how cultural theories of 'U curve' (Berry 2006b, p. 50; Bochner 2006, pp. 189-90), learning curve and the concept of third space operate in the adaptation process of international students in UK higher education. Drawing from the studies by Fougère (1976) and Tuan (1977), Burnapp (2006) defines *place* as a known context, and *space* as something unknown and abstract, and 'wider' than place. Comparing the journeys of international students from their home countries to their new educational landscape as a movement from place to space, he holds that through gradual adaptation, international students convert space into place. Emphasising the need for some kind of interventional course like EAP, Burnapp (2006) focuses on the value of encouraging reflective learning. Drawing on Grossberg's (1996) two models of identity: the intrinsic model that assumes that identity is formed by some 'intrinsic and essential' elements, and the extrinsic model that holds that identity is formed by external factors, and Crawshaw et al. (2001)'s four figures of identity – 'différance', fragmentation, hybridity and diaspora – Burnapp (2006) has suggested that 'hybridity' (p. 91) – referred to here as the third space, a concept which, according to Bhabha's (1994, p. 37) discursive point of view "constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew" – rather than complete acculturation as the ultimate outcome should be accepted, and to this end universities should target widening opportunities offered by potential synergy. However, there are quite strong perceptual controversies about this hybridised position between cultures and countries. Looking at it from a revolutionary as well as binary perspective, Anyanwu (2005) considers the concept as "a vantage position that enables one to freely traverse between disparate cultures ... an ideological space of discursive discrimination between

cultural signs and their external interpretation”, but also as a “... division between the haves and have-nots, and between colonisers and colonised, rather than bridge their gaps ...” (p. 94).

Cultural distance causes conflict and affects adjustments process negatively, and this, according to Shupe (2007, p. 572), reconfirms the U curve theory of acculturation. The cultural distance hypothesis holds that how much interpersonal interactions will be rewarding is dependent on the distance between the cultural backgrounds of the individuals involved. The more similar are the cultural backgrounds, the more rewarding are the interactions, and vice versa (Triandis et al.1994). Shupe (2007), Townsend and Lee (2004) and Townsend and Wan (2007), in their quantitative studies, have noted the negative impacts of cultural difference on international students’ adjustment continuum. Shupe (2007) has further demonstrated in the US context that conflicts arising from cultural differences or other reasons, affect work-related and socio-cultural adaptations which, in turn, interrupt psychological adaptation.

The adaptation process is influenced not only by the crisis period as conceptualized in the U-curve (Anderson, 1994), but also by positive experiences. Ramsay et al. (1999), in their comparative interview study on international and local students in an Australian university, have observed that international students experience more obstacles than local students, but both groups use positive experiences as opportunities which lead them to overcome their crisis more easily. They note that while local students draw on peer support strongly in overcoming obstacles, international students rely more on formal institutional support services.

To minimize the influence of cultural differences on the international students’ adjustment process, studies have emphasized the need for close contacts with the host culture. In their U.S. based study, Li and Gasser (2005) have underscored the significance of Asian international students’ contact with the host culture and their socio-cultural efficacy in their ultimate social adjustment. Similarly, Yang et al. (2006), referring to the Canadian context, have noted that competence and confidence in the language of the host country (in this case, English) “plays a

pivotal role” (p. 503) in establishing social contacts facilitating international students’ total adaptation process. In spite of consistent observations about the significance of the contribution of local contacts in the overall adjustments of sojourners, this is not free from debate. Contrary to these North American studies (Li & Gasser 2005; Shupe 2007; Yang et al. 2006), Myles and Cheng (2003) have noted that despite their low level efforts to have contact with native students, their international graduate student-respondents, adapted well to the host culture mainly “through their own network of international students with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 259). However, they admit that in learning about the host culture from co-nationals and ‘native language peers’, there is a possibility of cultural stereotyping in both directions (Myles & Cheng 2003, p. 251).

Cultural difference affects psychological adjustment. In their comparative study conducted on Australian local students and international students, Townsend and Lee (2004) have observed that international students face “problems of psychological adjustment” (p.149) in a new cultural context, and take a longer time than local students to adapt to the university environment. Due to the unfamiliar academic culture, they have found that international students find academic issues more challenging and are compelled to put higher priorities on academic issues than on social events, even though they consider them as obligations as well. Townsend and Wan (2007) in a longitudinal quantitative study comparing the experiences of international students studying in an Australian university’s offshore campus in their home country and in the university’s Australian campus, have also observed that socio-cultural adaptation in the new context is impeded initially, but grows gradually.

There has been some controversy among the researchers about the final adjustment level of international students. Though some studies (Burnapp 2006; Townsend & Lee 2004; Townsend & Wan 2007) acknowledge the application of the U-curve theory of acculturation, they differ in their observations about endpoint outcomes of the students they researched. Townsend and Lee (2004) and Townsend and Wan (2007) view integration as the endpoint outcome of the U curve, whereas Burnapp (2006, p. 81) identifies a hybrid-state of acculturation,

which he referred to as ‘third space’ (discussed earlier) as the endpoint adjustment level of international students. While Burnapp denies the possibility of full assimilation acculturation of international students into the mainstream culture, he predicts that the hybrid-state of acculturation changes constantly.

Academic success of international students is dependent to a great extent on their social and personal adjustments, which in turn are influenced by cultural differences. Whilst the studies by Wang and Shan (2006) and Zhang et al. (1999) – both about the Chinese international students in Australia – have underscored the same theme of the influence of cultural difference in adjusting in a new country (Australia), Zhang et al.’s (1999) qualitative study about Chinese students in Australia is limited to focus on academic adaptations, whereas Wang and Shan’s (2006) study has focused on both academic and social adjustments, including the problems the students face and the strategies they apply in overcoming such problems. In describing the impact of the cultural differences of their Chinese student-respondents, Zhang et al. (1999) have noted that, besides language difficulties, cultural differences have “significantly impinged upon the academic experiences” of the students, and warn that mere stereotyping of “international students as a homogeneous group of Asian international or Chinese learners” (p. 7) will not be helpful, rather suggesting that a better understanding of the differences may facilitate their adjustment process. Wang and Shan (2006) have conceived both academic and social adjustments as a single complex process, and identified both social factors, such as loneliness, and academic differences that ultimately impacted upon their overall adjustments. While Wang and Shan (2006) suggest institutional supports be expanded to bridge the cultural gap between international students and western universities, they also emphasize better pre-arrival orientation on western culture and education system.

Feeling of belongingness to the institutional community is an important factor that affects the adjustment process which, in turn, influences academic success as well. International students’ feeling of loneliness has been identified as a common aspect of their adaptation experiences in a new academic context, and that loneliness has been attributed to their cultural differences. Hellsten and Prescott (2004) in their Australian study have reported that international students continue

experiencing feelings of alienation and marginalisation within mainstream Australian population, Similarly, Sawir et al.'s (2007) study on cross-border students have found similar effects of loneliness of international students in Australian university level. The study has described the state of international students – particularly at their initial stage – as ‘neither inside nor outside’ and labelled that as a ‘relational deficit’ (p. 2), and found two main reasons of such loneliness: loss of family contact and absence of local social ‘networks’. They have further argued that international students’ classroom engagement, relation with teachers, staff and fellow classmates determine their institutional relations, and their level of loneliness is dependent on how distant are their institutional relationships, and observed that such loneliness is intensified by the institutional newness and unfamiliarity. Osterman’s (2000) study on student loneliness that observes that “Being accepted, included or welcomed leads to positive emotions ...The lack of belongingness is also associated with incidence of mental and physical illness and a broad range of behavioural problems...” (p. 327). Given that many international students come to study as the first step in the process of migration, Grinberg and Grinberg’s (1989) study on migrants that holds that in the initial stage of migration “one ceases to belong to the world one left behind, and does not belong to the world in which one has nearly arrived” (p. 23) has some relevance to international students as well.

In addition to the factors discussed above, lack of recognition has been a point of concern for international students. Such concerns have been found to be detrimental to international students’ adjustment in western universities. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) in their quantitative study of comparison between international and local American students have observed that international students are more subject to campus discrimination resulting in their homesickness, alienation and adjustment difficulties, than the local American students. In their qualitative study on Chinese postgraduate students in Australia, Wang and Shan (2007) have reemphasized the need of ‘respecting’ (p. 8) the academic cultural differences of international students. Pearson and Beasley (1996), Peel (1998), Poyrazli and Lopez (2007), Sawir et al. (2007) and Wang & Shan (2007) have recommended institutional intervention to reduce such negative environments, and adoption of strategies that will facilitate students’ adaptation process.

Transitional difficulties are an almost unavoidable element of the adjustment process of international students. Dawson and Conti-Bekkers (2002), Kantanis (2001), and Clerehan (2002) have dealt with the process of transition to university education. However, their focus is limited to first year transition history and institutional programs to ease transition, rather than on students' perception of postgraduate academic acculturation experiences. Andrade (2006) has also identified the need for greater attention to the transition process in the first year of international students' studies in a new context.

International students adopt different strategies in adapting to a new academic context. Kiley (2003) has differentiated the adjustment patterns adopted by Indonesian international postgraduate students in Australia. She classifies the students into three types of adjuster: transformer, strategist and conserver. Putting the groups on a continuum of change, she has identified two extremes – transformer and conserver – at each end, with the third group (e.g. strategist) in the middle. According to Kiley, the transformers, symbolized as high academic performers, have changed in an 'irreversible' way, though they have not 'become Australians' nor have stopped being Indonesian. Her transformers recognized the influence of the newness of the Australian society, whereas the conservers, who represent as relatively lower academic performers, have adopted an approach without bringing significant changes in their social, emotional and academic views. The choice of this approach was influenced by the students' short term sojourn, and their coursework degrees that required either short or no supervision. The middle strategist group had familiarised themselves with the requirements and adopted necessary strategies to meet those requirements. Kiley predicts that this later group is likely to 'readopt' necessary strategies to fit back in their home culture. Kiley also notes that her strategists and conservers had low proficiency in English with IELTS band scores of 6.5 or less. This has led her to believe that the strategies adopted by international students are determined, besides cultural and other factors, by the strength of their academic foundations, including English proficiency.

International students' adaptation to the academic institutes in a foreign country is influenced by treatment they receive from staff members. While Ballard and Clanchy (1991, p. 3) recognize the complexity of classrooms with international students, they suggest that some of the complexities can be overcome by bringing changes in the attitudinal behaviour of the students, but others require changes in teachers' behaviours. Youn and Kirkness (2003) have considered the effects of the cultural differences from the perspectives of the international academic staff, who are from overseas and have themselves been in transition (i.e. teaching assistants, teachers on exchange programs). Youn and Kirkness have established the fact that cultural differences cause problems not only for students, but for faculty members as well. Failure on the part of the academics to acknowledge and accommodate cultural differences including the learning styles of international students may prompt responses not conducive to adjustment. While Trice (2003), Wang and Shan (2007) and Youn and Kirkness (2003) have emphasized the importance of developing multicultural awareness among the teaching staff as a part of strengthening international students services, they have ultimately established the fact that the influence of cultural differences encompasses both staff and students.

Learning Style

The discourse of learning style of international students has occupied a significant part of the literature on international students. The concept of 'learning styles' has been applied by many researchers to make sense of the different approaches to learning adopted by different students including international students (Ballard & Clanchy 1997; Biggs 1990; Britton et al. 2003; Kember 2000; Kember & Gow 1991; Li & Campbell 2006; Meyer & Kiley 1998; Mills 1997; Pearson & Beasley 1996; Radclyffe-Thomas 2007; Ramburuth 2000; Ramburuth & McCormack 2001; Volet & Ang 1998; Volet & Tan-Quigley 1999; Wu et al. 2001; Zhang & Xu 2007);

Ballard and Clanchy have been instrumental in promulgating the concept of "clash of educational cultures" (Ballard & Clanchy 1997, p. viii). Ballard and

Clanchy (1991) have summed up the differences between attitudes to education held by western culture and traditional Asian cultures like CHC, and point out that in western culture, education at post secondary tertiary level is aimed at 'extending knowledge' (p.13), which Weigle (2002, p. 31) calls 'knowledge transforming', and in traditional cultures it is aimed at 'conserving knowledge' (p. 13). Without in-depth analysis of the learning practices of international students in general, and of traditional cultures, in particular, there have been a common stereotyping by western educators that international students, referring mainly to those from Confucius Heritage Culture (CHC) backgrounds are prone to memorisation and rote learning (Kember & Gow 1991), and encounter a 'learning shock' as they join the western academic system (Ballard & Clanchy 1997, p. 28).

Many researchers have held international students' cultural differences to be responsible for their preferred learning styles. For example, referring to Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) revised coinage of five dimensions of culture – power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism – collectivism, masculinity-femininity and Confucian dynamism – that are used for making judgments about how different cultures function differently, Zhang and Xu (2007) have attempted to explain why students from different cultures demonstrate different learning styles. For example, the Chinese students' orientation in collectivism and the American students' to individualism have been used to account for their preference for collaborative learning style and individualistic learning style respectively (Zhang & Xu 2007). In elucidating further, they have noted that the Chinese students' apparently passive style of learning can also be attributed to the dimension of high power distance and its resulting teacher-centred classroom practices that prevail in their home country. Indicating a positive transition, Zhang and Xu (2007) have noted the CHC students' rewarding experiences in adapting to American 'small power distance situation' (p. 55) where teacher and student are treated equally by each other, and also in adjusting to an interactive teaching-learning environment, even though they initially utilized some risk avoidance strategies. In another earlier study, drawing from a range of literature on international students, Pearson and Beasley (1996, p. 83) present Asian international students as having values in collectivism, maintaining high power

distance and employing memorisation and rote learning; and have attributed these paradigms to their cultural uniqueness.

A number of researchers have defied popular stereotyping about international students (Biggs 1997; Kember 2000; Li & Campbell 2006). Kember and Gow (1991) and Kember (2000) in their quantitative studies, have refuted what other researchers (Dunbar 1988, Reid 1989 in Kember & Gow 1991) and Phillips (1990) have attributed negatively to the learning style of international students with CHC background (often over generalized as Asian students).

One misconception about international students that has been perpetuated by some of the discussion concerning learning styles concerns international students' capacity for critical thinking. Acknowledging and accommodating the fluidity and diversity of the concept of critical thinking, Jones' (2005) comparative assessment between Chinese international students and Australian students indicates that in spite of their cultural differences and linguistic limitations, the conceptualisation of critical thinking within both groups is the same. Defying the observations that the Chinese students are passive learners, she emphasizes the 'profound significance' (p. 350) of the context of learning, and discourages treating international students as 'other' (p. 351). Her suggested importance of learning context confirms a similar recommendation that Chalmers and Volet (1997) have made after refuting the five frequently stereotyped misconceptions about South-East Asian students that these students are rote learners, passive learners, do not mix with local (Australian) students, lack analytical and critical thinking skills and are slow in acculturation. Accounting this stereotyping about international students by the western academic support service staff as being based on 'tacit assumptions', Volet (1999) justifies that the learning styles international students develop and bring with them are compatible to the systems they come from, and notes, in line with some earlier studies (Biggs 1991; Kember & Gow 1991), that CHC background students successfully transfer their high level motivation linked with better understanding of content, in other words, deep learning, a quality desired in the western academic culture. However, identifying some aspects of 'ambivalent transfer' (e.g. memorising study materials), 'difficult transfer' (e.g. participation in tutorials), and 'inappropriate transfer' (e.g. reporting verbatim) of

the CHC students, she suggests a pedagogic approach that should ensure “durable, flexible, meaningful and application oriented learning outcomes” (Volet 1999, pp. 630-40).

The dichotomy of deep and surface learning has been insufficient to describe international students’ learning styles. The quantitative comparative studies of Asian (mainly from South-East and Far East) international students and local Australian students by Ramburuth (2000) and Ramburuth and McCormack (2001), have analysed the learning diversity among the groups, and found that this dichotomy between deep and surface learning is not enough to explain the international students’ learning styles, which may be both “deep and surface in their learning” (Ramburuth 2000, p. 11). The Asian students in these studies were found to be using more deep motivation, surface strategies and achieving strategies than their Australian counterparts, who tended to be using deep strategies with surface motivation (Ramburuth & McCormack 2001). The differences in the learning style of the groups in Ramburuth and McCormack’s (2001) study are attributed to their differing cultural characteristics, but involve a much more complex interplay of motivations and strategies than a simplistic learning style dichotomy can capture. Furthermore, memorisation and rote learning do not necessarily signify surface learning. Kember (2000) and Kember and Gow (1991) have questioned such stereotyped assumptions that Asian students focus on memorisation and rote learning, attributing these practices to curriculum that requires reproductive approaches even if as a means of fostering deep learning.

Acknowledging the cultural differences and associated diversity in learning styles of international students, some different measures have been suggested, primarily focussed on pedagogical modifications and institutional support services (Biggs 1996, 1997; Radclyffe- Thomas 2007; Ramburuth & McCormack 2001; Volet 1999).

One way of dealing with the diversity in learning styles of international students is rethinking about pedagogical approaches. One of the frequently discussed teaching approaches that has been suggested is Biggs’ (1996, p. 360)

“constructive alignment”, an approach that considers the students as the key players in the learning process. Refuting the three popular overgeneralisations about Asian students – “that the Asian students memorize and are therefore surface learners”, that “the way Asian students learn is inferior to the problem solving and analytical skills of mainstream Australian students” and that “Asian students have a deficit to be remedied” (Biggs 1997, pp. 14-5), Biggs (1997) has recommended an approach to teaching which takes the student learning process into consideration and allows some concession required due to cultural differences in preference to one that either focuses on remedying perceived ‘deficits’ or changing pedagogy in narrowly culturally-specific way (Biggs 1997).

Drawing from a comparative study about CHC influenced students studying both in their home and Australian contexts, Volet (1999) in agreement with Biggs (1997), holds that neither the ‘assimilatory approach’, which is based on a deficit model and endeavours reconstructing individual students’ behaviours through remedial treatment, promotes adaptation, nor the ‘accommodation approach’ that is based on a customer-oriented model and aspires to adapting host educational context is appropriate. Rather she suggests a third approach which, similar to Biggs (1997)’s constructive alignment approach, should combine deeper conceptualisation, and flexible and sustaining learning outcomes (Volet 1999, pp. 639-40).

Greater institutional initiatives in multicultural campuses can make better sense of internationalisation of education bringing positive effects on its stake holders (Radclyffe-Thomas 2007; Ramburuth & McCormack 2001; Volet & Ang 1998). Predicting learning diversity in other academic contexts with the same kind of cross-cultural student populations, Ramburuth and McCormack’s (2001) study suggests the need for closer attention to learning diversity. Recognising the presence/availability of opportunities on international campuses for intercultural learning that can enrich both visiting international and local students leading to maximum benefit of internationalisation of higher education, Volet and Ang (1998) have also suggested greater responsibilities for the universities in promoting more conducive learning environments. Given their subject groups from CHC background, some studies about international students conducted in

non-Australian contexts (New Zealand, the US, and the UK) have made more or less similar observations. For example, Radclyffe-Thomas (2007) in her study about CHC students in the UK also has refuted the popular stereotyping about CHC students and emphasized the development of greater understanding about the international students which may help, on the one hand, maximum utilisation of opportunities present in a multi-cultural academic setting, and on the other hand, reduce the associated challenges therein.

To facilitate international students' adjustment, the need for greater discursive cooperation between teacher and students and fellow students has been emphasized. Indicating many of the international students' inclination towards passive form of learning, Britton et al. (2003) in their qualitative study on a wide range of international students in the US academic context have emphasized on the role of peers and the greater significance of teacher-student interactions, and has advocated more inclusion of international students in the classroom environment. Mills' (1997) comprehensive study involving three groups of subjects – international (South-East Asian) student, local kiwi (NZ) students and academics – suggests that differences were viewed as problematic (as per a deficit model), and have suggested greater responsibilities on the part of the academics. On the basis of a qualitative exploration about Asian students in the New Zealand context, Li and Campbell (2006) have reported some important but challenging issues about teaching Asian students. Whilst the study has challenged some of the taken-for-granted norms and practices of Asian students, it has also noted that these students' academic progress as well as their overall adjustment is impeded by cultural dissimilarities in classroom interactions and academic practices. The study's suggested approach of an adapted pedagogy with realignment with the needs of local and international students is consistent with what Biggs (1996, 1997) has proposed as noted earlier.

As a curative measure, extensive face-to-face teacher-student interaction has also been recommended. In their study about postgraduate students' learning experiences, Wu et al. (2001) have found that students face learning difficulties because of the gap between their perceived level of linguistic (English) competence and the actual competence they possess. Referring to computer aided

learning (CAL), the study has also noted that CD-ROM based language improvement program did not achieve the desired objectives, and students preferred more ‘teacher interaction’ (p. 304), and suggested that use of focus group discussion may be useful in identifying students’ learning needs.

Transformation of Identity

The issue of identity of international students has been brought to light in a number of recent studies (Arkoudis & Tran 2007; Chapman & Pyvis 2005; Kashima & Loh 2006; Orletti 2001). These studies have explored how the international students’ subjective entities have transformed with their changing positions in any given situation resulting in their new identities that have been conceptualized as non-unitary, decentred states of individual people that change over “historical time and social space”(Norton 1997, p. 411; 2000, p. 124). In their investigation of some Chinese postgraduate students in an Australian university, Arkoudis and Tran (2007) have analysed how these international students have used their agencies – a notion that denotes the “intentional actions of the students as they position themselves” (p.161) in a certain academic milieu. They show how the use of agency is dependent on each individual student and how they position themselves in a given context. Individual heterogeneity rather than cultural homogeneity is the guiding factor in employing their agency.

The intricacy of identity in the adaptation process of international students has been projected from different angles in different studies. For example, Kashima and Loh (2006) in their quantitative investigation of the impacts on their acculturation of the need for cognitive closure and international ties of the international students have noted that greater international ties help the students develop and exert new identities in the host context. Orletti’s (2001) study of social identity issues in the interaction between immigrants and non-immigrants also has some relevance to international students in the development of their identities. Drawing attention to multiple social identities, Orletti asserts that identity is constructed by many external factors – social status (native or non-native), skin colours, appearance, communicative role and language.

Taking an interpretivist position, Chapman and Pyvis (2005) have presented an emic description of experiences of students studying in an off-shore Australian university campus. Referring to Sachs' (2003) "professional identity" (p.124-5) and also to Wenger's (1998) five dimensions of identity, even though mediated in professional context: negotiated experience, community membership, a learning trajectory, a nexus of multi-membership and a relation between the local and global, Chapman and Pyvis (2005) have reiterated that individuals who realize social reality on the basis of their subjective views of the world need to be studied individually in order to get a holistic view of social reality. In answering the questions of how the students understand the dynamics of their particular educational context and how they sense themselves as students in relation to the communities to which they belong, Chapman and Pyvis note that the postgraduate students enrolled in an off-shore international program, construct a new identity by "reconciling and negotiating the various social roles" (p. 51) during their long term learning under the banner of western university, while also maintaining the demands of family, work and study in their home countries. However, they reveal how some common inadequacies with off-shore programs, such as limited contact with faculty members and distance from the university's main campus, debar them from constructing a different type of identity with a greater sense of belonging to the western university.

World view and religion play important role in shaping someone's identity including those of international students. Singh-Ghuman's (2001) qualitative study about young South Asian students in Australia and their parents has identified that "adherence to religion is a serious commitment" for South Asian young people and religion is the "mainstay of their identity" (p. 59). As a result their lifestyle is determined mostly by religious provisions. That religion influences acculturation has also been observed by Stodolska and Livengood (2006). Drawing from other studies (e.g. Eidsen 1999; Zaman 1997; Hoffman 1992) they have observed that dress, food and leisure behaviour constitute a significant part of acculturation. Citing the example of Muslim women's use of traditional clothing, Stodolska and Livengood (2006) have further noted that because of the religious obligations, groups prefer selective

acculturation in which they assimilate non-essential elements but retain some essential elements even though there is risk of being “identified as alien” (p. 314).

English Proficiency and International Students’ Experience

Another factor that has been instrumental in the adaptation of international students to the western English speaking countries is their proficiency level in English. The majority of international students studying in Australia are not native speakers of English, and their English language proficiency is an important factor that impacts on their adjustment, and affects successful participation in tertiary education in any English medium western university (Andrade 2006; Ballard & Clanchy 1997; Borland & Pearce 2002; Hellsten & Prescott 2004; Kiley 2003; Leder & Forgasz 2004; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000; Pearson & Beasley 1996; Singh-Ghuman 2001; Wang & Shan 2007). For example, Borland and Pearce (2002) in their qualitative study about international students with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), have argued that there is a complex interrelationship between a student's English language acquisition history, previous educational experience and exposure to academic cultures that contributes to different experiences of linguistic and cultural disadvantage in studying in an Australian university. Studies of student performance in specific genres of academic study, such as lecture listening (Flowerdew 1994) and note-taking, academic reading, academic oral presentation, writing in various academic genres (Flowerdew & Peacock 2001) have also directly or indirectly demonstrated a range of linguistic and non-linguistic skills that contribute to student experiences and outcomes.

There is considerable debate about appropriate level of English language competence and the value of widely accepted English tests – International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) – as measures of capacity to cope linguistically in an English medium tertiary learning environment. Trice (2003) in her study on international graduate students in the US context notes, “the TOEFL scores do not seem to be indicative of whether the students can speak English or not” (p. 394). Similarly, Feast (2002)

has advocated the need for higher IELTS band score for both undergraduate and postgraduate students' meaningful participation in their programs. Kiley (2003) observes that IELTS band score of 6 (or 5.5 for a limited number of courses) which allows international students to join postgraduate courses does "not necessarily guarantee" (p. 346) their successful participation in the academic programs. The controversy about the English language entry requirements has also been broadened in a study by Coley (1999). Coley (1999) reports the serious concerns of Australian academics at the low level English of both NESB and ESB students entering universities. However, others, such as Dooley and Oliver (2002), Kiley (2003) have argued that though the English proficiency tests like IELTS involve culturally appropriate test batteries, they have limited value as predictors of a students' preparedness for tertiary study in an English language and cultural context. Consistent with their argument Elder (2003), referring to the Diagnostic English Language Need Assessment (DELNA, a New Zealand version of Australian DELA), has noted 'only moderate correlations between language proficiency and over all GPA' (a performance indicator) and highlights that correlation also varied in strength from one discipline to another. The primary difficulty is that such tests primarily measure lexico-grammatical proficiency, rather than the test takers' sociolinguistic competence, and also cannot account for an array of other cognitive capacities and personal attributes, including what can be referred to as strategic competence that may contribute to a person's capacity to successfully make the transition from one linguistic and cultural context for academic study to another. In addition, it has been argued that performance in a test, such as IELTS, reflects more the test takers' familiarity with the specific format of the test and other factors, such as 'rater reliability' (Weigle 2002, p. 73), rather than their sociolinguistic competence. Referring to the importance of taking the writer's own position "in relation to the ideas put forth by another writer" (p. 95), Weigle (2002) points out that writing on a test and writing in an academic setting is not equally demanding. With these types of limitations of IELTS, the adequacy of an IELTS score as the lone indicator of NESB students' English language proficiency must be called into question.

Low English proficiency is an impediment to meaningful academic and social participation for many international students. Without specifying whether

problems were associated with written or spoken discourses Zhang et al. (1999) have noted that most of their South-East Asian student-respondents attributed their limited English as “the cause for the difficulties of their academic experience” (p. 7). Leder and Forgasz (2004), in their quantitative comparative study on mature Australian and international students, have referred to international students’ additional investment of efforts in making sense in English. The example that Leder and Forgasz (2004) have cited, that international students employ an additional phase of thought processing in their L1 first and then in English, gives an insight into the nature and depth of problems that international students face resulting from their English deficiency. Such problems compel them to spend their leisure time compensating further for their language deficiency rather than being able to relax.

For quite a significant portion of international students, the problems they face in Australia due to differences in social and academic cultures are magnified by their limited English (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000; Pearson & Beasley 1996; Singh-Ghuman 2001; Wang & Shan 2007). The quantitative research by Mulligan & Kirkpatrick (2000) and Pearson and Beasley (1996) and the qualitative research of Wang and Shan (2007), Zhang et al. (1999) – all about the South East Asian international students mostly influenced by CHC – have documented learning difficulties due to inadequate English. These include difficulties in “metapragmatic signalling”, “identifying lecture macrostructure” and “note-taking,” which contribute to their poor academic performances (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000, pp. 317-323). The need for interventional support strategies, including EAP courses to enhance students’ learning outcomes, has been advocated as a result of this research (Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000; Pearson & Beasley 1996; Wang & Shan 2007).

Sing-Ghuman’s (2001) mixed-method study, though conducted at a lower level academic setting, on South Asian young learners with “hyphenated identity” (p. 57) (e.g. Australian-Indian / Indian-Australian) has traced that the academic progress of these hyphenated Indian students with Urdu, Hindi or Punjabi as L1 is impeded by their poor English. Drawing from some earlier studies (e.g. Bhachu 1985; Verma & Ashworth 1986), Sing-Ghuman concludes that Indian students

whose first language is not English “are handicapped by their written English in that they find it difficult to understand and to express themselves when dealing with abstract concepts in language based subjects”(Singh-Ghuman 2001, p. 60). In spite of their inheritance of English in some form from the British legacy in the subcontinent through the family chronicle, the hyphenated young Indian students have difficulties in maintaining simultaneously two languages: their L1 and English. However, they are frequently discovered in a bilingual context. The parents and elderly members of such families, for communication among themselves, mostly use their L1. But the young generation communicate differently. When they interact with their parents they use either their L1 or mixed codes of L1 and English, but when they interact with conational peers they mostly use English.

Negotiating Spoken Discourse

Effective performance in spoken genres in academic and academic-related settings is a prerequisite for successful participation in any English medium university. While the academic spoken genres, on the one hand, generally encompasses a wide range of activities, such as classroom interaction with teachers and peers for clarification of and discussion on taught lectures, giving input to tutorial classes, facing viva voce demonstration of laboratory tests, and participation in seminars (both as presenter and audience), the academic-related spoken sub-genre, on the other, may cover oral communication at the university library, bookshop, enrolment desk, gymnasium and other on-campus sites. Emphasising the significance of spoken communication in the academic setting, Mauranen (2001) has noted that a great deal academic discourse takes place in the form of speech rather than in writing (p. 165), and the international students who are part of the academic landscape are likely to be affected in their on-campus adjustment by the quality of their mastery of spoken English as long as they are studying in an English medium western university. Ballard and Clanchy (1997) hinted at the embarrassment arising from poor spoken communication in classrooms.

Meaningful negotiation in spoken genres depends, as Dias et al. (1999 in Paltridge 2001) and Paltridge (2000) have outlined, not only on knowing the ‘textual

features', but also on having comprehensive knowledge of the target "culture, circumstances, purposes and motives that prevail in particular setting" (Paltridge 2001, p. 7). Referring to a spoken sub-genre (e.g. introduction to conference presentation), Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) have observed that lack of mastery of such spoken genre may "pose an even greater problem" (p. 46) for the presenter than the presentation of the main paper, and have apprehended that speakers of other languages may face greater problems due to their "culturally and linguistically based differences" (p. 65), and suggested some rhetoric/syntactic preferences, such as use of short interactive statements rather to passives and extrapositions.

Spoken communication may result in negative experiences due to poor English. Volet and Tan-Quigley (1999) in their parallel presentation of staff's and international students' interpretations of interactions between them have reported that such interactions are often turned into 'awkward' (p. 113) experiences. They have also attributed such awkward experiences resulting from strained and broken-down communication to cultural differences, hierarchy in positions as well as to language related problems. Both staff and students admit that students' limited English marked with juxtaposition of a "manufactured pace of speech" (p. 103) and poor comprehensibility are the main causes of some communication breakdowns.

A complex relationship is also associated with the variety of English used in the classroom and the identity of international students. While Andrade (2006) has summed up, among other issues, that the international students' difficulties with listening comprehension of lectures and reading, note-taking and oral communication are associated with their poor English skills, Hellsten and Prescott (2004, p. 347) have reported a complex impact created around the limited English of international students. Their study has indicated that when lecturers use English with a low-level register to help international students coping with their linguistic deficiency, the international students view this use of a low level register as evidence of marginalisation and consider that their expectation to improve their English is compromised as their exposure to a high level register of English is denied.

The Gap in the Literature

As highlighted in Chapter I, international students come to Australia from different parts of the world. Although they share some cultural commonalities, they also present a lot of differences. Some studies of international students' adaptation experiences contribute insights that are informative for a wide range of international students and have relatively comprehensive application. For example, Borland and Pearce (2002) explore quite broadly how non-English speaking background (NESB) students' academic outcomes are influenced by their English language history and cultural capital. Other studies are specific to certain student groups. The existing body of research has heavy weighting on Chinese students with CHC backgrounds, often referred to these more generically as Asian students (Biggs, 1996, 1997; Biggs & Watkins, 2001; Watkins & Biggs, 2001, Arkoudis & Tran 2007). This research has attempted to demystify academic behaviours of and practices with these 'Asian' international students and has unravelled the paradox of Chinese teaching and learning, showing that the teaching and learning conditions prevailing in the Chinese context that western educators perceive to be discouraging actually generate positive outcomes and have been poorly and superficially understood by many western researchers. The focus of some other studies about international students is limited to undergraduate level (e.g. Leder & Forgasz 2004; Jones 2005; Kember & Gow 1991), and so have failed to capture the complexities of postgraduate studies for international students.

Besides that, in many studies the denotations of international and Asian students can be misleading. Studies with specific international student groups, such as Chinese or South East Asian students with CHC backgrounds, tend to be presented as representing the overall international student cohort, without even mentioning the cultural uniqueness of other parts of Asia. International students have very often been viewed as a homogeneous group and their differences have been overlooked (Andrade 2006; Trice 2003; Wang & Shan 2007). Failure to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of students' cultural backgrounds leads to simplistic hypotheses and stereotyping. For a comprehensive understanding of

international students, differences in their culture, gender, degrees they are pursuing should also be taken into consideration.

The literature review makes it evident that a wide range of issues about international students has been covered, but at the same time it reveals that there is an imbalance of attention to different backgrounds of students. Whether international students have been termed as Asian, South-East Asian, Chinese, or Taiwanese, most of the studies reviewed above have had their main focus on students with CHC backgrounds. Students from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, referred to in this study as South Asian students, constitute a large proportion of the international student cohort in Australia. Although they share some commonalities with other international students, they also differ in many more ways. There is little reason to assume that findings from studies about other Asian /international students can be unconditionally applied to them.

South Asian students making the transition to postgraduate study in Australia not only have to cope with linguistic demands of their new learning context, but simultaneously need to adapt to a more learner-centred and autonomous style of learning, to become participants in new academic discursive structures that value the critical appraisal of and application of knowledge, and to learn to interpret and live in a different society. Whilst there has been very little research located concerning South Asian students (Arambewela 2003; Borland & Pearce 2002; Kashima & Loh 2006; Siemensma 2001; Singh-Ghuman 2001), this has pointed to substantial cultural and linguistic issues in academic acculturation and adjustment. Borland and Pearce (2002) have briefly explored how one Indian postgraduate (MBA) student has experienced the process of adjusting to the demands of formal academic written genres. Arambewela (2003), in his study on international postgraduate student satisfaction, researching students from India, Thailand, Indonesia and China studying in five Australian universities, identifies that international students have had high expectations from the university they attended, and have reflected their varying levels of post-choice satisfaction in relation to what they expected. Siemensma's (2001) study covers students and academics of MBA programs in India and Australia, and besides looking at the MBA program from teaching, learning and social perspectives, she explores how

the students and academics perceived their identities as a result of being associated with a professional course, like the MBA. While Kashima and Loh (2006) have highlighted the acculturation process of South Asian international students from the perspective of differences of need for cognitive closure and also from the point of their international network, Sing-Ghuman (2001) focussed on the adjustment process of hyphenated Indian-Australian school goers in respect with their religious and linguistic orientations.

The limited focus of the present body of research about the South Asian students establishes that South Asian students in Australia have been relatively little researched. What lecturers and others need is research that can give them a deeper understanding of the differences that might need special attention and consideration, in the context of a broader and richer understanding of the process of academic transition and acculturation. Given the fact that South Asian international students' issues have not as yet had full proper attention, further investigation is needed to explore how South Asian students, with their distinct social and academic cultural traits, linguistic orientations, and motivations, adjust in the Australian postgraduate context. With this justification, this study attempts to fill that gap.

Chapter 3

Methodology

“The familiar is more difficult to observe”

- Denning 2004

Credible studies need to follow acceptable methodologies. Merriam (1988) has observed that a research design is like an ‘architectural blueprint’, which is determined by “how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises and the type of end product desired” (p. 6). This means that in explicitly developing a research methodology, it is important to achieve a logical fit between what the study sets out to do and what it ultimately uncovers.

Rationale for the Qualitative Approach

As my aim in this study is to provide a better understanding of the different ways in which South Asian postgraduate coursework students adapt to the Australian postgraduate setting, this necessarily encompasses socio-cultural, academic, economic and linguistic issues. For a number of reasons that I will put forward below, an analytical and interpretive approach, rather than a quantitative approach, was considered likely to be more valuable, so I opted for a qualitative paradigm. Referring to Kuhn’s term ‘disciplinary matrix’, Schwandt (1997) notes that the term ‘paradigm’ connotes a cross-disciplinary sharing of “commitments, beliefs, values, methods and assumptions about research” (p. 109), which usually gains its meaning from interpretations of “non-numeric data in the form of words” (p. 130). Denzin and Lincoln (1998) have viewed qualitative research to be “multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 3).

Identifying critical developments in social science research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have outlined a chronicle of eight historical moments which they define as: (1) traditional (1900 -1950); (2) the modernist, or golden age (1950 -1970); (3) blurred genres (1970-1986); (4) the crisis of representation (1986-1990); (5) the post-modern, a period of experimental and new ethnographies (1990 -1995); (6) post-experimental inquiry (1995-2000); (7) the methodologically contested present (2000 - 2005); and (8) the fractured future (p. 3). They have called the fractured future ‘the eighth moment’. Adopting their segmentation and analysis, this study spans two of these periods: the “methodologically contested present” and “the eighth moment”. Thus it is not free from the influence of the post-modern and post-experimental inquiry, which indicated a concern for story-telling as a new way of retelling human experiences. Echoing the tone of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) I have engaged the story-telling approach as an attempt to “provide hopes, meet needs, achieve goals and fulfil promises of a free democratic world” (p. 3).

Besides the above concerns, I felt sceptical about the suitability of quantitative study for understanding the adaptation experiences of international students whose stories include what LeCompte et al. (1992) termed ‘sensory narratives’ (p. xv). By sensory narratives they mean narratives or stories that include non-verbal codes like body language and non-verbal gestures and sounds as well as explicit verbal utterances. When the data includes ‘sensory narratives’, it suggests that quantitative methods would not be suitable for bringing out the meanings of such narratives, and that this necessitates an interpretive paradigm instead.

Consistent with its historical turning points, the qualitative research approach that has been adopted and recognized in social science since 1970 has embraced the traditions of post-positivism, post-foundationalism, and post-structuralism (Denzin & Lincoln 2003) . In the midst of the debate as to superiority between quantitative and qualitative approaches, while positivism claims to bring precision to the findings out of numeric data, which quantitative researchers argue to have impartiality and objectivity, it has certain limitations with regard to social and behavioural sciences in which the human voice plays a very dominant role. Against this backdrop, *post-positivism* – a version of “positivism with a human

face”– emerged “to move away from scientism with its rigid, deterministic views of a single objective reality towards acceptance of the value laden, social context of inquiry” (Padgett 2004, p. 15). As a gradual change, interpretivism – an approach of “clarification, explication, or explanation of the meaning of some phenomenon” (Schwandt 1997, p. 73) – with its close connection with phenomenology and hermeneutics, appears to focus on narratives and the meaning of human experience, and post-structuralism embarks on treating “language as ever changing and unreliable as representation of some external reality” (Padgett 2004, p. 15).

Qualitative research is referred to using a number of terms and associated concepts. Tesch (1990) has identified some forty-six terms that are associated with qualitative research. Different qualitative researchers have conceptualized qualitative research in very diverse ways, which accounts for the variety of these terms and concepts. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have further described the sprawling and ever changing notion of qualitative research, emphasising its complexity and multi-dimensionality:

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, and sometimes counter disciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multi-paradigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multi-method approach. They are committed to naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p. 7).

Kirk and Miller (1986) have observed that “qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language on their own terms” (p. 9), and this encapsulates what I am aiming to achieve in my study. My task in this study is similar to what Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Vidich and Lyman (2000) have assigned to qualitative research in sociology and anthropology, to understand the ‘other’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p. 2; Vidich & Lyman 2003, p. 56); and with the commitment of “maintaining authenticity in mind”, the narrative in this study has been developed utilising a qualitative approach (Schwandt 2000, p. 189). As the study involves picking up insights from different bodies of knowledge, the existing academic literature and the knowledge recounted by

international students, as the researcher I have become a kind of ‘bricoleur’ or a ‘maker of quilts’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 5), and the ‘bricolage’ – the outcome – is an ‘emergent construction’ (Weinstein & Weinstein in Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 5).

Studies of students in higher education have mostly adopted quantitative methods (e.g. Cassidy & Eachus 2000; Dao et al. 2007; Grebennikove & Skaines 2007; Jones 2005; Kashima & Loh 2006; Kember & Gow 1991; Meyer & Kiley 1998; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000). Researchers, such as LeCompte et al. (1992), present strong arguments about the pervasiveness of quantified research, particularly in relation to higher education. In contrast, there has been relatively little qualitative reflection on international students’ experiences (Dao et al. 2007; Grebennikove & Skaines 2007; Kashima & Loh 2006; Kember & Gow 1991; Meyer & Kiley 1998; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000). I am persuaded that qualitative approaches would be an appropriate means to analyse the students’ stories from their own points of view to portray a picture of their adaptation experiences marked with their individual idiosyncrasies in a manner as authentic and complete as possible, despite the controversies as to the objectivity of such an approach.

Qualitative Approaches to Data collection

While any research relies on data, the quality of qualitative studies is dependent on rich data. Regarding data sources, Patton (2002, p. 4) has observed that qualitative findings mainly grow out of three kinds of data collection: i) in-depth open-ended interviews; ii) direct observation; and iii) written documents.

To Kahn and Cannel (in Marshall & Rossman 2006, p. 101), interviewing is a ‘conversation with a purpose’. Interviews provide direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Interviews are used for different purposes in different contexts. To differentiate the research interview from those of journalists or talk shows, Wengraf (2001) has stated that we might speak of its width (i.e. its consistent development) instead of its depth. However,

that again depends on its purpose. Referring to interview as a “conversational research journey”, Miller and Crabtree (2004) have observed that the interview approach allows a “listening space where meaning is constructed through an interexchange and co-creation of verbal viewpoints in the interest of scientific knowing” (p. 185).

One of the major sources of data for qualitative research is in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews, defined as “repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants’ perspectives in their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words” (Taylor & Bogdan 1984, p. 56), are a kind of extended story through which we can know the ‘other’. Qualitative researchers have argued that the purpose of in-depth interviews is “not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used, but to understand the experience of other people and the meaning they make out of that experience” (Seidman 2006, p. 9). Seidman (2006) has further argued that “stories are a way of knowing” and that “telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their streams of consciousness”(p. 7). Eliciting stories is one of the primary aims of the qualitative interview.

Interviewing involves a variety of forms. The most common form of interviewing is the individual, face-to-face interview. While most qualitative interviews involve open-ended questions, interviews can be distinguished by the degree of structure of the questions. They range from structured interviews to the informal conversational style interview. Compared to structured interviews where questions are prepared in advance and all participants are interviewed using the same set of questions, with minor variations depending on the interview circumstances (Fontana & Frey 2005), a semi-structured format allows more flexibility for both the parties whilst preserving a degree of commonality in the overall structure. In contrast, unstructured interviews reflect a fluid process, but may run the risk of losing relevance to the study in question, and also make the collection of systematic data for a number of interviewees a lengthy process. Given these pros and cons of different approaches to interviewing, for this study it was decided that the most appropriate interview format to adopt was

semi-structured in-depth interviews. This would enable the same broad areas of questioning to be covered for all informants, whilst not being overly rigid and prescriptive in the precise questions that are asked.

To supplement in-depth interviews, focus group discussion can be a valuable additional data collection method. Fontana and Frey (2000, p. 651) have defined focus group discussions as a qualitative data gathering approach that takes advantage of structured interviewing techniques performed in a group setting. Referring to its mechanism, Herndon (1993) has noted that “focus groups rely heavily on member interaction to stimulate ideas” (p. 40) rather than on the more familiar and linear question-and-answer format used in one-on-one interviews. As a means of triangulation and filtration, questions are designed in advance for use in the focus groups. The prompts that the interviewer uses to elicit deeper information in a face-to-face interview are replaced by the participants’ comments and counter comments in a focus group. On many occasions, focus group dynamics can spur new insights and understandings among the participants, which in turn helps the researcher. Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 364) have given a precise idea of focus group discussion in which the “setting is formal and preset, the role of the interviewer is directive, question format is structured, and the purpose is exploratory”.

However, there are some potential drawbacks in focus group discussions, particularly if the ‘structuredness’ is lost and the discussion goes uncontrolled. Glaser (1992) has warned that depending on 1) the diversity of the participants, 2) the handling efficiency of the researcher and 3) the time limitation, the quality as well as amount of data may be limited. Another concern about focus group discussion is that it does not guarantee confidentiality as the discussion is shared by a group. Suggesting that in spite of these limitations, focus group discussion is a helpful means of triangulating and explicating data received from other sources, Morgan (2004) has argued that in a focus group, “participants query each other and explain themselves to each other ... (it is) more than the sum of separate individual interviews” (p. 272), and offers “data on the extent of consensus and diversity among the participants” (Morgan & Krueger 1993 cited in Morgan 2004).

Data from observations consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviour, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organisational processes that are part of observable human experience. Journal observation is a useful tool in depicting human behaviors and has the advantage of being able to include information received through sensory narratives (as noted above) as well as experiences shared by the respondents outside any formal recording. Sessions need to be interpreted in context and to capture this context fully necessitates journal keeping. LeCompte et al. (1992), referring to Glasser (1978), have underscored the importance of journal keeping stating that the history of the research, the research memos and other observations, which can cover respondents' hunches, reactions to events, worries, discoveries, evolving conceptions, should be recorded for meaningful interpretation. Mulhall (2003 p. 306) has acknowledged that unstructured observation, contrary to structured observation that is used in the positivist paradigm, "is important to understand and interpret cultural behaviour", and for the "co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the researched". The journal notes are consulted when making sense of the respondent data later during the analysis period. Otherwise, important clues and indications might get lost, resulting in a less complete picture.

In the research presented here, my intention is to retell and interpret the stories of adaptation experiences of ten postgraduate international students during the first two semesters of their quest for postgraduate education at Southern University in Melbourne. To achieve this, I decided to utilize in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the main sources of the informants' stories. The in-depth interviews with each student were intended to take place twice in a semester – one within a week or two after the semester started and then the other at the end of the semester making all together four sessions. Details of the interviews conducted and dates for each participant are located in Appendix A. Difficulties associated with participant recruitment and identifying acceptable interview time slots due to study and employment pressures meant that this intension for precise spacing was not able to be fully realized. The actual number of interview sessions per participant varied between three and four spread across each person's first 9 to 12 months at SU. Each interview session lasted for 45 – 65 minutes at a time.

Two focus group discussions were designed to be held one at the end of each semester, but as not enough participants could be recruited in first semester after the study commenced, the rest were recruited in the following semester, thus resulting in two groupings of participants. With the first recruited group, two focus group discussions were organized, but with the second group only one focus group discussion was able to be organized. All of the focus group discussions were held on the University campus.

In addition, I also maintained a journal for data that I came across during informal social interactions beyond these formal sessions. The journal observations were useful in supplementing the data collected from the interviews and focus groups. The journal also included context and culture specific interpretation of non-verbal codes that participants used sometimes.

Drawing together material from these three main sources, as researcher I analysed the students' stories and attempted to make sense of them and present the shared experiences and individual uniqueness of the ten students' adaptation experiences.

Data Collection for the Study

Relationship with the Respondents

If we want to build a story or a narrative of someone's experiences, we need to know about them. If we want to make the story of a living person a credible and reliable one we need to meet them, have extended talks with them and, if possible live with them, like a method actor who lives the life of the character they intend to portray. Grant and Fine (1992) have described, for example, how Judith Rollins worked as a domestic for several employers and experienced directly the emotional and ethical dilemmas of such employees when she was researching the relationship between domestic workers and their employers. Her reflection on her own experience as a domestic worker added richness to her findings from the data collected from her subjects. While Gergen (2001) describes interviews as the sites

for respondents “telling their stories to empathic listeners whose projects were framed as having both personal and political emancipatory potential”, Brinkman and Kval (2005, p. 158) have justified the “intimate and caring exchanges” in interviews as appropriate for research.

While I was very keen on getting an in-depth perspective on the experiences of my student-respondents, locating myself close to them, I was also aware of the acceptable level of closeness, so that the personal lives of the students are not invaded, thus potentially threatening the validity of the study. This means that it is important that the researcher’s involvement with his/her participants is not so close as to distort the nature of the participants’ lives and experiences. Referring to Connelly and Clandinin (1999)’s citation of Hogan, Gowans emphasized the need for developing ‘connectedness’ in research about human experiences (p. 64). While I would agree with the level of familiarity Gowans (1999) employed with her respondents for her study about missionaries’ second language learning strategies in Nepal, I remain strongly sceptical about the level of intimacy Wolcott developed with his respondent, Brad, for his study titled ‘Adequate Schools and Inadequate Education’ in which he had unlimited access to his respondent and felt that “there seemed no topic that we could not discuss, no aspects of his (or my) life about which we did not talk freely” (Wolcott 1994, p. 358).

Keeping the importance of familiarity and the danger of excessive intimacy in mind, I aimed to develop a moderate level of closeness with my respondents, so they felt comfortable to share personal lived experiences. In a context of sharing South Asian social values, this was easier for me to achieve with the male students because of our shared gender. However, I believe that the female respondents, by the end of two semesters of ongoing conversation, also felt confident and relaxed about sharing even some of their personal gender specific experiences. For example, when I asked Dina if she would allow me to talk in-depth about some issues to do with her being a female student, which I believed might be sensitive, she assured me, “Please feel free to ask”.

The interpersonal relationship between me and the participating postgraduates – resulting from the fact that I entered into a bifocal age more than a decade ago and

they are yet to reach that stage, and that I have been an academic that positions me with a special and respectable identity, by virtue of the socio-cultural norm which both the postgraduates and I share – has impacted both in positive and negative ways. Because of the generation gap between us, the students did not appear to hesitate in sharing some personal issues such as family matters or being approached offensively by course mates and strangers of the opposite sex. In contrast, because of my social position as an academic, who they might have assumed to have an anti-brain-drainage philosophy, many of the participants opted not to openly discuss seeking permanent residence in Australia, although this motivation emerged over time.

For the interpretation of the stories, this study has drawn on two perspectives namely, constructivism and grounded theory, to which is added features of hermeneutic methodology, and a brief discussion of my understanding of these is necessary at this point.

A frequently used research orientation in qualitative studies, constructivism holds that knowledge is not created independently rather it evolves out of the realities that exist at a given point of time. Denzin and Lincoln (2003c) further explain:

the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondents co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 35).

Vanderstraeten and Biesta (cited in Maxcy 2003) have identified two types of constructivism – individualistic (subjective) and sociological (inter-subjective). Another prominent constructivist, Dewey (cited in Maxcy 2003, p. 59) has argued that “humans live in a common world which is nevertheless non-subjective”, and he also holds that humans do not bring to their experience of this world any set of structures or a priori knowns; rather through social transactions we understand the existence of multiple subjective realities. Referring to Lincoln & Guba (1985), Schwandt (1994) has observed that the constructivist approach is ‘idealist’ in the sense that reality is a construction of the individual mind (p. 128). In other words, ‘reality’ is perceived differently by different viewers and shaped differently by different bodies of experiences of individual observer-constructivists. Lincoln and Guba (cited in Guba & Lincoln 2005) sum up saying

that “constructivism adopts a relativist ontology (relativism), a transactional epistemology, and a hermeneutic, dialectical methodology” (p. 184).

The second perspective I have drawn on for interpretation, ‘grounded theory’, refers both to a “method of inquiry and to the product of inquiry”, providing a set of flexible analytic guidelines that enable researchers to focus their data collection and build inductive middle-range theories through successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development (Charmaz 2005, p. 507). Referring to the uniqueness of grounded theory, Charmaz (2005) observes that the grounded theory approach keeps researchers close to their worlds and helps develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts from their empirical materials which not only synthesizes and interprets them but also openly acknowledges the processual relationship (p. 508). Glaser and Strauss (cited in Minichiello et al. 1995, p. 75) have viewed grounded theory as a “theory drawn or teased out of the data gathered”. The data that I have collected through interviews, focus group discussions and observations noted in my journal have been analysed to draw out patterns as well as variations in the adjustment process of the respondents.

Hermeneutics is the study of the text that counts the body of conversation that is created out of interviews between the researcher and the researched. Modern hermeneutics is the study of how meaning and understanding is achieved when we are confronted with new, difficult, or ‘other’ experiences or texts (Gadamer 2007 [1966]). Geertz (1993 [1983]) in his epigrammatic definition described hermeneutics as the “understanding of understanding” (p.5). It is an interpretive approach to drawing meaning(s) out of a given text in a given circumstance from a given standpoint. In an introductory note, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) have defined hermeneutics as an “approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process” (p. 27). With regard to this study, as a member of the broader cultural community that the participants come from, I am quite familiar with their cultural understanding and expectations in university learning and these understandings to the interpretative process. Besides that, being a mature student with international experiences beyond Australia, I am relatively privileged in having access to prior personal

intercultural educational experience that I can draw on in making sense of my participants' current experiences.

Recruitment

The process of recruitment of the respondents for this two semester longitudinal study started with an invitation through open fliers posted in different locations of Southern University. As a researcher I was aware of the culture-specific expectation of the proposed respondents that the researcher should contact them personally and seek their consent to join the study, so I also made personal contact with the prospective respondents. While one responded to the invitation-flier, and a few others to personal contacts positively, the rest of the respondents then were recruited using the snow-ball method. In order to identify new students from South Asia, I attended some orientation programs arranged by Southern University's international office, and faculties' receptions for incoming international students. Aware that some respondents may resign from the study, I initially recruited thirteen respondents out of which ten remained with the study to the end of the required period, which was the first two semesters of their study.

Those who resigned were one Pakistani and two Indian postgraduates. While the Pakistani postgraduate had to return home due to family reasons, the two Indians declined to make time for interviews after the two sessions.

Prior to recruitment, details of the study – its focus themes, nature of involvement, the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any obligation, and issues related to privacy and confidentiality – were explained to the interested participants. The recruitees were selected from all four faculties of Southern University – Arts, Science and Engineering, Business and Law, and Human Development – and all had commenced postgraduate coursework studies. Of the ten respondents, there were four from India, four from Bangladesh and two from Pakistan and across the group there were six males with at least one from each of the three countries and four females from two of the targeted South Asian countries, Pakistan (one) and Bangladesh (three). Further details of the respondents are summarized in Table 1 with short profiles of each also provided later in this chapter.

Interviews: Process and Setting

Interviews were conducted at least three times with each of the respondents over a period of two semesters, spanning in total roughly nine months. The series of semi-structured interviews made it possible to gain information about the students' adaptation experiences at different phases and also their feelings at different points of adaptation. It often happened that they changed their views about different aspects of their experiences at different points of time. Rarely did they remain consistent with or rigid about what they had felt at the earlier phases of their settlement. This serial interviewing has enabled me to capture the temporality of their views and feelings and thus to understand the changing trajectories of their adaptation experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have claimed that 'temporality' is a key concept in understanding human experiences, and to them "experiences taken collectively are temporal" (p. 19). They have argued that better understanding of life is not possible if experiences are seen as they are "here and now" rather than looking at them as a continuum. Geertz's (1993 [1983], p. 19) key concept, "the refiguration of social thought" encapsulates the way in which temporal change is a standout feature of any study about human behaviour. With this problem in mind, the serial interviews with each respondent were arranged at gaps that allowed some changes to take place, including exploration in the analysis of how temporality shapes experience.

The interview sessions (details in Appendix – A) were held mostly in a private environment (e.g. in the respondents' apartments, in the researcher's office, or in a private study-room in the university library). Sometimes, for reasons of the respondents' convenience, sessions took place in open areas, such as a quiet corner of a convenient fast food restaurant. In none of the situations were the respondents' privacy and confidentiality threatened. Although all the interview sessions were pre-arranged, meaning they were formal, the real interview session always started only after some informal warm-up interaction, and this helped to set a tone and create a productive interpersonal climate or 'establish ... a rapport' (Minichiello et al. 1995, p. 64), and that ultimately facilitated the un-hesitated flow of narratives from the respondents. As time passed and the familiarity

between the researcher and the respondents deepened, the storyline became more and more fluent and unimpeded. At the beginning of each session the respondents were requested to identify themselves, which, along with the subsequent conversation, was recorded on tape. The researcher, was looking for ‘the emic perspective’ (Marshall & Rossman 2006) as opposed to the etic perspective. Emic and etic perspectives – etymologically derived from linguistic terms phoneme and phonetics which refer to sounds as “internal function of a language and their acoustic properties” respectively (Geertz 1993 [1983], pp. 56-7) – are sometimes used to mean experience-near and experience-distant concepts. According to Geertz (1993 [1983]), “an experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone ... might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellows see, feel, think, imagine, and so on....” and “an experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another ... employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims” (p.57). To proceed with the emic perspective, the researcher introduced initial topic questions and then the respondents were encouraged to talk at length sharing their own perspectives and experiences. They were allowed to proceed in a relatively unstructured fashion to provide an opportunity for each participant to raise issues or talk through issues, not limited by the researcher, and talk about their issues at length. Sometimes there was a tendency among some of the respondents of avoidance and giving brief responses. The researcher, very often in such circumstances, had to provide some prompts to draw out detailed information and explanation. The recorded tapes were secured and then replayed and transcribed soon after the interview so that details of the interview were still fresh in the researcher’s mind.

Focus groups

Initially I had intended to organize two focus group discussions – one in each semester. However, the recruitment of all the required number of respondents was not possible during the second semester of 2004, which was when the recruitment process was able to start after ethics approval had been granted. The intake of international students mid-year is limited, and there were fewer interested respondents who could fulfil the selection criteria than I needed. The additional participants required for the study were recruited at the beginning of the following

semester i.e. the first semester 2005. As a result, the first focus group discussion was limited to the first batch of respondents. The following semester, the recruits of the first batch attended their second discussion while the second batch of recruits had only one focus group discussion. Because of the non-availability of respondents, another group discussion was not held for those who commenced in Semester 1, 2005. While the researcher was the moderator of the focus group discussions, there was an assistant who helped with recording and documentation.

English being the only common lingua-franca for the respondents and the researcher, all the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in English. However, a limited amount of social interaction beyond formal sessions between the researcher and the respondents was in their shared vernaculars. Relevant parts of these types of interactions were recorded in the observation journal.

The focus group discussions were used for triangulation of the data collected through individual interviews. As a process, the questions that were raised in the focus group discussions were chosen mostly from one-to-one interviews taken earlier and identified as warranting further clarifications. The focus that evolved, considering counter arguments and cross examination of what participants shared, allowed the refinement of the understanding about them – about their experiences. Insight into some of the issues that were understood vaguely earlier during one-to-one interviews (e.g. motive of seeking permanent residence in Australia) was possible to achieve.

Transcription and editing data

Following a principle that Wolcott (1994) has referred to as “stay close to data”, the data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions was transcribed almost verbatim. While I agree with Wolcott (1994) when he emphasizes the analysis and interpretation of data more than how it has been collected and recorded, I feel that authentic data presented faithfully is the first thing needed for an acceptable study. However, as the study does not involve

detailed conversational analysis, some minor linguistic ill-forms were rectified during transcription although not at the expense of preserving a sense of each postgraduate's way of communicating in English. Some linguistically redundant elements like repetition of negative (e.g. no, no, no) have been retained to signify its forcefulness and emphasis.

The data thus collected and transcribed were codified using Nvivo software. The codes and sub-codes (e.g. child nodes, and sibling nodes) were created on the basis of themes and sub-themes that emerged out of the data. Then the closely related codes/themes were clustered together in a matrix of wider abstractions for further analysis.

The journal that I maintained throughout recorded observations beyond formal interviews and noted down the non-verbal codes (NVC) and body language that the participants used in course of their interaction with me as well as their silences. This journal was consulted to assist in getting insight into what the participants intended to share. The NVC and the body language based on their cultural backgrounds were interpreted by virtue of my familiarity with and background knowledge of their cultures, which I broadly share.

Backgrounds of the Respondents

The ten respondents who continued for the full length of the required period of the study came from Bangladesh (4), India (4) and Pakistan (2). The highest degrees they had completed before coming to Australia were either a three-year Bachelors or four-year Masters. Prior to that, all had completed 10-year long Secondary School Certificate and two-year Higher Secondary Certificate courses¹.

The Australian Education International (AEI) follows two different frameworks and guidelines to assess Indian degrees obtained before and after 1980 (AEI (no date)). However, as all the respondents had completed at least three years' tertiary

¹ The two year higher secondary certificate course in India is also referred to as Senior Secondary, Intermediate or CBSE depending on the states they are offered in and nature of the courses.

study they were all qualified to join postgraduate courses in Australia. Whilst the respondents from Pakistan and Bangladesh had had their pre-Australia education partly through the medium of English and partly through their local vernaculars, i.e. Bengali and Urdu for Bangladeshi and Pakistani respondents respectively, the Indian respondents undertook their studies in English except for their respective first language units (e.g. Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi or Telegu).

Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' backgrounds and key features relevant to their entry to Southern University (SU), such as their IELTS scores and access to pre-departure briefing. The sample questionnaires used for collecting such information have been appended as follows:

Appendix	A	Summary of Recruitment of Respondents and Interview Dates
Appendix	B	Participant Information Form and Background Information Questionnaire
Appendix	C	Information about English Proficiency
Appendix	D	Information about Pre-departure Briefing
Appendix	E	Sample Interview Schedule

Table 1: Summary of the Respondents

Name	Gender	Country	Last degree	Self Assessment	IELTS Score before coming to Australia (overall)	Attended IELTS Prep. Course	Number of IELTS taken	Medium of Instruction at Secondary level	Medium of Instruction at Undergraduate level	Medium of Instruction at PG level	Pre-departure briefing	Lingua franca at home
Zinat	Female	Bangladesh	M. Sc	GA	6	N	1	Bengali	Bengali & English	Bengali & English	Y	Bengali
Mita	Female	Bangladesh	M. A	Excellent	7	N	1	Bengali	Bengali & English	English	N	Bengali
Shafi	Male	Bangladesh	B. Sc (H)	GA	6.0	Y	2	Bengali	Bengali & English	English	Y	Bengali
Suzan	Female	Bangladesh	MSS	GA	7.5	N	1	Bengali	Bengali & English	Bengali & Bengali	Y	Bengali
Arnold	Male	India	B. Physio	Excellent	7.5	N	1	English & Hindi	English	English	N	English & Hindi
Anil	Male	India	B. H. M	GA	7	N	1	English	English	English	Y	English & Hindi
Azabul	Male	India	B. Eng	GA	6.5	Y	1	English & Telegu	English	English	Y	English & Urdu
Niranjan	Male	India	B. Eng	Out standing	7	N	1	English Punjabi & Hindi	English & Punjabi	English	N	English & Punjabi
Dina	Female	Pakistan	MB A	GA	6.5	Y	1	Urdu	Urdu & English	English	N	Urdu
Qursat	Male	Pakistan	B. Com puter	GA	6.5	N	1	Eng, Urdu	English	English	N	Urdu

Legend: GA= Good Average. N=No. Y=Yes. B. Eng=Bachelor of Engineering.

B. Physio= Bachelor of Physiotherapy. BHM= Bachelor of Hospitality & Management.

Profiles of the Respondents

Zinat

Easy-going Zinat came from Bangladesh, and was enrolled in the Masters in Asian and Pacific Studies at Southern University. Prior to coming to Australia she had completed a three-year B. Sc (Hons) in Zoology and then a Masters with a thesis in the same field. She has a permanent government job and came to Australia as an AUSAID grantee. Her job in Bangladesh, as well as the field of her present study in Australia, is a deviation from her previous tertiary education.

Whilst she received her secondary and higher secondary education through the medium of Bengali, her undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Bangladesh had been through both Bengali and English mediums with a 30:70 ratio. She also had had about four and a half hours of English instruction a week at secondary and higher secondary levels. She had grown up throughout in a culturally aware, traditional Bengali monolingual society.

Zinat scored an overall IELTS band of 6 in one sitting, with her listening module reflecting a relatively lower score of 5.5. She had not attended any IELTS preparatory courses prior to sitting for the test. She experiences difficulties even at the end of her second semester in her English communication, although she describes herself as confident. In Australia she initially shared a flat with a Bangladeshi female student and another international student and with them she used Bengali (her L1) and English at home, but the volume of Bengali use was proportionately more than English. Later when her spouse and daughter joined her they took a separate flat and Bengali became the only mode of communication at home.

Zinat attended a pre-departure briefing organized by the Australian High Commission in Dhaka, which covered information about housing, food, the academic system, customs regulations and weather. She found the information useful to some extent when she had arrived in Australia.

The first fearful experience Zinat had was at the airport on arrival when there was no one from the university to pick her up, in spite of their confirmation that she would be met. She was very nervous for some time before she could contact someone she knew earlier. Her other concerns included personal safety issues, and the different weather. She faced monetary difficulties as well, as the scholarship authority had not given her any travel money. As she arrived on the weekend when the banks were closed and she could not change currency, the situation temporarily became more worrying. One of her friends helped her with financial needs. Once she managed to make her way to her student accommodation, she found the on-arrival briefing useful, and that helped her develop initial confidence.

Zinat assessed herself as a good average student compared to her other fellow classmates in Bangladesh. Based on my acquaintance with her since the time she volunteered for this study, she did not appear to be a proactive challenge-taker, rather an easy-going 'let it go' type person.

Mita

Mita, another Bangladeshi student, had come to Australia to do a coursework only Masters in Business and Finance. Prior to her arrival in Australia she had completed a Bachelor of Arts and studied the first year of a two-year long Master of Arts in Economics in India through English medium.

While she had attended secondary and higher secondary courses in Bangladesh with instruction in Bengali, she had received compulsory English lessons over 12 years of instruction. In her Bachelors program she took an English language subject for the first year. In her only attempt, she obtained an overall band score of 7 in IELTS without attending any preparatory course. Her spoken communication, in spite of her IELTS overall band score of 7 and with a score of 8 in the spoken module, suggests that she needed further improvement in her oral

English skills. The language Mita still uses at home with her husband and other Bangladeshis is Bengali.

Mita did not receive any pre-departure briefing about Australian life, culture and education system. As she started her new life in Australia, she experienced difficult moments both in the academic context and off-campus social settings. Except for the Indian part of her studies, she had lived throughout in a Bengali monolingual society that strongly values its language and traditions.

She assessed herself as an excellent student in her contemporary academic context in Bangladesh.

A moderate risk taker Mita started her very first day with a traumatising experience at the University. On her arrival after a long exhausting journey in Australia, she went to the International office of the University where she expected a welcoming experience, but instead, she experienced treatment which she perceived to be rough, rude and humiliating. However, soon after this she started to take control of her situation and that resulted in a relatively relaxed and straightforward settlement experience by the end of the first semester. She was aware of her limited communicative skills in spite of her reported good IELTS score in the spoken module, and gradually improved as she immersed herself in the new English-speaking environment.

Shafi

Shafi is a student from Bangladesh who came to Australia with an Honours Bachelor of Science in Applied Physics and Electronics to pursue a postgraduate coursework Masters in Telecommunications.

Shafi had grown up in the largely monolingual Bengali speaking society. Whilst Shafi received his secondary and higher secondary education through the medium of his L1, Bengali, his undergraduate education was through the English medium. He had also studied English compulsory subjects for five hours per week

throughout his secondary and higher secondary schooling. He took the IELTS test twice, three months apart, with prior preparatory training in IELTS from the local British Council. The IELTS preparatory course taught by the British teachers was two months long and focussed on grammar and the other four language skills. In his second sitting, his overall IELTS score rose to Band 6 from Band 5.5 in the first administration. He also attended an ELICOS program for ten weeks at Southern University in order to bring his IELTS score up to that required for postgraduate program entry (IELTS 6.5). While he admitted that listening and reading were his weak areas, the corpus from his interviews by the end of his second semester reflects that he needed further improvement in his spoken English as well as in listening. At home in Australia, he continued using primarily Bengali, as he lived with other Bangladeshi postgraduate students.

Shafi received a pre-departure briefing about weather, housing arrangements and the academic system in Australia from the Dhaka branch of IDP Australia. He found the briefing session relevant to some extent.

Shafi assessed himself as a good average student in the contemporary Bangladesh context.

Shafi, who appears to be critical about anything that is not up to his expectation, struggled a lot initially with his ELICOS course, and later on with his mainstream Telecommunications course. His comparatively poor English appears to be a contributing factor in his difficulties. Assistance from a fellow classmate helped him survive in the course.

Suzan

Suzan consistently showed a strong willingness to take full control of her own life and circumstances. She came to Southern University from Bangladesh to do a Masters in Public Advocacy and Action. Before coming to Australia, she had completed a three-year Bachelors in Social Science and also a one-year Masters in the same field, and was working for an International Labour Organisation (ILO)

supported NGO in Bangladesh. She was an AUSAid grantee selected through open competition.

Before joining the SU, she received all her education from secondary through to postgraduate level in her first language, Bengali, except for approximately 4 hours a week of compulsory English language classes at secondary and higher secondary levels. She sat for an IELTS test twice, and scored an overall band of 7.5 with skill module scores ranging between 7 and 8, in the first sitting. In her second sitting a year later, she surprisingly scored a lower band, 6.5. She never attended an IELTS preparatory course. She accounted for the lower grade in her second sitting as being the result of personal indisposition. She felt confident of her communication ability in English.

Suzan attended a pre-departure briefing session that covered areas like housing, life style, immigration formalities, food, shopping, medical facilities, weather and academic culture, with an emphasis on plagiarism, at the Australian High Commission in Dhaka. Her reflections indicated that the briefing session was useful.

Initially Suzan was homesick, and had difficulties in locating appropriate shops and going there. However, the help from fellow residents at the Student Village mitigated such problems. Because of her late arrival, she missed some parts of the Introductory Academic Program (IAP) and this resulted in some hardship in academic adaptation. Her IAP course-mates, teachers and course coordinator played supportive roles.

Suzan assessed herself as a good average student compared to her other fellow classmates in the Bangladeshi context. From the very beginning, she presented herself as a serious student, who was a risk taker with strong motivation and commitment.

Arnold

Arnold is a postgraduate coursework student in Applied Science/Exercise Rehabilitation. Prior to arriving in Australia, he completed his Bachelor of Physiotherapy in India. He pursued his secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education through the medium of English, except for Hindi vernacular lessons. His confidence in English was such that he had taken part in public speaking competitions in India. By virtue of his placement in different parts of multi-lingual India, he could communicate in Hindi, Bengali as well as in English. Arnold scored an overall band of 7.5 in his only sitting in the IELTS test. He had not attended any IELTS preparatory course prior to taking the test. He felt confident and comfortable while communicating in English.

Arnold did not get any pre-departure briefing before coming to Australia. He found his initial settlement experience at the Student Village of the University quite financially difficult because of the expense, and the local inclement weather was very uncomfortable.

Arnold assessed himself as an excellent student in his contemporary Indian context.

A vocal and critical Arnold projected himself as having a sense of responsibility in his approach to adjusting himself to the Australian social and academic settings. He perceived that the academic system here ‘makes students responsible’ and if ‘students are not serious by themselves, it’s not going to help them’. From this point of view he appeared to be moderately proactive in adapting to the Australian environment. Arnold comes from Maroari community described as having a trading history and he exhibited stubborn commitment to achieve his goals, a characteristic often attributed in India to people from his ethnic background.

Anil

A postgraduate coursework student from India, with secondary and post-secondary schooling in business disciplines, Anil was doing a Masters in Hotel Management at Southern University. He had completed a Bachelor of Hospitality in India before coming to Australia.

In addition to six hours of weekly English lessons both at secondary and post-secondary levels, Anil had always studied in English medium institutions, except for Hindi vernacular lessons in secondary school, and he had actively participated in English language. At home with his family both Hindi and English are used along with his L1, Bengali.

Anil's apprenticeship and service at formal banquets in different hotels in India, where English is the most widely used lingua franca, had provided him with opportunities to practise English in actual work settings. In his single attempt he scored an overall band of 7 in IELTS. He considered himself confident in communicating in English.

Anil received a pre-departure briefing about climate, housing, and customs regulations from IDP Australia before leaving India. He found some of the briefing useful to some extent.

Anil assessed himself as a good average student in the Indian setting. He is a serious risk taker, was very definite about his goals in Australia, and appeared to be mentally prepared to achieve those goals. He presented to being able to take unfamiliar circumstances with a positive spirit. He was rarely shocked by the cultural differences, and held an attitude that 'Be Roman when you are in Rome' (his words).

Azabul

Azabul is a postgraduate student from the southern part of India studying for a Masters in Engineering Project Management at Southern University. Before

joining the Masters program in Australia, he had completed a three Bachelor of Engineering in India.

In his secondary, intermediate (post-secondary) and undergraduate schooling he had English medium instruction except for when learning the Hindi and Telegu languages. Besides his mother tongue, Urdu, he is conversant in Hindi, Telegu and English. He also received lessons varying between two and three hours a week on compulsory English language subjects at all three study levels. Azabul sat for IELTS only once and scored an overall band of 6.5. He undertook a preparatory course on IELTS for a week before sitting for the actual test.

Azabul received a pre-departure briefing from an educational agent about Australian life, food, culture, and the education system. He found the pre-departure briefing had some relevance to his actual settlement in Australia.

Azabul assesses himself as a good average student in his Indian context. Whilst in his first semester Azabul experienced a significant amount of difficulties associated with language, particularly in understanding class lectures (he missed 30 to 40% of lecture materials) and spoken communication. However, he made some improvement in a span of one semester. He started his life in Australia sharing a flat with fellow Indians and used more Urdu and Hindi than English at home. At the beginning of the second semester, he perceived that the difficulties of the first semester resulted from the non-familiarity with the new environment and system.

Niranjan

Telecommunications postgraduate coursework student, Niranjan came to Southern University from the Punjab in Northern India with Punjabi as his L1. He had completed a four-year Bachelor in Engineering from the Punjab Technical University.

During his secondary education Niranjan had been exposed to three mediums of instruction (Punjabi, Hindi and English). Besides attending classes for his vernaculars, Punjabi and Hindi, he had 4.5 hours of English lessons weekly. During his two-year post-secondary schooling (years 11 and 12) he followed a bilingual model of instruction with both Punjabi (20%) and English (80%) used in daily instruction across a six-day academic week. His undergraduate instruction was officially entirely in English. In his single sitting, he scored an overall Band score of 7 on the IELTS test. He had never attended an IELTS preparatory course. Niranjan assessed himself as an outstanding student at the secondary level but a good-average at the undergraduate level in the contemporary Indian context.

Although he did not have any pre-departure briefing, Niranjan's initial settlement was not a difficult one as he stayed with one of his uncles.

An easygoing Niranjan had come to Australia with the mental preparation to accept experience in a 'far more different' and challenging academic program. However, his first impression about Australian postgraduate education was that it was different in certain respects, but 'not really' challenging. Given that he made gradual adjustment to locate himself in the new context, having accepted that he had to, he represented himself as one who accommodates himself to the demands of the local context. One of his initial difficulties, being a strict vegetarian, was finding culturally appropriate food.

Dina

Dina, from Pakistan, had a somewhat different academic background to the other participants. She was doing a coursework Masters in Professional Accounting at Southern University. Besides her Bachelor of Arts and MBA from a university in Pakistan, she had also completed one year of a research degree (e.g. M. Phil), and she had taught accounting subjects for some time in Pakistan, a discipline she was quite familiar with from her education in there.

Both Dina's secondary and higher secondary studies were through the medium of Urdu, her L1, except for 3-6 hours per week spent in studying the compulsory English subject. The medium of instruction in her bachelors program was mixed with a 60%:40% ratio between Urdu and English, while her MBA program had been conducted exclusively in English. Both her bachelors and MBA programs included subjects dealing with business English.

In her single sitting Dina scored an overall band of 6.5 in IELTS with 7 in both speaking and reading modules. She had attended an IELTS preparatory course offered by Pakistani instructors for three days, after which she discontinued, as it did not satisfy her. Her main objective behind attending the preparatory course was to become familiarized with the test format. She identified her English listening skills as being problematic compared to the other three skills. Dina feels awkward when her English is not easily understood by native speakers in Australia

Dina did not receive any pre-departure briefing before coming to Australia, but her initial stay at the Student Village, a housing precinct of Southern University, helped her adjust to Australia.

Dina assessed herself as a good average student compared to her other fellow classmates in Pakistan.

A confident Dina accepted the differences between education systems in the two countries as a normal phenomenon. She demonstrated herself to be a self-confident, optimistic risk taker. She found Australian educational requirements, particularly the course content and examinations in her chosen course of accounting, to be not very challenging. By the end of the second semester she was able to obtain some distinction and high distinction grades.

Qursat

Qursat had completed a Bachelor of Computer Science in Pakistan before coming to Australia for a Masters in the same field.

Qursat's secondary and higher secondary schooling was conducted in English except for an Urdu vernacular subject. In both these levels, he also attended compulsory English language lessons for 4.5 hours a week. His Bachelor of Science course in computer science had been studied through the medium of English. In his first and only attempt he scored an overall Band of 6.5 on IELTS, and had not attended any IELTS preparatory courses prior to sitting for the test. Whilst Urdu is his lingua franca at home in Pakistan, Qursat felt confident in communicating in the Australian English environment.

Qursat did not receive any pre-departure briefing before coming to Australia, but he found his course coordinator's advice at the initial stage very useful.

Qursat assessed himself as a good average student in the contemporary Pakistani context.

A mentally prepared moderate risk taker with some internal locus of control, Qursat expected a different educational environment in a western university, and positively took up the challenge to meet the University's requirements. With his perseverance, diligence and accommodation to his new situation he judged himself reasonably settled in Australia by the end of two semesters.

Drawing on the data collected through interviews and focus group discussions, the following chapters will consider the postgraduates' pre-arrival expectations, their perceptions about studying in postgraduate programs at SU, and their initial experiences (Chapter 4). The analysis will then go on to explore how they made a transition to this new academic landscape (Chapter 5) and, finally, what each had achieved in their adjustment by the end of two semesters (Chapter 6).

Chapter 4

Getting Started: From Expectations to Realities

“Every new adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem.”
- Eric Hoffer (1902-1983)

The South Asian postgraduate coursework students in the Southern University who constituted the very basis of this study set off from their respective homes with a mission to achieve. The mission aimed to fulfilling their expectations, some explicit and sharable, and some hidden, but implied. The expectations were identified from the reflections of the respondents’ about their objectives for what they hoped to attain while studying in Australia. As the researcher I have analysed the expectations they shared during interview sessions, and classified them mainly into two groups - primary versus supplementary, however with overlapping layers.

Pre-arrival Expectations and Preconceptions

Primary Expectations

The partition between primary and supplementary expectations has been drawn on the basis of degree of emphasis and detail as well as the length of discussion of the expectations. While the widely spoken about and strongly emphasized expectations have been labelled as primary, the supplementary expectations include some related prospects about what will be a part of the Australian student experience even though these may be peripheral to the students’ core expectations, and additional opportunities that they expressed hopes of availing themselves of that would encourage them to continue in the challenging new environment that they have arrived in.

Analysis of the primary expectations yielded three main themes that constituted their focus: career enhancement, respect for quality scholarship, and education as a pathway to an end. All but one (Suzan) of the postgraduates in this study reported that their main expectation out of their enrolments in this Australian university was to widen their career opportunities. Although these students shared this goal as their foremost expectation, they approached it from different perspectives, and there were some contrasting areas of emphasis in how they explained their expectations. For example, whilst seven (Arnold, Shafi, Azabul, Mita, Niranjana, Anil & Dina) indicated explicitly that their expectation was to upgrade their career through enhancement of professional academic qualifications, two others (Zinat, Suzan) placed less direct emphasis on this, even though their focus was career enhancing skills. Zinat and Suzan highlighted their interest in transferring knowledge for utilization in their home country (Bangladesh). Only one (Qursat) of the overall group of the students thought of utilising the image value of having studied at an Australian university.

In his initial narrative, Arnold focussed on his perception of Australia as a place with a reputation of excellence in his chosen career area:

Before coming here I had a picture or I had a thought like Australia is pretty good in exercising rehabilitation and physiotherapy field so that's what I thought and opted for Australia as compared to any other country.
[Arnold, India, Exercise Rehabilitation]

Whereas Shafi focussed on his thirst for a practically oriented education to enhance his career prospects:

Actually before coming here I had lot of expectations about Australian university- that ... my subjects- most of them would be practical oriented ... I came here so that I can learn something in my practical life – so that I can get a better job. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Highlighting a similar expectation of Australian education, Azabul put forward the reason behind his investment and indicated his expectation for a more 'industrial oriented' education:

I thought that Australia education is very far developed ... more industrial type than the theoretical type. ... That's what I expected in Australia and I put all my money for that. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

In contrast, Suzan, who was studying a course designed to equip her for work internationally in the NGO sector, voiced unspecified but more idealistic expectations:

I want to prepare me for better contribution to my professional commitment through adaptation and application. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

In order to upgrade their professional careers, the above-noted postgraduates opted for the augmentation of an academic qualification in general, whereas, Qursat, referring to the context of job market demand back home, admitted that his expectation was to be attributed with the name and reputation of a western university, which is valued in the career market in his country:

The name of foreign university is of high value in Pakistan. Basically we look forward for the name - that we are qualified from foreign university. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Qursat also shared his justification for paying a higher rate of tuition fees as an international student:

Here we are just paying for the name... [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

The underpinning message that Qursat was conveying through these observations was that his longing for being attached to a western university would enable him to construct a new superior identity for himself that he saw as having the potential to create a new power relationship for him with other individuals, groups and communities. This resonates with Norton's (2000) non-unitary, decentred notion of identity that changes over "historical time and social space" (Norton 1997, p.411; 2000, p. 124).

The second aspect of the primary expectations of the postgraduates is respect for quality scholarship. Some of them were eager to enrich their specialized knowledge by gaining deeper understanding. Anil, expressing his readiness to accept whatever is 'good', looked for a different level of understanding of and engagement with familiar subject matter:

The topics that come in marketing and all around are quite similar but here it is in different standards ... it's deeper- it's Masters after all. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Echoing Anil, Suzan also looked for excellence in scholarship indicating that her goal was “To get the best available”. She explained further by indicating how she expected to expand her horizon of knowledge:

I came with an expectation that other than lectures or class-based interaction we would have some access to other form of teaching or attending extra learning like seminars or other workshop – something like that. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Another interesting aspect of the students’ pre-arrival expectations is the link between their desires to study in Australia and to gain permanent residency (PR). It is known from statistics that “just over half of international higher education students in Australia seriously intend applying for permanent residence” and 36% and 39% of Indian students in Australia would like to live and work respectively in Australia (Lawrence 2007). Exploring the motives of Indian students enrolled in Australian universities, Baas (2006) has also noted that their main objective is to obtain permanent residency in Australia, and they choose courses and low cost campuses that will help them fulfil their main goal. From my social interactions with the respondents, a similar tendency can also be observed among the students from the other two South Asian countries of this study, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

There is no reason to think that the postgraduate students in my study are any different from the norm in terms of their interests and desires to remain in Australia permanently, although in the initial discussions on expectations it was not overtly mentioned by any of them. However, some of the students through their demonstrated plans and actions (e.g. switching over to courses that would gain them more points for permanent residency requirements, or even changing education provider to better support their plans) indicated that many of them arrived with the hidden agenda of becoming permanent residents in Australia. Although some of my group of respondents justified their moves saying that they were not satisfied with their initially chosen education providers for one or other reasons, as the researcher and with my background knowledge about the students, I formed the view that for most of the students one of the most important, if not overtly discussed, motivating factor for their enrolment with the University was as

a means of being able to achieve the objective of being able to apply for permanent residency and gain employment in Australia.

To implement his hidden agenda Azabul was contemplating a shift to another university:

If you want to apply for a residency here, you need to have two years' complete study ... I am studying here for one year and then move back to Swinburne University. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

While in his earlier interviews he talked about his quest for quality scholarship, at a later session Anil shared his until then hidden expectation candidly:

I will tell you frankly, very frankly, I just needed to be an Australian, permanent resident, visa, and I need to start working and earning money, that's all. ... So I have to get PR first, I have to apply for two years study, get a PR first, talk to the lawyer, or whatever, yeah. That's all I think. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Exploring further, several reasons present themselves as explanation of why the students with these aspirations kept this agenda hidden initially. One of the most probable reasons for hiding such an agenda could be that they were avoiding losing face in case their hidden agenda could not be translated into reality. So in other words, during the earlier interview period they may have felt it was premature to share this aspiration. They wanted to settle in and feel more confident about their new situation before opening up on this aspect of their plans. Another reason could have been that they did not feel comfortable to share this effective intention to contribute to the intellectual 'brain drain' from their country to a researcher who they saw as aligned with that region.

Three of the postgraduates, including those who were restricted by their grant conditions, did not show any interest or expectation of migration. While Shafi indicated his desire to go back and seek employment in Bangladesh, Suzan and Zinat, the Ausaid grantees, were obliged to return to their home country in accordance with the agreement made with the donor and their government. When Suzan was reflecting on the problems of the application of the learning gained through Australian education in her home context, she clearly implied her expectation and contemplation of going back home:

I think it's a bit tough ... that application needs –like in our context – some changes in our local scenario and that might not be that easy. I am

not saying that it is impossible but might not be that easy. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Whilst other respondents never overtly articulated any attitude towards or desire to achieve residency at any stage in the adjustment process over the first year, it is relevant to note that seven of the students, other than those two who were on scholarships that bonded them to return home, have subsequently gone on to achieve Australian residence; and the remaining one moved to another Australian university and from there subsequently moved on to Germany. One student with a three-semester long course, having failed to transfer to another education provider to extend the length of study in Australia to the required two years to qualify for permanent residence, opted for a reduced study load with the plea of a personal problem, so that he could extend his course out to two years in order to fulfil the immigration requirement at the time. For seven of the students, the interest and desire to remain in Australia either was part of their initial, but hidden plan and desire and/or evolved from their positive experience of life in Australia once they had arrived and settled in.

Supplementary Expectations

The supplementary expectations, defined as secondary level of considerations about what the students expected to be an important part of their new Australian educational experience, featured in their narratives as being influential in their decision to study in Australia. These included expectations about physical infrastructure and a conducive learning environment that would assist them in attaining their primary goals, such as enhancement of intellectual and professional qualifications. The supplementary expectations have further been reclassified into two sub-categories depending on the areas of focus.

A quality physical environment is one of the peripheral expectations that the respondents intended to avail themselves of. The importance of the expectations of getting congenial physical facilities in a higher educational context is apparent, though such facilities are not of absolute necessity for effective learning. Without enunciating any specific physical facilities, Mita indicated her expectation associated with a developed country:

When I was coming to Australia my expectation was high...because I'm going to study in a developed country ... I'm from third world country. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Physical facilities, like spacious classrooms equipped with modern educational media aids (e.g. multimedia), comfortable and attractive classroom learning environments with air-conditioning, were explicitly referred to as expectations by fifty percent of these international postgraduates. Dina, a business postgraduate from Pakistan, probably contemplating her own context back home, expected a developed academic setting in this developed country. Her perception of developed setting included a large campus linked by the university's own transport infrastructure. When reflecting on her expectations she explained:

I think that university is [an] important institution of ... the culture or society – [in] any society universities are very good ... the university should have transportation system at least (laughed). Transportation will be the first thing, the very basic thing that should be here. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

She also expected a difference of quality in terms of 'well furnished' classrooms and iterated:

I am going to a developed country, so there will be – there would be – there should be a difference in the classroom. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

An interesting feature of the focus of Dina's expectations here is that they are shaped strongly by the context of her own country. For example, she assumed that 'large campus' and the university having its own 'transport system' were important because back home in Pakistan these are considered to be symbols of a developed university, even though in Australia, and, specifically, at Southern University, university-operated transport tends not to be given high priority by university management because it is expected that the government has responsibility for ensuring that public transportation will provide appropriate levels of campus access.

Another supplementary expectation that all the students hoped to have fulfilled at the University was a client-friendly social and institutional context. These students, like most international students, were paying higher tuition fees and they expected some degree of preferential treatment in return. Qursat, while

reflecting on his initial experiences, pinpointed his expectation for better treatment:

You are paying very high fee – you just expect that the other person- he is at least nice to you. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

To substantiate his expectation he added:

Because you are paying \$8000 for 3 or 4 months- I think you can expect that professional behaviour from them. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

In addition to Qursat, in their retrospections Arnold, Mita, and Niranjana also indicated their expectation of being treated in a dignified manner.

In addition to expectations of career enhancement and quality scholarship, two students presented an open-mindedness to learn as much as possible from their new context, to take Tennyson's expression, they expected the opportunity to 'drink life to the lees' (Tennyson 1912(?), p. 107) and stated an affirmation of the necessity of striving ever onward. Highlighting her mission of studying in Australia Suzan explained:

My aim is to get the best from it and my aim is to get the best experience from it and then go back to my country, enrich myself. So from this point of view I am talking like that knowledge sharing, and information sharing... [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Preconceptions about Australian Universities and Postgraduate Study

Just as the students' expectations were found to be varied, so also were their preconceptions about Australian university and postgraduate study in Australia. In narrating these preconceptions, they focussed on a number of different aspects of the academic context: teaching style, academic challenges, teaching quality, and teacher-student relationships. The majority of the students drew on their earlier experience of spoon-fed surface learning that insists on concise, pre-digested notes and explicit teaching in describing their preconceptions of Australian postgraduate study. Suzan's emphasis on "concise, issue focussed" teaching and Shafi's insistence on "explicit teaching" are just a few reflections of their pre-arrival orientation to learning for recognition and reproduction, rather than expansion of their intellectual horizons (Reid 1989 in Kember and Gow

1991). In his appraisal of postgraduate study in Australia, Azabul expected it to be easy to understand:

Basically I expected the salient coursework be very much understanding ... I could understand the subject very easily and I thought that I could do the subject very easily just like cake cutting. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Only three students, Dina, Arnold and Niranjana, exhibited an awareness of a different type of education in Australia. While Dina, who had prior postgraduate research experience, expected a higher level of themes and analysis, Arnold and Niranjana were eager to have deeper understanding of the themes and issues they had studied before.

The students' preconceptions of Australian lecturers were diverse. Azabul thought that Australian lecturers would be "more advanced and more intelligent", and Arnold's view was similar to this as well:

My expectation about them was pretty different from the way they are in India. And they will be very skilled and will be able to share subtle skills, which will make me learn more about my field and make me different as compared to my peers in India. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehab]

In contrast, Qursat's outlook about the Australian teachers projected a slightly different understanding. He considered them as the 'source of knowledge' which they should 'share with the students'. Expecting the teachers to be considerate he noted:

Australian teachers would have better understanding about international students' psyche and their ability to follow Australian teachers. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Other respondents' preconceptions of Australian lecturers included other positive attributions. For example, Shafi expected that the teacher-student relationship would be 'informal and accessible', and Dina thought the teachers would be caring about the students' understanding of class lectures. All the students expected the non-teaching staff would be compassionate and accommodating in their dealing with international students, in particular.

Initial Experiences as Postgraduate Students

In this section I will present the analysis of the students' initial experiences of adapting socio-culturally to their new context as postgraduates studying at Southern University. In subsequent sections of the chapter there will be more detailed discussion of their initial experiences with key aspects of their new academic learning context.

The journey the international students have made from their respective home countries to Australia can be perceived as a movement from “a known place to an unknown space” which was initially open and abstract, but gradually turned into a place (Burnapp 2006, p.83). The openness of the space posed confusion, fear and ‘vulnerability’ and what Burnapp (2006, p.83) refers to as a sense of ‘placelessness’.

At the very beginning, when the postgraduates arrived in Australia - a country different from their own in look, climate, culture, lifestyle and language - they were both excited by its newness, and also challenged by its alienness. The comprehensive repertoire of reported initial experiences of the students is marked by some trends in phased-variations, such as exhilaration at the very beginning of their sojourn in Australia, followed by cultural shock with a heightened perception of the challenges and frustrations at varying levels for different individuals. The demonstrated different stages of their adaptation process show partial resemblance with Hofstede's (2001) and Berry and Kim's (1988) theories of acculturation patterns. While Hofstede's (2001) theory indicated four phases of adaptation - euphoria, culture shock, acculturation and finally, stable state, Berry and Kim (1988), referring to a different context, summed up three broader phases – contact, conflict and adaptation.

One of the postgraduates, Anil, provides an interesting contrast because he did not appear to experience these stages in quite the way others did. While he recognized the differences between the two contexts – his home context and the Australian context, Anil did not appear to view them as a source of conflict or culture shock.

As a goal-oriented and strongly motivated student, Anil was very straightforward in his deposition about his initial experience, suggesting that he would be following an assimilatory strategy:

I came with an open mind- and whatever I found I accepted it. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Another attention-grabbing aspect of the students' experience narratives is that the new landscape and the events therein were viewed and filtered through their respective cultural lenses and the narratives – whether positive or negative – included a comparative rhetoric, with the basis for those comparisons at this point in their transition consistently being their home experiences and cultural context. While sharing his early experiences in the new context, Arnold went on making a relative assessment of learning and teaching approaches:

...their practicals were also not that much advanced ... I did not find them that advanced as compared to in India. basically the classes in India are just similar like the one we have here, except that these lectures are well supplied with multimedia presentation equipment. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

So was Dina's appraisal:

... but the [Australian university] campus is very small (laughs....) because in our country although university classroom is not very well furnished then some classrooms, seminar and hall they are very well furnished ... but the university is quite large ... [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Mita, in her initial observation about the modes of course presentation, also drew a comparison between the system of her home country and that of Australia:

Course structure ... here it's semester wise – six month but in my home country it is one year (system). [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

All of these postgraduates were charged with the excitement of newness as they found themselves in the new academic landscape of their Australian university. Anil, in his initial perception about Australia, in general, and its academic setting, in particular, portrayed a positive picture of the new context:

For an international student, it is quite a friendly environment to study in here. And here the facilities are excellent. It's quite impressive. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Qursat's initial excitement was also associated with the physical facilities of the University and referring to the classrooms equipped with multimedia projection systems he commented:

Classrooms are great in Australia, compared to Pakistan. In Pakistan we have wooden chairs mostly. I was expecting that classroom would be something like Pakistan ... it is something better. We have got multimedia projector here, but in Pakistan it is only in the labs – in computer labs. Here it is in almost every class. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Detailing his new experience of a computerized library system, he continued stating his happiness:

If you are coming from worse thing to good thing, it's good (laughs) – you become used to it very quickly. Just in the first time you take the book and place it on bar code reader, that's it.... To find a book you just search the book with ISBN number on the computer ... in Pakistan we have to check the book(s) manually on the shelves and you have to tell the librarian, then he comes with [us] and issue it for me. But here it is different. You just take the book; place it on the bar code reader ... no need to ask anyone. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Referring to the infrequent use of multimedia in Indian classrooms, Niranjana revealed:

“It is used very frequently here... Mode of teaching is quite different from India”. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications]

With their arrival in the Australian context, the students started, in a meaningful sense, living between two cultures – their home culture and the Australian culture. As a result, they were in a dilemma of to follow or not to follow and to accept or not to accept, how much to accept or how much to resist the cultural differences.

Social and Intercultural Norms

The most commonly shared cultural difference that the postgraduates experienced initially was associated with the academic norm of addressing teachers either by ‘Sir / Madam’ or by their first names. In spite of the reality that the students had differences both in their cultural backgrounds and as individuals, they all had invariably addressed their lecturers back home either as ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’. To them, these two words are not just the codes of formal address; they connote special meanings in their own cultural framework as they represent the manifestation of respect that their societies have attached to teachers. They believe teachers are always teachers even outside the classroom and even after

completion of their education, and this issue of addressing the teachers as ‘Sir’ / ‘Madam’ – an issue associated with the traditional means of showing respect to teachers – is so deeply ingrained in them that the disappearance of such expressions in their discourse is constructed by them as meaning absence of respect for their teachers. Cagiltay and Bichelmeyer (2000) have noted a similar observation in their study of Turkish students in the U.S. context, as one of their students explained:

... they call their professors with their first names, they start talking in the class without taking teacher’s permission ... I think some of them are not suitable. (p.10)

Another study dealing with Taiwanese students in an Australian university (Zhang et al., 1999) has also made similar observation. Quoting one of their respondent’s surprise at such cultural difference: “We respect teachers in Taiwan, and are surprised to see the casual behaviour of students” (p.7), Wang and Shan’s (2006) study also conforms to similar hierarchical teacher-student relationship. This difference in the practice of addressing teachers in the Australian context resulted in cultural shock and led to a silent resistance and application of crisis-reducing strategies. A surprised Arnold reacted:

They just interact with them with their direct names... with their first name ... I don’t know – I don’t understand what’s there. Because back in India whoever be the tutor, we always respect them with either ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’, and that maintains the respect between students and teachers. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Reflecting on the practice of calling teachers by name, Mita described it as a new experience for her:

Any student if it is he or she can address the teacher by name- that is quite new to me and quite interesting to me. ... Actually students there in home country – we could not cross that barrier [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance].

At the initial stage, it was quite unthinkable for Niranjana to accept the norms of the new context:

... I have to call them by name. It is not allowed in India – it is very difficult for me – I used to respect them by calling ‘Sir and ‘Madam’. Here I have to call them by name and it is very difficult. They are elder than [sic] me and I am calling them by name. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering].

Niranjan's initial cultural shock was further amplified by his perception of the inappropriateness of the behaviour of students in front of their lecturers on campus:

... in India students are not allowed to smoke in the campuses ... in Australia I see people are smoking in front of their lecturers - people (are) doing everything. It's not allowed there. I haven't think [sic] of it. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Having failed to acculturate himself fully to the new context even after the first six months – particularly in relation to this cultural practice in the academic arena – Arnold made a compromise between the practices of both his home and the Australian context, introducing his own compensatory strategy by replacing the mode of address with 'excuse me':

I generally don't address them directly by name – I just start talking to him – if I want to call them I just say, "Excuse me" and start. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Justifying his strategy Arnold continued:

I have already studied for 16 – 17 years [and have practised this custom], I don't think it will be easy for me to change the practice. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

In her reflection Dina noted that her instant interactions with teachers included 'Sir' or 'Madam' as a mode of address, while during her pre-planned discourse she could use the teachers' names:

I always addressed [sic] my Indian teacher 'Sir' and he also understands that in my culture it is normal thing ... because since last twenty years I am calling my teachers by 'Sir' or 'Madam' ... suddenly (if) I want to speak up [to Australian lecturers] then I will draw the attention by calling him 'Sir' or 'Madam'. But If I have planning of the question – today I have this question or I have to ask this question – maybe at times consciously I will call him or her by name. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Arnold's innovation of the strategies of evading the use of 'sir', 'madam' or teachers' first names and getting straight into business and Dina's code switching have resulted from what Bialystok (1999) has called 'problematicity' that provokes introduction of new strategies. Siegel (2003) and Tarone (1977 cited in Ellis 1994) have labelled such strategies as avoidance.

This experience of living between two cultures can further be understood if we look at how the genres in any field are constructed. The aspects of academic norms, culture, delivery systems that the postgraduates were experiencing in this new context are genres that have been socially constructed ‘in response to communal need, goals’ (Freedman & Medway 1994, p. 5) of the Australian academic landscape, and the experience the students brought with them were also associated with genres in their discipline, but shaped according to the needs of their home context. The obvious dissonance between the two contexts and their respective genres, have provoked disruptive tensions leading to acculturation stress, which Berry (1997, p.14) calls ‘psychopathology’, and which accumulates into culture shock.

Whilst 80% of the postgraduates in the study have experienced an initial euphoria stage, the remaining others had very shocking initial experiences that challenged immediately their expectations in various ways. Some had the unanticipated initial experience of status change and of having assumed membership of a minority. Before coming to Australia, these postgraduates enjoyed the status of being members of the majority community and were from fairly privileged middle class families. They had never felt themselves to be part of a minority. Immediately after her arrival in Australia, Mita explains how she felt quite traumatized by the manner in which a student centre front counter staff member spoke to her aggressively and made quite a derogatory and insulting remark because she had not arrived at the right time. On the very first day she felt she had been pushed into a downward spiral. As Mita approached the front desk at 12 noon, leaving her husband waiting with luggage on the roadside, she narrated how the staff member responded:

‘You came at 12’. And there’s already tension ... there is a discrimination; they don’t just talk to us in a way that they talk to locals. She said, ‘I don’t understand why you people come here to study’. She was in front of me – in front of my face she said that. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

All the students, who were already emotionally distressed after leaving the familiar behind including friends and families, explained how they felt diminished in themselves, and suddenly realized their lessened and reduced selves in the new context through one or more interactions in the initial period after their arrival.

The treatment they received from some of the university's non-academic staff members compounded with their perceived differences or deficiencies – their different looks, alien culture, and language deficiency – created for some an overall impression that they are inferior. This aggravated the sense of now belonging to a new minority of international students and left a lasting impact on them.

Even at the end of the second semester, Niranjan was still being haunted by the memory of humiliation he suffered when he had gone to ask for an extension for his second semester payment five months earlier and recollected:

They said, “No, no. go back, go back, go back. We can't do anything Why do you come to us?” So I had some really bad time. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications]

Similarly Zinat, an Aus-Aid grantee, felt herself to have a diminished identity when she was treated with what she perceived as an unwanted level of surveillance by an international branch staff member. In her recollection of her initial experience she noted:

My liaison officer asked me to see her once a fortnight during the semester; otherwise she would stop my scholarship. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Suzan in her deliberation made it more generalized:

... many international students experience very rigid and unwelcoming behaviour from International office unfortunately – Staff from International office - sometimes they are very, very – we can term that rude – not friendly and they prioritise their schedule first and don't put students first. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Raising the issue of double standard, an agonised Qursat narrated his feeling:

I find some of the staff members – they are some sort of RACIST- they are like – their behaviour – the way they behave with the white – their own (local white) students is not the same they behave with the international students. It doesn't matter where they come from- what I have experienced that mostly they are not good with the Asians students. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

The misery of an attributed subordinated identity and of an identity crisis has been reported by more than six of the participants, either explicitly or implicitly from

their narratives, and similar transformation of identities due to skin colours, appearance, and communicative role and language has also been reported by Orletti(2001).

Social Isolation and a New Lifestyle

The students' tales of initial experiences also revealed another domain of their life in which they endured social isolation and which required renegotiation of their personal lifestyles. When they arrived in Australia's alien landscape they all experienced social exclusion with very few people to associate with and they failed to perceive a sense of belonging to the greater university family. They perceived that they received very little support from their Australian counterparts. Some studies (Choi 1997; Osterman 2000; Sawir et al. 2007) have also noted that a majority of the international students suffer from loneliness and expressed their dissatisfaction over their multicultural relationships, and identified that attitudes of Australian students to international students were problematic. Once the formal orientation program was over, Suzan, who considered herself as one of those affected adversely, shared a collective feeling that hardly anything else could compensate for such loneliness:

I always stress on one particular point that when they (international students) come in the beginning of the year- newly enrolled students – then they feel more isolated - more alienated because- sometimes this is their first ever international experience – like me. ... So I know that how hard it was for me to cope and adjust and adopt – neither any IELTS score nor anything else make you comfortable with the sole environment - you need something more. ...as I went along I lost touch ... So I think we feel a bit isolated sometimes and that creates tension. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Zinat also talked similarly:

...Yes I think the international students are little bit isolated, because in my classes, yeah we were informed by our IAP course teacher, that Aussies are very inconsistent, they won't approach us ...[Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Failing to discover anything interesting on campus, Qursat's life was initially confined to a limited cycle of home, university, classroom and back home:

... you have to come and sit in classes - and go back home. Like there are no co-curricular activities in this university – you can say. No trips – no recreational program. The University lacks in this area – because they are not creating something interesting for the students. They should be doing something in addition to studies. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Besides social isolation, the students were exposed to experiences of a different personal lifestyle. This experience was neither voluntary nor optional, rather a natural one in this new circumstance, which challenged them and forced them to renegotiate their own lifestyles and fit into a day-to-day domestic routine. As previously alluded to, students coming from South Asian countries usually belong to the relatively wealthy upper middle class of their respective societies. At home they have had a comparatively relaxed lifestyle, with full time student status and hardly any family responsibilities, such as managing finances, shopping, or even family cooking. Domestic activities requiring going out, like paying bills and shopping, are normally done by the father or older male members of the family, and, rarely, by female members. When they arrived in Australia, they described how all these responsibilities suddenly weighed them down. Some of them, particularly the female students, felt a kind of pressure for which they had neither training nor any mental preparation, and they found it difficult to manage. Before coming to Australia, Mita had had only her studies to concentrate on, but now she had a whole range of responsibilities to take care of:

I have to think about my food, if do wanna buy something from outside and to carry home and carry that damn luggage everywhere – it's like troublesome. There in my home country ... I have to attend my classes only and that's all. ... I did not have to think about anything – this bill and that, gas bills, electricity bills –like too much pressure. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Similarly, Dina also narrated her story of initial hardship arising from everyday household activities:

At the beginning I had very much problem – for example – if I wanted to go for shopping, it took me the whole day. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

When Azabul was asked in his first semester why he could not make time to see his lecturers in the morning, he indirectly indicated a new lifestyle that still needed adjustment:

Because the students have got their jobs and they have other kinds of engagement, so they could not – can't make that timing. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Perception of Cost

Another noteworthy initial experience for the students involves the comparative perspective they have of costs. Four of them reported visualising any expenditure, at the initial stage, in terms of their local currency, which converts in a low exchange ratio with Australian currency, in spite of its distinctive purchasing power in their local economy. When Arnold was asked to pay a tuition invoice he perceived the amount in terms of Indian currency and this caused him a lot of stress:

I am spending a hell lot of money – it is not just a thousand dollar or few thousand dollars – it is 35 times of the Australian currency in my currency. [Arnold, India, Exercise Rehabilitation].

In some written feedback, Niranjana also noted his psychological shock due to low currency exchange rates:

Whenever I bought something at initial settlement, I used to calculate that price in terms of Indian currency and got a kind of psychological shock. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

The pragmatism behind Shafi's comment that he was 'spending a lot of money', and Qursat's reference to 'paying very high fee' is all linked with that economic perception. Although it was not expressed in explicit terms, students often mentioned that they were disadvantaged because of the low exchange rate between Australian and their home currencies. When they thought a \$2.50-sandwich in the university cafeteria "expensive", they mainly referred to the conversion they made of the Australian dollar into their home currencies.

Coping with Academic Requirements

Another aspect of the initial experiences that the postgraduates shared was how they coped with the academic requirements of their courses. That coping experience was marked by differences among the group of students in the extent to which they found the academic expectations in the Australian context difficult to meet. Mulligan and Kirkpatrick (2000)'s observation that international students usually miss certain portion of lectures, though drawn from a study on

South East Asian students imbued with Confucius Heritage Culture, applies also to the students of this study. Where they occurred, the difficulties arose from a lack of initial readiness to undertake the courses in terms of understanding the subject content and following lecturers' presentations and fulfilling academic formalities, such as submission of assignments, implementing academically approved practices (e.g. to avoid plagiarism), and sitting for examinations.

The situation of poor comprehension of class lectures by the students in the study resulted from one or more of Flowerdew and Miller's (1995) four dimensions of the cultural context – ethnic, local, academic and disciplinary (p. 346). From among those who reported initial difficulties in understanding class lectures, Suzan and Zinat's difficulties were more associated with the dimension of local culture which refers to 'the social, political and economic milieu of any education system from which "local" lecturers and students can draw a shared experience to enhance their understanding of lecture material, especially to elucidate key concepts' (Flowerdew & Miller 1995, p. 365). Similarly, for Qursat, Azabul, Shafi, academic and disciplinary cultures appeared to be the main dimensions influencing their limited understanding of class lectures. While the academic cultural dimension encompasses "academic values, roles, assumptions, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour that can operate at various levels in different educational system", the disciplinary culture dimension consists of the "theories, concepts, norms, and specialised vocabulary of a particular academic discipline" (Flowerdew & Miller 1995, pp. 362-366). Sometimes the causes of difficulties, particularly in relation to subject content and comprehension of lectures, were blurred. For example, when a student noted that they had difficulty in following class lectures, it might have two implications. Firstly, the subject matter of the lecture could be too hard and complicated for him/her to follow. Secondly, the difficulty might have resulted from the student's inability to follow their teachers' accent, articulation, or language, in general, implying more a linguistic and communicative deficiency. If this latter area of deficiency was the most significant contributing factor, then easier and simpler subject matter might not be of any help, and the ultimate consequences would be the same – an overall comprehension problem. Considering this analytical complexity, due to the absence of very precise evidential data, the difficulties involving perception of

demanding subject matter and poor comprehension of lectures have been discussed together.

The extent to which they faced challenges in addressing these academic adjustment issues, result in the students being able to be classified broadly into three levels according to the degree of their severity and the extent of their struggle and the students' subsequent perceptions of the success they achieved. The first group reported not finding the adjustment very challenging and they needed little effort to deal with it. The second group felt moderately challenging, but were able to cope with the challenges by expending a considerable effort. In contrast, the third group found the adjustment highly challenging requiring maximum efforts to achieve an acceptable level of coping.

In the following sections, I will consider the students' initial experiences in relation to subject content and understanding lecturers' presentations, and fulfilment of academic formalities and explore for each area how the three broad subgroups of students experienced their new academic environment and dealt with the challenges they perceived.

Fulfilling Academic Requirements:

Subject Content and Lectures

In their initial observations, three postgraduates, Dina, Arnold, and Niranjana, commented that the subject content in Southern University was repetitive of their earlier studies back home, uninteresting and not particularly challenging. They did not find the subject content required any deeper understanding either. They found it easy to adjust to. When Arnold was asked to comment on the subjects he was doing in the first semester, he mentioned:

I did not find them to be very advanced as I expected because most of the things were covered during my undergraduate studies of Bachelor of Physiotherapy. ... I did not find them to be that much in-depth information. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

In her retrospection, Dina echoed the same message in more elaborate language, indicating the minimum investment of effort she felt was being required in her subjects:

Sometimes it happens that I don't want to listen to teachers –because the kind of the topic I have already studied – that's very easy and sometimes I feel that what a boring topic it is, because that is very basic for me. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

When she was asked for a better understanding of how the course was 'basic' for her, she continued:

I was doing four courses (subjects) and only one was new for me. Not really new but that was a kind of new for me. And the other three...I was very very familiar. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

She also shared what she was telling to herself about a subject:

Oh my God Dina at this level you are doing these basic things. You should not do this. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

The fact that Dina had already completed an MBA course (which would have included an accounting subject) and had completed one year of an M. Phil program before coming to Australia might account for the relative ease with which she coped with the demands of her course, and her initial experience of it being academically undemanding.

We can sense a similar reaction from Niranjana when he recounted his initial experience of postgraduate study in Australia:

Still the syllabus is lighter – I am rather expecting heavy stuff – I am doing postgraduate course – it should be very heavy- but it is not. I have already studied some of them. If I talk about percentage – I have studied 50-60% of that. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

The moderately challenged group of four postgraduates, Zinat, Suzan, Anil and Mita, all felt that their initial difficulties in adjusting academically were associated with unfamiliar subject content and course delivery mode. With her science background, Zinat, had come to Australia to study social science, which exposed her to a new field of knowledge and a different presentation mode, void of laboratory based-activities:

No, (laughs) my background was science – I am doing Arts because of my job. ... I feel some difficulties because here the teachers do not deliver the lecture (on) that specific subject to be delivered – they just deliver the broader context and they give example from many different sources and in many

different ways. I feel difficulties to connect all those examples with that specific subject because I am not used to that mode of teaching. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Suzan, a student without any prior knowledge and experience of online courses, also experienced a moderate level of challenge. Some of her concerns were related to online protocols, which she termed as ‘netiquette’, and the ultimate outcome of the online subject she was studying as part of her course. As she shared her initial experience she pointed out that she lacked direction:

As I am doing on line courses, it is totally on computer and Internet based – it is totally new to me. Sometimes it creates a kind of pressure on me. As the teachers are not there, I am not sure whether I am meeting the standard or not ... [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Referring to her traditionally taught subjects, Suzan continued:

I had no understanding –basically how courses are conducted or lectures are given or delivered ... sometimes the discussions are too broad here – it’s not divided like module to module – very broad – it is step by step but sometimes altogether on good discussion it is hard to click the right topic or right lesson from the whole class – at the beginning it was very difficult for me. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

The remaining group of postgraduates (Shafi, Azabul and Qursat) were highly challenged in the new academic context and had to struggle a lot to cope with the situation. The degree of their disruptive tensions, caused by both hard-to-understand subject matter and the dearth of their linguistic and communicative skills, was so high that they became very critical of almost everything, made frequent complaints, and demonstrated impatience and frustration. The acculturative stress resulting from their English language deficiency, slow academic progress, lack of psychological accommodation and other personal factors (e.g. financial insolvency) was so severe that it led to what Kim (1995) refers to as ‘personality disintegration’, which was manifested in their emotional uncertainty, confusion and anxiety. Shafi, a postgraduate from Bangladesh with an IELTS overall band 6.0 in his second sitting, and who had attended an ELICOS course in Australia for two semesters, found his initial Telecommunications subjects very hard to follow. Acknowledging his deficiency in English, the most basic skill required in the Australian academic context, Shafi

needed to have very explicitly taught lessons as well as expecting more individual assistance from the teachers:

Yeah, yeah, English not (my) first language. So I have some problem in English class but when I try to (make) clear, it takes time – it takes time. But the teacher did not give time for me. ... Before coming here I thought that may be most of the teacher(s) will explain the things more clearly. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

With the expectation that the teachers should be available to help him in each and every difficult situation, he had approached them but was disappointed:

But what happened – when I didn't understand – when I get my tutorial – I just go to the teacher's room – and wanted to discuss –the teacher does not bother – they say, 'I have no time' ... I am really frustrated about this type of lecturer. [Shafi, Bangladeshi Telecommunications]

At certain points he endeavoured to present his own problem as a generalized problem for other students as well:

... actually the students see the teacher as negative. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Attributing his problems to his language deficiency as well as other resulting factors, Azabul also shared his initial difficulties in understanding subject content:

I feel it very difficult to understand the course. it is difficult because the time duration is very limited. Lecturers (are) fond of wrap [sic] up their things very quickly, the language communication is very poor and you won't be able to catch up their language ... it is very difficult to catch for the people from other nationals – whose English is not as first language. ... Yeah, it's a pretty difficult in taking notes even – so quick umm, umm ... difficult to do the job [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Referring to the Australian lecturers' perception of the students' background knowledge, and guest speakers' presentations based exclusively on Australian work experience, Azabul acknowledged that his difficulties resulted from the gap in both his theoretical and practical knowledge of the subject, and was initially provoked to comment on the quality of Australian education:

.....they (lecturers) have a pre-understanding that we have a very good knowledge of those subjects and good background – working background. ... The practical experience they (guest lecturers) share is very good – but theoretical (is) not good [laughs].... I think the education I found right now is inferior to Indian type of education. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Qursat also stated that he found it ‘difficult to follow the lectures with headlines’ on the slides.

Acculturation syndrome that resulted from cultural stresses associated with the individual acculturation processes of the students in this third group was strongly evident.

Assessments

Initially, the students also experienced difficulties of different magnitudes in fulfilling academic requirements in connection to the preparation of assignments, complying with referencing needs, and sitting for examinations. To start with assignments, the students in their initial stories indicated their varying levels of understanding about assignment requirements. The clearer their understanding of the requirements was, the better they coped with them. While all but one of the students were familiar with the term ‘assignment’, the initial understanding about an assignment for more than 60% of the students, was denotative rather than connotative. They gave the impression that being familiar with the term was as good as understanding and applying the concept. Only 30% of them clearly indicated relatively better understanding of what an assignment was, whilst the remaining postgraduate admitted her total unfamiliarity with the concept. These students’ perception of an academic assignment, irrespective of the above classification, was limited to expectations of some kind of assigned academic essays scheduled to be submitted by the due date. For them, the research, quality and standard-related issues associated with the notion of assignment were totally overlooked. In this section, I have started my discussion with those who had some, but imprecise understanding, then move on to those with only a denotative understanding followed by those with a zero level of initial understanding.

With her previous postgraduate experience, Dina stated that the practice of academic assignments was common in Pakistan, but its requirements were obscure:

Assignments are also given in there (Pakistan) – they are also given here (in Australia) ... but you can say that the expectation of the teachers (there) are

quite tough I don't know what their (Pakistani lecturers) expectations are. They do not give very good grade for the efforts of the students they put in doing the assignments ... but here in Australia you do the assignments you can get good grade... the teacher expects from students that they should be submitted on time. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Drawing a contrast between the contexts of her home and the Australian university in terms of the fundamentals of assignments, Suzan pointed out what she was used to:

It (assignment) is very organised here – weeks before we are informed of the assignments – how we are expected to fulfil the criteria and how many words and how many references are required – all these are set up. Back home we don't have like this. Assignments are there but how many words and how many references are required – these are not very clear. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

While Zinat's conceptualisation of assignment, after its refinement in a subject within Introductory Academic Program (IAP), included an important aspect of assignments e.g. building up argument and sourcing support, she ascribed timely submission as being the most important expectation:

Well, in case of assignments – the requirements are more or less similar, but the difference here is that we have to build-up arguments here – and we have to support it. ... But back in my home there is argument but we were not so clear about (what) supports we have to give – the source of supports – those things were not clear. Here these things are clear and specific-what we have to do (use) this type of supports. ...Most important thing is 'time' in terms assignments.... first of all I think I have to maintain the due dates to submit the assignments [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

The group of 60% of the respondents, whose initial understanding about academic assignments has been described as being denotative, presented an inaccurately focussed idea of this important notion. Niranjana, who apparently did not recognize any difference initially between the assignments as genres in the academic settings in India and in Australia, admitted non-compliance to one of the essential norms, not colluding or copying from another student. This raises questions about the acceptability of his work:

Assignments are same – I don't find any difference in that.... we can copy like one boy and one girl are making (doing) assignment – we can copy from her without worrying about what the teachers will say. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Azabul, referring to his understanding of a practice of assisted assignments in India, initially found the assignment task in Australia different and challenging:

Similarities is [sic] like we have even assignment in India – like assignments which is very easy to do it without taking the lecturer’s guidance ... because our seniors could assist us in doing this [sic] assignments ... but here it is difficult- we do not have any seniors to communicate and help us. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

In spite of visible difference in terms of acknowledgement of authorship, Qursat also shared his perceived view of similarity of assignments in two contexts:

I think they are same both in Pakistan and here ... It’s same, I think. ... In Pakistan we are not used to acknowledge [sic] the authorship. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

The one remaining student, Mita, in her story of initial experience, repeatedly admitted her ignorance of the concept of assignment, although the vocabulary was not totally unfamiliar to her:

OK, if I wanna compare between these (assignments) – I don’t have any idea regarding assignment in my home country. I just cannot compare. It is not possible to distinguish. ... I didn’t have any idea about assignment. I know there is something called assignments- and bla- bla –bla but then I know empirical experiment not assignments. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Referencing and Plagiarism

Copyright to intellectual property is a worldwide issue, and plagiarism and misquotations are viewed very seriously in western universities. Plagiarism, a term first coined by Elizabethan playwright, Ben Johnson to mean ‘literary theft’ (Grossberg, 2004) has been conceptualized differently over time. The Office of Research Integrity in United States of America has defined plagiarism as “the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results or words without giving appropriate credit” (Dahlberg 2007, p. 4). Grossberg (2004), in his editorial has drawn attention to the Statement on Plagiarism by the American Historical Association, defines plagiarism to include:

more subtle and perhaps more pernicious abuses than simply expropriating the exact wording of another author without attribution. Plagiarism also includes the limited borrowing, without attribution, of another person’s distinctive and significant research findings, hypothesis, theories, rhetorical strategies, or interpretations, or an extended borrowing even with attribution (p.1334).

While the need to quote and reference accurately in academic practices is universally emphasized by academicians (e.g. Bretag 2007; Master 2005), the postgraduates in this study, who come from different academic cultures and with varying level of academic literacy, demonstrated initial understandings about plagiarism and referencing requirements that varied from zero to partial familiarity, with sketchy and imprecise ideas about what constitutes plagiarism. Their understandings also indicated that although some of them had some acquaintance with the concept of plagiarism and were aware of referencing requirements, they had little practice in the application of such notions in their earlier academic life. Six of them had misconceptions about the practice of referencing. The overwhelming non-compliance of referencing requirements by the postgraduates might have stemmed from their own academic culture where using quotations in the examinations profusely with or without proper referencing are encouraged. Quotes signify that the students have read extensively. The researcher's background knowledge in this regards has also been supported by East (2005, p.7).

One of the responding postgraduates, when asked about his understanding about plagiarism, gave a blank look and asked for an explanation of what it meant. But when explained, he mentioned the imprecise referencing practices back in Pakistan and underlined the need for a change:

Plagiarism means...? ... No, please explain me. ... in Pakistan we use this and that book for the assignments but we have to say that we have consulted this or that book – we don't have to write all information of the source- we don't write the name of the book etc. But here I understand that we have to follow the copyright rules [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Referring to the academic culture he had been exposed to in his home context, Shafi viewed referencing as least important, and with his sketchy understanding, he questioned its little relevance to his mathematical subjects, in particular:

Actually in my country referencing and bibliography is not so important. We just (use other sources) and that's why maybe plagiarism (can be observed) in our country – most of the students are used to those kind of thing. Because they don't need to give reference and bibliography properly ... my subject is ... mathematics based. It is not related so much with referencing. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

In a tone almost similar to Shafi, showing his indifference to referencing needs, and pointing to its irrelevance to mathematical subjects, Niranjana reported:

In India we don't have stuff like plagiarism. ... You know in the assignment we are supposed to do only numerical - so only numerical- micro-solving- we don't have anything for referencing and all these things. I don't need them. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

However, Shafi acknowledged the importance of referencing in the Australian context and had learnt how to do that:

It's demanding here. ... after coming here I have learnt at least one thing properly that how to take (ideas) – how to give reference and how to use bibliography within your research work- [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Anil also had no earlier history of practising referencing and noted, 'Plagiarism is stealing ideas from others' and indicated a perception that knowledge is something concrete to be shared by anybody. However, failing to recognize the fact that the knowledge he perceived to be his own was built upon ideas created by others who need to be acknowledged, he held that his self-composed assignments should not need referencing:

Well, it is quite the same for me, because I always choose my assignments to be my own. So –yes, if you say about India, I never used to reference- I mean never used any such reference other than that of my own class teacher. Whatever I had to refer and ask, I always ask them. In a way I never read other people's materials to go through my writing. I never did that. ... It did not affect me much (in India). Even in here, yes- most materials that we get such as the pictures and location sites and everything is, of course, from Internet- that's the work source of knowledge. But writing I always put in my own (words). [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Azabul, whose perception of plagiarism was similar to Anil's, shared an experience of partial fulfilment of referencing practices:

Plagiarism is copying from some others work and stating it as your own work- that's plagiarism ... Actually we used to quote all these references just at the back of the complete essay and that's it. We never practise that - the in-text referencing? [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Only thirty percent of the participating postgraduates indicated having initially an acceptable level of understanding of the concept of plagiarism and prior training on and experience in referencing. Dina shared her understanding of plagiarism and also noted the lesser significance of referencing in her home context, except in higher postgraduate research with western educated teachers:

I think (plagiarism is) copying some materials from any other source... you find some materials relevant to that and copying it as it is without acknowledging (its authorship). ... In Pakistan I didn't much care about referencing but during my M. Phil studies when I was preparing the thesis ... in the text I just wrote the name of the author and at the end of the text I gave the publication date all this information I think the same as here. Like those teachers who have studied who have done Ph. D or who have studied

from overseas countries they always keep reminding and those teachers who has done MBA or Masters from Pakistan- they were not very much demanding- they did not care much about all these things. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Only Suzan and Zinat, the two AusAid scholarship students had formal academic training on referencing, which was covered as a part of their AusAid-funded Introductory Academic Program (known as IAP), offered before the grantees start their mainstream postgraduate studies in Australia. Both had also been informed of the partial practice of referencing back home in Bangladesh. Interestingly, both of these postgraduates mentioned that they crystallized their understanding of plagiarism only after coming to Australia. To talk about her understanding of plagiarism and feeble use of referencing in the Bangladeshi academic context, Suzan said:

Referencing- we were taught, I think, in my course in Bangladesh. I was taught about that Harvard system - lucky for that – {laughs} I practised that (to) some extent in our assignments- but not strictly. But here I have – here I got the clear picture of it–like how to cite from web – Internet, how to cite from books, articles, journals, different writings. It is very strict, as I said, if I copy four words from any of these media, I have to acknowledge the source. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Zinat's experience was almost identical:

... Yes, I know it (plagiarism) after coming here {laughs}, now I know it. ... for the end-text referencing, that is there – but in-text referencing – that's not that much practised there in Bangladesh. If we use someone's view in part or compare with something, I don't think that is acknowledged in terms of in-text referencing but the end of the text-referencing is there in both situations (Australia & Bangladesh). [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

The individual narratives of the postgraduates about their initial knowledge and practices of referencing have portrayed most of them as having inadequate academic literacy, and that inadequacy reasonably caused significant hardship to the students in adapting to the Australian postgraduate environment.

Dealing with Examinations

The issue of dealing with examinations in the Australian context was relatively much less confusing for the postgraduates in question. They were attuned to a traditional examination system as a part of assessment, and were also used to the core component of such examinations being the requirement to answer some questions within a specified time frame. While the concept of an open-book

examination system was new to most of them, they had a relatively better understanding about the closed-book system. In spite of that, they acknowledged some differences in the examination administration processes and the proportion of weight given to examinations in the final assessment of students. As the assessment criteria included not only examinations, but also other modes (e.g. assignments, class presentation), the discussion, for obvious reasons, will encompass those areas when they are found intertwined.

While the students were all familiar with the ancient academic tradition of examinations, their initial narratives focussed on their preferences between the two modes of examination, (e.g. open book and closed book); year-final examination and end-of-semester examination; and their home system and the Australian system, often in comparison with each other. For example, in his comparative assessment of the examination systems of the two contexts in his first interview, Arnold expressed the view that the Australian system of examinations was less challenging:

Regarding the differences, there we give our exam at the end of the year- each year- and here the course structure is like every week we are having our small quiz kind of exams - on going progress of education, of examination here. For one subject, not every week - at the end of semester I have to sit for exam, for other subjects it's on-going and that is not as intensive. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

While Mita noted that the examination back home was 'at the end of the year' with books closed, in Melbourne 'the norm is open book exam', Dina's initial appraisal included more about the administration of tests and the proportion of weight that the examination covered in the final assessment of students in Australia. According to Dina, assessment modes in her home country context were uniform and administered centrally all over the university, whereas in the Australian context, assessment criteria were determined by individual subject-lecturers, and the administration of tests was flexible on negotiation between a teacher and their students:

There are some differences ... all the teachers - they had 20% for the assignments, 20% for mid-term exam, 40% for the final exam, that is given to them by the department or ... by the university but here it depends upon the teacher that how he will assess us... So individual teacher has got different modes of assessment, ... then mid term exam after the holidays week, because we have negotiated with the teachers and there is no such kind of thing in our country, because there is schedule which is given by the

departments and so teachers should follow that schedule and student should follow that schedule. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

As Dina continued, she commented on her preferred ratio of examination and assignment in the assessment of students:

... the assessment method here is quite relaxed- as compared to other universities. For example, in one subject – we have open book exam and heavy percentage of assignment - although it is tough to work on assignment - but as compared - on one side if you have exam papers – 100% assessment is made on final exam. If on the other side, you have 40% assessment on the basis of assignment and 60% on the basis of exam- I think that would cover... Here more weight is given ... on assignment. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Indicating her orientation to learning for recognition and reproduction and dependence on strenuous memorisation, Zinat showed her preference for piecemeal examinations held at the end of each semester rather than the end-of-year comprehensive tests:

Not only memorisation, you see in course system we have to, as it is long term course, to learn many things, and in our exam we have to answer nine questions at the end of the year and nine questions covers the whole year's course (contents). In four hours you have to answer nine questions – it is very difficult and the marks were 100 marks and so it is a little bit difficult. I face a little bit difficult to cope with that. But now it is – in my two subjects- one has exam- only one exam and the other one has no exam – just assignments. It is much more [sic] easier (laughs). [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Niranjan's preference for closed book examination is also linked to his orientation to a 'surface approach' (Macaro & Wingate 2004, p. 470) to learning:

I think, because you know open book exams are meant to be very tough. You have only three hours. You can't find all the answers in three hours. Open book exam for me I think is very hard. Closed book (exams) are easy. In closed book you just suppose to answer questions. I mean closed book exams are linked with your memory and your understanding. Open book exam I don't think are linked with your memory and understanding of the subject. You just find answer. If you have got luck and you can find. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Equivocal feelings about aspects of the assessment process are another facet of the initial experience of these postgraduates. The postgraduates' initial response was to appreciate certain academic aspects, such as the use of transparent assessment criteria, although some were critical of the predictability of examinations. Referring to some biased assessment practices in Pakistan, Dina appreciated the objective assessment of her Australian teachers:

Some of them (teachers in Pakistan) give high grades or good marks to students (laughs) who are friends to them. Here I have seen no such thing- I think there is no such kind of thing, as far as – up till now I haven't seen such kind of things. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

In another episode, she valued the Australian assessment process through assignments but expressed her surprise over how the examination question was set:

Because you yourself work on the assignment and you learn a lot ... and for that final exam we have already been given the question which would be in the exam paper. So it is quite easy to work on it - what would be asked to you in exam – I can prepare the questions. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Arnold also expressed satisfaction with the assignment process, but commented that he felt the examination paper was less demanding than he had expected, with provided course notes assisting with preparation using a 'strategic approach' and involving 'surface learning' (Macaro & Wingate 2004):

In term of assignments it's okay. But in terms of examination I would say it was less challenging because the notes, which were provided to us - if we just handle it, and if we appear for exam we can very well pass ... because the questions are set from those notes. [Arnold, India, Exercise Rehabilitation]

Perceptions about Teaching

The postgraduates' initial reflections on teaching in the Australian context demonstrate quite divergent responses to their new environment. Three postgraduates viewed the Australian teaching as rewarding and evaluated it positively, whereas five appraised it negatively and made critical remarks. The remaining two used a relatively neutral rhetoric – opting neither to applaud nor criticise it. In spite of her reservation about lectures being too broad and too Australia-specific and her non-familiarity with online classes, Suzan found the traditionally taught classes with their analytical lectures supplemented with visual projection rewarding:

More participatory – total participatory... Good discussion – basically good discussion and when the guest speakers come and also overhead presentation is there. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Besides her discovery of a medium of instruction different from that of her home context, Mita also found the teaching in Australia participatory:

But the only thing here is the medium of instruction (English). And here it is more interactive- more responsive. So that way, I think, it works better here. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

The group that were more negative in their initial appraisals viewed the teaching as falling below their expectations and satisfaction level. This perception was filtered through the cultural lenses of their home contexts, and frequent references to their home contexts were evident. Whilst the students classified in this group shared a predominantly negative view, they varied in the degree of their pessimism. Most aggrieved among this group was Shafi, who made very critical initial comments about teaching, referring to the lecture sheets as ‘age-old’:

Most of the teacher [sic] use overhead (projector) - not only that, their class lectures – maybe they have prepared it up ten thousand, sorry, ten years ago and continue with their overhead and transparency sheet ... it’s not interactive- because the teacher just place [sic] his transparency (sheets) on the overhead and they just stand on the other side and the students try to write down the notes according to the lecture sheet. That’s all. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Reflecting his dissatisfaction over what he perceives as the monologue approach to teaching, Qursat felt that he was lucky if he had understood fifty percent of the lecture material being presented:

(From) Three out of four teachers – if you get fifty percent, you would be lucky - two of the three teachers –they do the same – they just bring their files and read the same materials – what is on the screen and that’s it. They don’t explain anything. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Sharing his boredom with non-engaging class lectures, Qursat continued:

You know you (we) are not that much involved in that (the class) ... in the same routine all the time – for now 11 weeks- or you can say 10 weeks all the time. So it’s a bit boring - and the same thing is on the screen and the person in front of you is reading the same thing- you also read the same thing or you just listen to that. You (we) are just comparing whether he is reading like - exactly what is on the screen {laughs}... but the teacher should not be like reading machine . [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

The implication of Qursat’s description and his associated boredom is that such “lecturing only involves transmission” (Biggs 1996, p. 348) and the learning outcome is little. Had there been a stronger ‘constructive alignment’ which, according to Biggs (1996), refers to “a marriage of the two thrusts”: ‘constructivism’ and ‘instructional design’ (p.347), the students may have had a stronger sense of being engaged in creating meaning, in other word, in constructing knowledge.

Comparing the rigidly structured lessons in the Australian university with the flexible course modules in Pakistan, Dina grumbled about the lack of teachers' proper attention to students' understanding:

... there is one difference, for example, if I have (the unit guide) at the beginning of the semester if teacher tells us that we will study these topics in these weeks but during the week if the teacher feels that the students could not understand this particular topics in one class he can prolong that topics to the next class so that students can clear (their misunderstanding) and ... to cover up the whole syllabus he can take extra class but here I have seen that teachers don't care much about the understanding of the students ... they just come to the classroom and deliver the lecture according to the schedule which was given to us at the beginning of the semester. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Attaching a label of 'self-study' to Australian postgraduate education and using a less-judgemental, but nevertheless comparative expression, Anil also referred to the rigid structure of lecture sessions as well as tutorials in Southern University:

... in Australia it is a kind of self-study for all the students and in India, yes, you get a [sic] interactive class between teacher and students - that's less here. Yes, it is quite less interactive here. ... Tutorials in Australia- they mainly present slides and we are expected to listen and go through it. ... there is no time for questioning and answering... in India it never mattered for the time limit to exceed. We always kept on going – even after the classes were over. But here – yes – time limit means lot, I suppose. Because the next class is coming in. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

In his first semester, referring to the non-interactive nature of lectures, Qursat perceived that actual academic pursuits had to take place outside the classroom:

Here...students are present (in classroom) physically only – they are mentally somewhere else. ...In Pakistan you have to do everything – most of thing in the classroom, but here you have to do most of thing outside classroom, because you only get the headlines in the classroom – so you have to do each and everything yourself. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Referring to student engagement in the classes in Australia, Dina noted that half of her first semester teachers preferred uninterrupted monologue-lecture:

I am studying four subjects and two teachers want so much - expect from students that they should speak up and the two teachers they do not expect from the students or they just, as far as I understand, they just want that 'student should let me to do the lecture (laughs) students should listen to me' – that there is two teachers who expect a lot from the students – that they should speak up in the lecture (session). [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

The group representing equivocal opinions drew out the differences in teaching in the two contexts - Australian and their home – without referring to any resulting evaluation of each as being positive or negative. Nirranjan preferred to share his experience of the technological difference, rather than being judgemental:

Mode of teaching is quite different from India. Mode of teaching is like – we don't have projectors. They have projectors but they use it only for special classes.... You know it is quite different. It is used very frequently. [Nirranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Also pointing to relatively limited use of advanced educational technology and occasional use of vernacular in lectures in her home context, Dina described the teaching in Australian university as similar:

Mode of teaching is quite same because that was the semester system, there was also limited time, there we had fifteen weeks to cover the syllabus, here we have fourteen, ... there we also had presentation and assignments, here we have also have presentation and assignments. Here I mean style of delivery– the way the teacher present it in the class (is) quite same... in our country for the subjects, which are very technical, the teacher can take the help of other language like Urdu. That's the only difference, otherwise that is also in English... [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

But in a balancing statement Arnold demonstrated both his enthusiasm for some issues as well as his depressing outlook for others:

Regarding the course structure I would say if you compare it with my undergrad studies there and my Masters here, course structure is pretty much same ... but one part is good is that they have incorporated too [sic] much of practical and student interaction. The mode of presentation is good, but one thing I found lagging behind is whatever lecturers are teaching is not that rich in – is not rich in their- content. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Perceptions about Teacher-student Relationship

The teacher-student relationship influenced significantly the initial settlement experience of the students associated with this study. The initial perception of the relationship in the host culture was also interpreted through the lens of understanding of the relationship formed in their respective home contexts. This is an issue about which the participants of this study, in spite of possible differences about other issues, have least controversy among them. They all view a teacher as someone who is treated as an embodiment of knowledge, and who is given a special social position and draws highest respect from the full cross

section of the society. However, they also impose a high level of expectation on a teacher. Teachers are more than people employed to deliver the curriculum content - they are 'GURU' to some, mentor to others, or even a philosophical guide to some, and many teachers leave almost everlasting impressions on their students. Given this culturally-influenced perception, the students contrast the teacher-student relations in the Australian context with those they expected. While two sub-groups of the students can be placed at the opposite ends of a continuum representing their initial experiences of Australian teacher-student relations as either rewarding or frustrating, a third sub-group were less equivocal and expressed their ambivalence towards Australian teacher-student relations.

One group comprising five of the respondents (Dina, Suzan, Zinat, Arnold, and Niranjan) expressed a positive attitude to the teacher-student relationship that they were initially exposed to at Southern University. Drawing a contrast between some teachers in Pakistan, who are biased towards students known closely to them, and the Australian teachers' professional integrity, Dina expressed her satisfaction with the teacher-student relations at the University:

I think that's good or you can say that's OK here ... Teachers [in Pakistan]... give high grades or good marks to students who are friends to them, who are their friends. Here I have seen ... no such kind of thing ... [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Describing the Australian academic context as a 'totally informal environment' and teacher-student relationships as quite 'friendly', Suzan pointed out that the accessibility to teachers for appointments were based on formalities:

Like we don't feel pressured that how the lecturer will react ... if I do something or I express my view against him, so say, it is friendly here. Teacher-student relationship is very friendly. ... Here it is, I think, very accessible because through e-mails and telephones and personal face-to-face contact - it's very possible but it is totally based on appointments (laughs) for face to face contact here. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Similar to Suzan, Zinat also found the teacher-student relationship to be 'more relaxing here', and teachers, with some exceptions, accessible:

Here it is much friendly. Students feel comfortable to ask any question to teachers here ... It is much informal here ... teacher is permitting students to express them - but all teachers are not like that. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

In spite of their traditional means of showing respect to teachers, which is different from the Australian practices, Arnold viewed the teacher-student relationship as being ‘very congenial’:

Relationship is – what I found is- relationship is good.... But one thing I found very odd is the students here don’t respect their lecturers with their designations or something [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Referring to the hierarchal relationship between teacher and students that prevails in India, Niranjana observed:

Here students and teachers are more friendly, I suppose. [Niranjana, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

The second sub-group of three respondents (e.g. Anil, Shafi and Azabul) viewed the teacher-student relationship in the Australian university context as rather remote and less supportive. A proactive and internally driven Anil, based on his perception of teachers having stronger roles back home, viewed the lecturers in Australia as having a lesser role and he experienced a distance in the teacher-student relationship, which he partly attributed to the unpredictability of the Australian teachers:

... in India, all the teachers were mentors to me. But in here (one) is just a lecturer ... here (the) teacher-student relationship – there is quite a gap, I would say, because lack of interaction. But as I can see in here the students come from different cultures, various places of the world – so when they come in for a teacher, they don’t know how he is and what they expect from him- so, yes- there is some gap in that. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Continuing on his comparative analysis of Indian and Australian approaches, Anil labelled the relationship in the latter setting as ‘reserve[d]’:

... when you are interacting with your professor, you come to know a lot about them- you become more friendly with them- so that helps a lot. But here it is quite reserve[d]. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

Shafi, who presented himself as dependent on very explicit teaching, complained about the non-accessibility of teachers. His repetitive indictment against the teachers was sufficiently pronounced to generalize that he found the teacher-student relations mostly de-motivating:

What I didn’t get here is that the teachers in friendly mood so that the students can get access to the teachers and students can get their problem solved. ... because I went to the teacher many times but the response was not so[sic] well and they did not have enough time to answer my question ... a picture different from my expectation. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

The other two of the respondents presented mixed views about teacher-student relations in the Australian academic landscape, and distinguished between the informal and professional aspects of the relationship. Though he found the teacher-student relationship to be ‘good’ and professional, Azabul did not find it helpful in supporting his learning needs:

Relationship is good but it does not help us very much. . . . In India, they are very friendly and they are professional as well. Here the teachers are professional all the time. It’s a professional relationship. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Qursat, who explained that he considered the teacher as an embodiment of knowledge, admitted that it was too early to comment definitively, although his initial perception was that the teacher-student relationship in Australia was formal and comparatively distant:

It is just one month I have started here- so I can’t say much. One thing – though I have no experience – back home we used to meet the teacher at the parking – in the cafeteria- we used to ask him. But here we have to make appointment- we have to check if he is free or not. It was more informal there. Here we see more formalities. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Spoken Communication

Seeking to portray the adaptation experiences of the postgraduates in question, the study has explored initial responses of students to another important, but relatively neglected aspect of life on campus – spoken communication in academic settings. Building on the preview of spoken genre provided in Chapter 2, the following discussion will include both purely academic spoken genres as well as other spoken discourses from contexts beyond classrooms that have bearing on students’ academic success. For example, the discourses at the international office or other service counters on campus are not strictly academic, but they are part of academic life and culture. I have emphasised that classroom interaction may be “a valuable tool for learning” (Kumpulainen & Wray 2002, p. 3) and also that classroom interaction that often goes beyond subject content and includes learners’ social and cultural interactions, and allowance of some space for discourses, such as those involved in undertaking research for assignments/projects helps not only subject-based knowledge, but also enculturation (Mercer 2000, pp. 3-9).

Given the necessary involvement of two or more interlocutors in any spoken communication context, successful well-negotiated interaction can only take place if the interlocutors understand each other. So success in spoken communication of these international postgraduates depended on their understanding of what their Australian lecturers or classmates were saying, and also on being understood by the other party – the Australian or other background interlocutors. Given the data was from the postgraduates' interviews, the discussion about spoken communication will only be from their perspectives. Like other aspects of adaptation, the initial experiences of the postgraduates of spoken communication were uneven and awkward. Their interactions were marked with different discourse topics, varying levels of success and mixed reactions at miscommunication.

The conversational topics of the postgraduates with their Australian and other international student counterparts were reported initially to be limited to short greetings and introductory pleasantries (e.g. about cultures, religions, languages spoken), but gradually expanded to some humorous youth themes and finally covered more academic discourses. The frequency and opportunities for students to communicate with native speakers were also limited for different reasons. When Suzan was asked how often she could speak to (Australian) classmates she noted:

Now not that much because I am doing on-line subjects ... and so mainly communicate through emails. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Referring to the duration and topics of conversation Suzan added:

(At the beginning) it was just Hi and hello ... we had longer discussions - like class, course, topics and our experience, their background – we shared each other's background and experience. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

In her retrospection, Zinat noted that in spite of limited opportunity for interaction, which is quite natural at the initial stage, the discussions gradually moved onto longer discourses:

They [local students] are, what should I say, they have their pride, they won't approach ... international students. ...Not quite often. But I interact with them. ... No, not always hi and hello, because by now three weeks have gone

– so we have made quite development. So we have talked about – how are you? - how is your week end going? – how the classes are going on - how the assignments going on. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Highlighting the remote possibility of interacting with native English speakers in class, Shafi described the demography of his class:

Actually in my class – in my classroom no Australian pupil here. All of them are Indian – Indian continental people. One from Pakistan – Most of them are Indians. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Niranjan talked about the register of the initial spoken communication with classmates, and described how the topics and discourse patterns changed over time:

It's formal talk, it could be anything, and it could be talk on anything. Like I have some Chinese classmates - today I said hi and hello. ... Some times 'Is that girl good? (laughs) ... we discuss more about the culture, religion - they ask me how I tie my turban - (laugh) – I ask them what they celebrate during Easter – like that. More cultural questions – about the countries.[Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering].

Seven of the ten students experienced miscommunication during their spoken interaction with native speakers of English, whereas two of them perceived that their spoken communication was unconstrained, and the remaining one noted only some minor strains. Anil, a postgraduate student who came with a completely English medium education background and had achieved an IELTS overall band score of 7 before he arrived in Australia, claimed his confidence:

... they understand me quite well. Neither do I have any difficulty in understanding them. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

In response to a question about how frequently he participated in spoken interaction with fellow classmates, what a high internal Anil said is a manifestation of Lam and Mizerski's (2005) observation that people with high internality are more likely to engage in word of mouth communication with out-groups, and can take social risks of adverse remarks from the interlocutors:

Quite often – very often. Most of them are international students just like me. Only a few of them are Australians- that depend from class to class. So yes, quite often. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

Referring to a different context of relational constraint, Arnold, another Indian student with a high IELTS overall score (7.5) noted that he had not encountered any communication problems while in Australia:

No. no, it was nothing concerning with my (spoken) language- not the way I was putting the things to them. They understood what I was telling.... [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Niranjan perceived his spoken communication to be functioning reasonably well except for a few minor impediments:

They understand me well and I understand them well. ... I think it's OK ...Not, not very often. I mean – it could be like – suppose we are talking for five minutes- and it could be just one or two words that we have to repeat or they have to repeat. It is not that odd. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

In contrast, the other seven postgraduates mentioned experiencing varying levels of difficulties in understanding both their native speaker English lectures and classmates. These postgraduates also experienced difficulty in being understood. As they narrated their difficulties in spoken interaction, they also shared their feeling about and responses to such difficulties, as well as the strategies they applied in problematic situations (discussed in Chapter 5).

I have classified the problems these postgraduates spontaneously raised as examples from their spoken communication, particularly in the on-campus contexts, into three broad categories:

- i) Problems related to quality of speech output.
- ii) Problems with L2 knowledge and processing constraints.
- iii) Problems due to lack of communication accommodation.

Problems Related to Quality of Speech Output

Quality of speech output encompasses variations of accents and speed of articulation. Although the respondents share some heritage of British English from the legacy of the British rule in undivided British India, they are segregated, as Kachru (1992 pp. 66-67) puts it, by their “linguistically identifiable, geographically definable ... non-native models of English”. Whatever exposure to English the students from the now primarily monolingual social contexts of Bangladesh and Pakistan had had, was limited mostly to academic English. Although the students from India had experienced a multilingual context back home with opportunities to use and practise English relatively on a wider scale than the students from the other two countries, the distinctive variety of English

they use is quite different from the Australian variety of English. These differences led to them experiencing problems. The most common factor that affected the speech output of the students causing strains on the part of their interlocutors was differences in accents. The accent-bar stopped many of them in getting into class interaction, as well as affecting their interactions in other spoken contexts. They also found some Australian accents and vocabulary different from their expectation, which made comprehension problematic for them. In her self assessment of her speech quality, Dina identified accent as the main problem with her spoken interaction and also explained why she could not follow Australians:

Accent, yeah, accent, because if they (Australian classmates) thought that my grammar was not OK, still they could understand... they don't take it so seriously. ... If they can't understand the accent ... they take it seriously ...I can't understand because of their speed. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Qursat also pointed out that accent influenced by his L1, Urdu, caused communication problem:

... if you are speaking English using your own accent - in the accent of Urdu, that would be difficult for them to understand.” [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

In her reflection Mita noted:

“Because of accent just because of accent ... we messed up.” [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Referring to an example that he perceived as ‘classic’, Azabul gave a relatively comprehensive description of what caused communication problems for him:

Miscommunication – there would be some basic words – because in India we have different accent and in Australian they have a different accent. For example, there is a very classical example like Australian call M-A-T-E – we call it /meit / {but} they call /mait /. That's the difference. We call hello mate /meit / they call hello mate /mait /. So there comes the miscommunication-. ...Their accent, their speed and style – all (laughs). [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

The other aspect that impinged on the speech quality was the speed of articulation. While the postgraduates perceived that the speed of articulation by native speakers was too fast for them to comprehend, some of them realized that the speed of their own speech was also problematic for others. Dina who did ‘not feel very much comfortable’ speaking to native English speakers, agreed with her classmates’ observation that her fast speech caused problems to the audience of her presentation:

I think I talk too fast sometimes- because during the presentation my class fellows said – they comment [sic], ‘you are too fast’. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

At the same time Dina’s explanation as to why she could not initially participate in spoken discourse with native English speakers, exemplified her familiarity with non-native varieties of English as opposed to a native English variety:

I can understand you and I can understand any Asians, any one, but I can’t understand this English people- because of their accent and because of their speed. ... when I don’t understand – obviously I won’t feel confident to ask question or in talking. The basic problem is listening problem- because of this my speaking problems arise. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

The comprehension problem for Suzan, who had an IELTS band-score 7.5, was also associated with the recognition of accent due to fast speech:

... sometimes it is hard to get their accent, because they talk very fast. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

While commenting on his overall comprehension of his lecturers, Azabul noted his disadvantaged position for being a non-native English speaker:

They speak good English but it is very difficult to catch for the people from other nationals to whom English is not his first language. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Problems with L2 Knowledge and Processing Constraint

I have classified lack of suitable vocabulary, inability to decode meaning of certain vocabulary in the Australian context and two-tier thought processing - first in L1 and then transferring into L2, as problems of L2 knowledge and processing constraints. Such difficulties posed a challenge for these international students while they were in any extended academic discourse situations.

Referring to her problem of deciphering the connotation of some vocabulary and expressions in the Australian context, Suzan recollected her initial experience of spoken interaction:

The Australians frequently use ‘I reckon’. At first I just wondered what they meant by that ... then I understood that they are suggesting something. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Zinat’s problem was of a composite nature; as she observed:

Pronunciation and accent, and sometimes I feel difficult to communicate because of lack of words. I can understand the teacher well. Only some words I cannot understand, I think, those words I don't understand. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Another problem in the students' spoken interaction was associated with their thought processing styles. It is evident that some of the postgraduates tended to process their ideas first in their L1, then transferring to the target language (e.g. English). Qursat candidly shared his experience:

Thought processing is longer and low ...because we have to get first in our mind what we are going to speak in our language and then transfer it into English, by that time we miss out certain sequences of interaction. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Mita's failure to keep track in spoken interaction also resulted from the lack of synchronisation between her thought processing in two languages and her turn taking in the discourse:

you know- we cannot be point to point- sometime we do not really find what we are going to say- at that time he (the native English speaking interlocutor) just wonders, 'What he or she is talking about'. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

What Qursat and Mita have said about their pre-articulation experience in spoken communication has resemblance to Leder and Fogasz's (2004) observation about this phenomenon.

Problems due to Lack of Communication Accommodation

Lack of communication accommodation was another problem that added to the miscommunication when these postgraduates were involved in any oral communication at the initial stage. Absence of adjustment strategies such as use of foreigner talk, paraphrasing, slowing down speed of articulation and minimising use of culture specific idioms and expressions as well as brief articulation, lack of self confidence and non-attentiveness all have been classified as constituting a lack of communication accommodation.

In her initial interview, Suzan remarked about the communication over a service desk:

It is hard to get them because they are very brief ... they think the international students should understand them the same way as the local students. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Even at the end of her first semester Dina expressed her feeling of timidity when she spoke to native speakers of English:

Whenever I talk to Australian people, I don't feel very comfortable, I don't feel much confident, and my communication skill-that becomes poor. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

The attitude of the non-teaching staff members, perceived to be indifference to international students, also contributed to poor communicative performance on the part of the postgraduates. Mita observed:

...they don't just talk to us in a way that they talk to locals. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Feelings about Miscommunication

The resulting impact of miscommunication and misunderstanding during any spoken interaction on the postgraduates was fairly uniform. While most of the postgraduates who suffered from miscommunication felt it to be an unhappy experience, only a few were self-confident and self-aware enough to see it as a natural outcome in any cross-cultural communication. Expressing her awkwardness in such events of miscommunication, Zinat remarked:

Well, (laughs) very much awful. Of course, Of course, I feel bad. Very much awkward position (when) they ask for clarification. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Mita's experience in such situation was almost identical to Zinat and many others:

I do feel awkward...this sort of feeling is embarrassing. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

That the postgraduates felt awkward due to their poor communication skills has been found to be consistent with what Volet and Tan-Quigley (1999) have termed as the 'negative experiences' of strained communication situations.

In a strained communication context, Dina felt uneasy and followed a strategy of avoidance:

I don't feel comfortable...Sometimes I remain silent. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Shafi, who I suspect had greater difficulty with his spoken skills than most of the others, suffered from a sense of identity reduction in a situation when his face-to-face interaction was not smooth:

My English is not so good ... poor English ...may be that's why people can't understand me. ... It's really frustrating ... I feel ashamed ... I think myself very much neglected. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

In contrast to others, Suzan did not feel embarrassed:

No, I didn't. Not at all (embarrassed). It was very friendly environment. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

To sum up the chapter, what have emerged from the postgraduates' initial narratives at Southern University are their expectations, and their initial academic and cultural challenges. For most of them the primary goal was to improve their professional qualifications through academic programs in order to enhance employment opportunities. Some others had goals of self improvement and uplifting their social identity by associating themselves with the western university. Whether expressed explicitly or implicitly, their main motivation was to increase employment opportunities. Obtaining permanent residence was also another strong motivation for most of them, though rarely shared at this initial stage. The main secondary expectations were about the opportunity to pursue quality western education on a campus with developed physical infrastructure.

While the postgraduates' initial experiences were marked by the excitement of newness of the Australian academic context, they experienced stress and cultural shocks due to the differences in the academic culture. The most common hurdle was negotiating a new relationship with teachers. In this new academic context, the postgraduates faced challenges (due to academic differing standard, norms and their limited English proficiency), and based on their intensity, they were broadly classified into three subgroups: least challenged, moderately challenged and most challenged.

Chapter 5

Ways of Becoming

“Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Transitional Experiences: An Overview

The new postgraduates reported that with their emergence on Southern University's campus, the first things they became aware of were the academic requirements and practices espoused by their lecturers. Then they started to identify the differences in those requirements between their present Australian university context and their universities back home, and finally they attempted to prioritise the fulfilment of these requirements. This necessitated them making some shifts from their former practices and pre-arrival expectations, bringing about behavioural changes, accompanied by some perceptual and attitudinal changes. Since such transitions involved some modifications, either in the form of gradual or radical changes from their pre-arrival and initial expectations towards the fulfilment of the demands in the new academic context, the transitions in this study have been described using different terms such as change, progress, turning point. The two terms, 'changes' and 'turning point' refer to shifts made from the students' earlier positions in terms of either perception, attitude or/and behaviour. Whereas the term 'progress' refers to change that brings an aspect of a student's behaviour, attitude or perception closer to that expected in the Australian academic context. An analysis of students' transition experiences demonstrate that the students did not have the same level of compulsion in adjusting to both the academic and social aspects of their new environment. The motivations triggering them to make adjustments to these academic and social aspects also varied in nature and degree.

Most of the students' discussion of their transition experiences was directed to academic adjustment. However, there was some discussion and evidence of trends in social adaptation as well. For example, all the respondents viewed adaptation to academic requirements as demanding immediate compulsion and this adaptation invoked the highest level of motivation, because their survival and success in the academic setting was their main overt objective. For some of the postgraduates it was also an important means of achieving their hidden agenda of setting themselves up to be eligible to qualify for permanent residence in Australia. The students also felt the need to make adjustments to social aspects with both integrative and instrumental reasons being evident in their motivations.

From another dimension, the students' transitions were also marked by two distinct areas of focus – attitude-oriented and action-oriented. Transition experiences that resulted in changes in students' attitudes towards aspects of the Australian context have been termed attitude-oriented; on the other hand, action-oriented transition experiences are defined as those that lead to reported changes in actual behaviours and actions. In some areas, the reported transition experiences suggested that students' attitudinal changes led them to change their behaviour and actions, and the two orientations were supportive of each other, but at other times, circumstantial needs forced them to bring about changes in their behaviours and actions, even though their attitudes to the actual area of practice remained unchanged. For example, Niranjan's transition to Australian academic culture include him starting to address lecturers by name rather than by sir/madam, even though his attitude to the lack of respect he associates with use of the lecturers' first names had not changed.

Although the students came from a broadly common cultural background and had more or less the same level of compulsion to comply with academic requirements in the new context, their transition experiences were rather inconsistent, rather than being uniform. Being at the same university, the postgraduates were being expected to conform to broadly similar academic requirements as documented in the formal university policies and procedures, though there were some differences in the implementation and interpretation of these within faculties and courses.

Overall, there was no single common pattern of transition experience across the group. The probable reasons for such variability might include the closeness to or distance the individual students felt from the target Australian academic culture, the levels of individuals' readiness for and orientation towards the challenges of their new target context, and also, the motivations behind their sojourns in Australia.

In this chapter I will begin with discussion of the students' academic transition experiences, then I will move on to consider their transition experiences linked to coping with spoken communication as this impacted upon their academic and social adjustments. Finally I will conclude with considering their social transitions to the extent I can ascertain this from the interview, focus group and observational data.

Transition in Academic Practices

Given their predominant entity in the Australian context as students, the primary focus of the respondents' transition was compliance with academic requirements. From the narratives of their pre-arrival and initial understandings, it was evident that there were gaps between the academic orientations and understanding of requirements that they brought with them based on their experiences at home and the orientations and skills that they would need to be successful at Southern University. These reported gaps demanded their transition and the following discussion will provide an account of the students' transition experiences towards fulfilling the new academic requirements as well as describing the strategies they applied to assist their transition.

All but one of the postgraduates reported one or more significant and noticeable 'turning point/s', memorable and identifiable incident/s that were pivotal and critical in the process of their academic transition. Also evident from their narratives was that the postgraduates reported relatively more satisfying transitions leading to outcomes in areas well aligned with academic fulfilment, in comparison with those associated with non-academic aspects of their adjustment.

One of the reasons behind the more successful and satisfying transition in academic areas was the ‘degree and quality of engagement’ (Bochner 2006, p. 189) they established with Australian academic genres. In addition, fulfilling academic requirements was perceived as resulting from external pressures to satisfy course requirements and comply with subject teachers’ expectations. This external pressure, and the associated extrinsic motivations, might have provoked some of the students to take strategic approaches, which mean that the students focussed on what was required by assignments and expected by their teachers, carefully managing their time and efforts in order to achieve the highest grades they were able to.

Sometimes strategic approaches adopted by students might be misinterpreted in their intent. When students adopt a strategy of undertaking perceived requirements actively in order to reach their desired success, it may appear to be underpinned by intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves an interest in, and even excitement about, the subject being studied coupled with a desire to learn more about it. But, in reality, the students still do not engage their own being and desires in relation to the subject of study itself. Like a surface approach, a strategic approach locates control of the students’ engagement in the perceived demands and criteria for success of external others (Macaro & Wingate 2004, pp. 471-473). Because of its complex dimensions, strategies have been viewed differently by different theorists. For example, referring to researchers, such as Wine & Perry (2000) and Zimmerman (1990), Perry (2002, p.1) has noted some theorists’ preference for using the term “*self-regulated learning* to describe independent, academically effective forms of learning that may involve metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action”.

Most of the students’ academic turning points were associated with realising a sense that their performance could match up with the expectations of the academic culture (e.g. computer and e-culture) and/or the academic requirements, such as coping with lectures, tutorials, assignments and fulfilling referencing requirements. The transition stories, particularly in relation to assignments and referencing requirements, make different sense if we keep in mind how few, in fact only 3, had more than a basic level of understanding and limited practice in

referencing and avoiding plagiarism. The discussion on transition will proceed by taking into consideration the accounts of the three groups classified in the earlier chapter (Chapter 4) on the basis of the level of the challenges the students saw themselves as facing initially: least challenged, moderately challenged and highly challenged. It is important to note that there were variations from one individual to another within each group. The degree of their success in fulfilling assignment-related requirements could not be precisely objectively defined, but rather is based on each respondent's self-reported information about their grades and their satisfaction with these.

The least challenged group included three students – Arnold, Dina, and Niranjan – and their narratives indicated that their transition experiences shared a common trend of being primarily perceptual and attitudinal, though their areas and levels of attitudinal transition differed. Arnold, who presented himself as a sceptic who remained strongly comparative throughout and critical about the quality of the Australian education, demonstrated some changes in his understanding of the Australian education system, but remained critical about its quality:

From the point of your (my) studies, I have understood much better than before- ... the way we have to study and how we will be tested or not. But then the process of teaching has not improved ... [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Arnold's assumed closeness to and greater engagement in the academic activities led him to further attitudinal changes which were evident by the end of second semester. Close to the end of his second semester, Arnold, who had initially found his Australian postgraduate study repetitive of his Indian undergraduate studies, indicated a turning point in his attitude about the teaching quality in Australia. This attitudinal change may have developed as a result of having new lecturers in his second semester:

No, in this semester whatever I have done till now I have found like it is interactive. ... because all the lecturers have changed apart from one. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

In his response to a question as to whether his initial overall opinion about the University had changed, he made a cautious comment that indicated a relatively softer position than his earlier opinion:

... this university if you say – it is good but not the way I expected. ... [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Another least challenged student, Dina, who came with some postgraduate research experience, indicated improvement in her understanding about the academic requirements by the end of her first semester and reported successful compliance with the requirements. Her perceptual transition resulted in transition in action. She attributed her success to time and her attitude and motivations:

As far as studies are concerned, ...at the beginning I was not very much familiar with the requirements of the teachers and the courses, now I am familiar with course content and now I am quite familiar with the requirements of the teachers. ... With the passage of time, I try to accommodate, to adjust myself according to the situation, I try to understand the subjects - I try to understand the teachers - gradually I have (adapted myself to this environment) [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Dina also suggested that her avoidance of class participation in her first semester was due to her hesitation in coping with the normal practices in the Australian academic context. But early in her second semester, she compromised and started practising the norms of the new landscape:

... actually in the last semester I told you that I do [sic] not participate very much in the class. There were only two teachers to whom I called – one was Professor Robinhood- and he says that it's OK. And Professor Shetti - he is Indian- his accent is very well. But this time if I call them by name - that's also OK. But I have heard from some people that they say that if they hear someone call them 'SIR', suddenly they ask, "I am not your SIR". But this thing has not happened to me. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Her response to a query about whether she followed any specific strategy to improve her performance suggested that she was driven by a competence motivation which is often referred to also as achievement motivation, implying an incentive that encourages students to strive for one success followed by another (Fazey & Fazey 2001; Harter 1987).

I think the time factor is important - I felt very strongly that I should ask when I don't understand anything. So ... now I ask - not very frequently- but I do ask. Again, I have worked on the assignments. I have submitted the assignments. For one assignment I have even received the marks from the teachers. For example, I got the highest mark for presentation. This also contributed to my confidence building. In one test, I think, I am not sure but the teacher was saying that I got the highest marks. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Niranjan, the third respondent in the least-challenged group, also reported high grades, implying his comparatively straightforward transition to the Australian

education system. He also reported a shift in his learning style from surface learning that involves memorisation to deep learning that looks for meaning and utilisation. While he claimed better overall understanding of what was expected from him as a student, nevertheless, he made little change in his perception about some academic requirements (e.g. referencing):

I don't memorise. They just gave me sheet of formulas like in a test they can give a sheet of formulas – so I don't have to cram. ... I think. I got 23 out of 25... it is HD – 90%+ ... You know in the assignment we are supposed to do only numerical - so only numerical- micro-solving- we don't have anything for referencing and all these things. I don't need them. ... Yes, I am very much aware of those requirements. I am supposed to attend all the tutorials. I need to fulfil all the attendance and I fulfil them. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

The second group, Zinat, Suzan, Mita, and Anil, who experienced the newness and differences in their postgraduate studies at Southern University as a moderate level challenge, also made steady progress in adjusting to the new system. One of them, Zinat, who had little computer literacy before coming to Australia, was apparently threatened to see the massive use of computers and electronic modes of communication in the Australian academic context, but she gradually made headway through her personal initiative and with the help of associates. While she was assessing her present state of computer literacy she also recalled her initial venture with the internet, indicating a positive turning point both in her computer skills as well as in her learning style:

I can manage my works but still not that much comfortable- I think I have to learn many - many new things about the computer. But I can manage my works (laughs). ...I learnt many things by myself and I also took helps from my friends and teachers about computer. But here I am exploring that (laughs)... Yeah, I have to go through library and Internet and I am very new with using Internet. It is the first time that I am using Internet in Australia, and back home I had limited access to Internet like mainly mail checking. ... Here I go through various web sites for the information for my assignments and also through SU library web site I go through e-journal and e-books and those things. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

In a similar manner, Suzan, who took a computer-based Web CT course for the first time and had no pre-understanding about the modalities of such courses, steadily got used to the system in spite of her non-familiarity with it and the risks she perceived in Web CT course practices. Although the 'ambiguity' and its resulting 'risks', which she referred to, have been well acknowledged (Crystal 2006), her

action-oriented transition spurred by changes in her confidence and perceptions was a useful element in her learning activities:

There is always a possibility (of being misinterpreted) but for me it is a new technology and that's why maybe I was not very confident. But it depends on practice – I think the more I get involved it gets easier. Still there is, everyone says including our teacher that there is a risk of being misinterpreted and this is (what), I think, comes to the benefit of Web CT ... wherever you are ... anyone can contribute from outside classroom as a web CT teacher or student. This is the good thing of this (Web CT) and I think still there is some barrier to this technological things. If we are briefed properly and if we try to use it more frequently – we become more comfortable. Now I think I am more confident about the whole system. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Indicating positive changes in her perception and overall attitude to e-culture and her readiness to maximize the benefit of facilities, Suzan continued:

... (E-mail culture) Especially in making appointments – yeah, the good thing here is that the response is very quick (laughs) and it depends on the access-how you use the Email and how I get access to the system. Here, I think, I am more organised so I can rely on it and make use of it. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Mita, who was once dependent on private tutors and oriented towards memorisation-based surface learning, was also able to make the shift within the first semester towards learning for understanding:

I am trying to cope ... first of all, I now have given up the habit to get by heart (memorize) that I used to do back home. Here I just try to understand ... and write it down in my words. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Mita, recollecting her earlier state of complete ignorance about assignments, indicated her significantly successful transition by the end of her first semester at SU. When she was asked how she was coping with an academic genre like written assignments, which she had had no prior understanding of, she shared a strong commitment that symbolized her 'perceived competence and self-worth' (Fazey & Fazey 2001, p. 355):

This word (assignment) is no more ambiguous to me, assignments have to be done, and you [sic] have to do assignments. I was (unfamiliar) but no more because we got 34 out of 40, I was so nervous about assignment – about plagiarism – about referencing- footnotes- this and that. I had to absorb lot of information ... I was searching online, all the time I copied the web site address and when I was reading through my books, always -like -I was writing down the author name, the page, the chapter, like that way, yeah. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Anil, also from the moderately challenged group, appeared to be target-focussed, and from the beginning tended to follow an adjustment process that may entice one to call it a linear acculturation pattern, as opposed to the U-curve adjustment process, which Shupe (2007) drawing on Lysgaard (1955) and Oberg (1960) describes as an adjustment pattern in which

“the initial process of adjustment presents the excited sojourner with few difficulties... after that honeymoon stage... the sojourner is likely to experience a period of crisis, characterized by intense loneliness and unhappiness, as he or she struggles to fit into the new culture. Eventually, the sojourner adjusts to the crisis and another period of relative happiness and wellbeing sets in, as he or she becomes better integrated in the culture’ (Shupe 2007, pp. 750-751).

But in reflecting late in the process he noted that his transition was also affected by the newness of the context, and this type of affliction has been termed as natural when one faces an ‘unfamiliar situation’ and cannot avail themselves of ‘sufficient opportunities’ (Fazey & Fazey 2001, pp. 355-356). Referring to his participation in class interaction Anil remarked:

Now it’s great- I think it’s great. It’s going on- like before I was away from home, may be, so there was some feeling of insecurity – whatever – it is a totally different culture for me – you see. Maybe I felt a bit away from home and that feeling got weak. But in this few months-now I have lived in here – so now it feels like just that I am one of them. And there is not much of difference. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

While Anil reported his regular participation in class interaction, he affirmed, saying ‘yes’, that changes were taking place. He also indicated a shift from his preference for pre-digested compiled notes to standard books:

Yes, I remember when we last talk about (this) I said that yes, that is maybe in lower degree of studies but then we agreed that in an MBA maybe things would get different even in India about everything ... So till now I think it’s ok, it’s great, because yeah even the more books I get to refer it’s always better for my own knowledge, so it’s OK. ... Nowadays [sic]... most of the classes are like everything is in system - in Hospitality they actually put in the questions before. Yeah, it’s the part of the tutorials, that we discussed, week before lecture Miss R, I guess, she puts in whole lot of questions and blank sheets that we didn’t understand and everything, so we discussed that in the tutorials- so ... it’s great. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

Turning to the third group, the group who most were challenged initially by the academic demands at their Australian university – Qursat, Azabul and Shafi. All also indicated transition towards the target culture. Two of them, Azabul and

Qursat, made significant progress in complying with the academic requirements, based on their reported ‘good’ grades.

Azabul was one of these students and he demonstrated significant positive transition from his initial cynical position about the Australian education system. He reported changes in both his attitude and perception as well as in his behaviour and actions. In his changed perception about the standards of education in Australia and his home country India, he upgraded his assessment about Australian education, but nevertheless stuck to his positive view about the Indian one:

Still I hold the same opinion (about Indian education). Because education has changed a lot during these years in India – I have been watching- and even Australia education is not bad - it is a different format compared to Indian education. I don’t feel it is bad. ... I don’t hold that opinion now. Now I think it’s not that bad. ... because in this education, I know how to interact with people and have had good exposure to the company people, and learnt to present your (my) opinion and skills in the classrooms. And good exposure. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Azabul, who found understanding class lectures, doing assignments, and communicating with teachers and native English speaking classmates all quite challenging, made improvements in coping with these aspects of the academic environment. However, in none of them was he totally flawless. After his first semester, although he claimed to have a better understanding about assignments, for example, he failed to highlight the importance of issues like task fulfilment in an assignment:

Now I get it (class lecture) completely. I got used to it. There is no problem in it. Generally I got an idea how to prepare the assignments from last semester. ... {for} assignment generally you need to work extensively, you need to put some efforts for assignments. That’s it. ... I submitted all the assignments and I am happy with the grades (I got). Last semester we weren’t that much familiar with Australian type of education- we were little bit hesitating how to participate – now we have got used to this. This is simple... [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

When he was asked about how he managed with referencing criteria, Azabul noted that he was first pushed forward by extrinsic motivation to conform to requirements, and at the same time he developed a ‘positive attitude’ to the new system over time accommodating to its differences:

We never used to do that (referencing) in India but I came to know that there is some law- you [sic] need to quote the references from where you got this and that’s how I am doing that. ... No, it’s not difficult because I got used to this since my first semester and got a good gap (good time span) of two or three months – so slowly I started developing a positive attitude towards

Australian education and it is easing and helping overcoming [sic] the problems. It's a learning process. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Qursat, another postgraduate from the most challenged group, initially presented himself as a slow mover in the adjustment process, but he made a notable transition over time. Referring to his initial difficulties with assignments and referencing formalities, he describes a strategic approach to learning to comply influenced by extrinsic motivation (such as conforming to subject guidelines and requirements), and triggered by external factors, such as the lecturer's threat to deduct marks:

It was difficult but I made all the referencing – because I know all the criteria here. It was very difficult – like I used to forget what (laughs) I was doing but when I remember the things (that) I have to do this then I do that. ... Here we have to do that because the marks are gonna deducted. ... the teacher used to say most of the times 'you have to do this thing. If you have got four pages of assignment, you have to mention the references – there is some marks for that. So take notice of that – because out of 10 marks 3 marks go for that.' So we have to take care of that. But we have to make habit of referencing. ... If you are in a place, you have to comply with the rule of that place (laughs). [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Further to this, Qursat, who was sceptical in his initial understanding about Australian education, tended to show his appreciation for the greater accessibility to knowledge in the Australian context, indicating a perceptual change towards a more exploratory learning orientation:

The facilities they provide us are really good. Like the library, it's very good. You can have books from all over the worlds. Not only just one or two authors- like in the same subject you can get books from America, England- you can have different observations – different authors- different observations of same thing. So you can get different things. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Qursat also manifested that transition becomes easy and smooth when it involves moving from a system that is time consuming and inefficient to something that works more transparently and easily. Comparing the University's computerized library system to the manually operated library system in his home country, Qursat narrated what made him get used to the library facilities and how he felt at being able to use the system:

If you are coming from worse thing to good thing, it's good (laughs). You become used to it very quickly. Just in the first time you take the book and place it on bar coder (reader), that's it. You find it very easy- because you don't have to check the book in there. You just search the book on ISBN number on the computer and take the book. No need to

ask anyone. Even in the first week or second week we got it (system).
...Yes, very much happy. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Among the ten respondents, Shafi was an exception both in terms of level of challenge he faced and also in the speed of transition he was making towards achieving the academic requirements. He initially reported being most challenged by the Australian academic context. This was evident in his stories from the frequent accusations, criticism and his demonstrated irritation and disappointment. Unlike all other respondents whose transitions were evident within their first semester, he was exceptional in a sense that evidence that he was making a positive transition and developing an understanding of his new context were not manifested until the middle of his second semester. The researcher's strategy, though limited by ethics restrictions, to dig out more information to trace transitional change through repeated questions was not very helpful. While his understanding about some concepts like 'practically-oriented', 'demonstrational class', 'bookshop' and 'library' were quite confusing, his response was also often marked with self contradictions.

In his second interview after a three-month gap from the first one, what Shafi claimed about transition was also mixed with some continuing uncertainty:

My course is going on well up to now. I don't know what will happen after today or after this semester. ... Yeah, this thing has improved by this time. Because I have the ability to make the questions clear [sic] and the teacher give[sic] me the answer. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications].

Self contradictions and confusions remained part of his discourse even in his second semester and he still was not able to clearly enunciate how the course was and was not meeting his expectations:

But one thing I have to mention here – that his lecture this semester is now understandable – it seems to me that it is practical oriented. ... In this semester the subjects I have mentioned are related with mobile phone. I did not have any practical oriented lab in this subject but information I am getting from this subject is in one sense practical- not fully practical but you can say in one sense, which is useful to me. ... No, it's totally (fully) not much (practical) oriented-but it should be. It should be that (much practical) oriented. Because – you know – mobile – it should be always practical oriented subject. But still now we are getting only theoretical information- in one sense it is practical- we didn't get any practical lab session. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

From this it is not clear whether his better understanding of lectures was due to the lecturer's change in his techniques or Shafi's improved academic skills.

Referring to his initial psychological pressure due to not being understood and not getting appropriate responses from his lecturers, Shafi hinted some enhancement of his identity resulting from his relatively comfortable position in the classroom situation:

No, I didn't (do not) suffer at all (from) it now. ... Yeah, Yeah, I can ask questions to teachers whatever I like.... Yeah. Now I am getting (the answer). [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Shafi, who claimed to have learnt referencing criteria well in his preparatory ELICOS course in Australia, also reported his perceived success 'beyond his expectation'. However, what his perceived 'expectation' (e.g. what grade he expected and what grade he was able to obtain) could not be detailed for ethical and privacy restrictions. Describing his present academic state as a 'positive change', and his efforts in appropriation of referencing criteria as non-challenging, he shared his academic performance:

Yeah, yeah that's a positive change. ... I have got two assignments. ... All that (referencing criteria) I have met. Yeah, I am happy with the grade - not only happy I am very much happy because I have got more than my expectation. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

If we accept his self-claimed 'positive change' and 'happy' reaction over his achieved grades as the true representation of his transition, we can call it a significant positive transition, even if it was at a slow pace and was comparatively late, at the end of his second semester. Considering of the gap that he covered between the two points – his initial state with high psychological pressure and his present 'easy' state of reported adjustment his transition can be termed as successful:

Umm ... I think I am now fully adapted. I know what I have to do – with respect to situations I face now. I didn't [sic] feel any difficult up to this stage. It's easy for me. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

To continue with Shafi, describing his classes as 'totally theory based', he expressed his growing concern over memorization, and this implies his continued association with surface learning. This also suggests that he had made relatively little transition during past six months towards a deeper learning style that looks for meaning and application:

And the class is totally theory based and lot of things we have to remember (memorize) during the exam. So I don't know – in this short time how can I

memorize all those things and the exam. That's why I am scared. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Although Shafi's reported compliance with academic requirements (e.g. referencing) was a sign of transition towards what he was expected to conform to, he did not indicate any perceptual change in acknowledging any ethical obligations to recognize and refer to any existing body of knowledge based on which new knowledge is constructed, and he continued to believe, even in the middle of his second semester, that mathematical work does not need any referencing:

Yeah, I have ... obeyed all these requirements ... What happened is that my subject is – that it is mathematics based. It is not related so much with referencing. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

There was not enough data to substantiate whether his stated perception of the non-requirement of referencing was due to the relaxation of referencing requirements for the particular type of assignment his course required or because of his continued unawareness of the requirements.

To conclude, what I have sought to demonstrate in this section is that the respondents all followed quite individual and different processes of transition towards fulfilment of academic requirements that involved varying levels of perceptual, attitudinal and behavioural change. The least challenged group's transitions were mainly perceptual and attitudinal, whereas for four of the moderately challenged group, Suzan, Mita, Anil, and Zinat, their transitions involved perceptual, attitudinal and behavioural changes. Zinat's transition appeared to be more action oriented in the sense that it was not evident that her actions were the outcomes of perceptual changes. Her actions appeared to be prompted by the needs of the situation. The most challenged group demonstrated the greatest variability in how they changed in the transition process. For example, Azabul demonstrated perceptual, attitudinal and behavioural transitional changes. Of the other two in the most challenged group, Qursat's transitions were proportionately more perceptual and action oriented. While Shafi's transition was difficult to categorize, it may better be described as action oriented. It is important to keep in mind that while the above categorisation is based on the high

proportion of their reported transition experiences, besides academic requirements, their overall transition experiences had been influenced by other factors such as their ultimate goals, opportunities available to them, their academic readiness to cope with and their varying levels of personal locus of control. For example, a short term sojourner (such as Zinat) might feel complacent aiming only for minimum academic compliance because of her short term needs and her personal qualities in relation to locus of control. In a similar manner, a long term settler whose main goal is to obtain permanent residence in Australia would prioritise his or her areas of transition, and might choose to comply mechanically with the areas of less priority. In contrast, Suzan driven by an internal locus of control and a motivation of self improvement made every effort to utilize all opportunities towards a smooth and relatively easy transition.

Negotiating Difference in Spoken Communication

Successful academic participation is not confined to attending classes, submission of written assignments and sitting examinations. Success depends on classroom interactions, discussions in tutorial groups, and oral presentations that involve spoken communication. Spoken communication is also the primary skill in surviving in any community. Besides the academic needs, good proficiency in spoken English is very vital for any non-native English speaking student for their survival in a predominantly monolingual English speaking society, such as Australia. With these intense needs for spoken English in mind, the non-native English speaking postgraduates from South Asia came to Southern University in Australia acquainted with their own varieties of English (as discussed earlier).

In their home contexts, whether considered to be English as a second language or English as a foreign language context, the role of English, particularly spoken English, is restricted to certain domains. Such compartmentalisation of the roles of English, in general, and spoken English, in particular, is impossible in an English dominant society like Australia. Keeping this understanding in mind, the discussion of transitional experiences in the spoken communication of the postgraduates in question will be carried out considering both academic and

broader social contexts. However, because of the high proportion of data from the academic context, the discussion will have greater focus on spoken communication in academic rather than social contexts.

As discussed in Chapter 4, of the ten South Asian postgraduates in the study, two of them perceived that they did not experience any communication stress and one of them reported that they experienced some slight minor impediments to their communication. In contrast, the remaining students experienced varying amounts of miscommunication from the beginning of their exposure to Australia. As a consequence, the discussion will mainly revolve around those most affected by difficulties in spoken communication.

As the postgraduates made their efforts to be more proficient in their English communication, their interlanguage featured a mixture of registers (e.g. formal, informal, colloquial), and mix of features from different varieties of English, such as Australian (e.g. use of words like *man*, *mate*, or *no worries*) and Indian varieties (e.g. frequent use of *like*, and second person to refer to first person is common in Indian English).

Niranjan, who reported experiencing only minimal impediments in communication, pointed out that the volume of his spoken communication gradually increased with relatively better comprehension levels on both sides. His application of different strategies (e.g. spelling out some words, repetition and slowed down articulation) suggested that some difficulties in his spoken interaction persisted till the end of his second semester. While he claimed his present spoken communication to be ‘very good’, particularly with native English speaking classmates, he noted continued difficulties with his South-East Asian and Middle-Eastern counterparts:

No change. But the volume of interaction has increased but the same communication problem... only with the Chinese. You can't understand the Chinese and sometimes the Middle-East people. You can't understand them.
[Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

He further explained why he could not follow his Chinese and Middle-Eastern classmates, but did not make any comment about being understood by them:

Chinese can't, you know, say some words ... they speak through their nasals. It's the way they speak Chinese, I think. So they put more stress on the nasal on the vocal chord I think. So you can't understand what they are saying. Yes, this is the only problem. Otherwise (it's OK) Suppose I say Sunday...they (Middle-Eastern classmates) will say / sʌnðei/...things like that. Some time if it is a long sentence then you have to concentrate what the person is saying. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Citing a frequently used example, he continued explaining the strategies he followed in sustaining his communication:

I mean ... if I want to tell them something, I have to say again, again, and again and again and again- slowly ... slowly ... whenever I say like – in my country we say 'schedule' / ʃedzʌl/ here we say / skedzʌl /. You know I repeat –telling OK I am saying this- s -c -h- e- d -u- l -e. ... Whenever I ask for direction, like I live in Dundas St.- I say someone they don't understand then I spell D-U-N-D-A-S.(laughs) [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Zinat was one of the postgraduates who experienced a considerable amount of difficulty in spoken communication, both in terms of understanding others and being understood by others in the initial stage of her settlement. However, she reported some progression within 4-5 weeks. Confirmation of being understood by her fellow classmates made her more positive about her communication skills. Referring to one of her class presentations, she explained how effective her oral presentation was and how this experience had developed her self-confidence:

... there was presentation ... I like to mention that in that class after I presented that thing ... that was 4th or 5th week ... I asked them if they understood what I said. They said, "Yeah". This gave me the impression that I could communicate. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Whilst Zinat made further progress in her spoken communication in a span of the first three months and described her comprehension of native English speakers as 'It's OK now', at the same time she admitted the persistence of strains in being understood due to her pronunciation and talked about her multiple strategies, including paraphrasing, enriching English vocabulary repertoire, contextualising unknown words and phrases, and supplementing her speech with the written mode to improve the communication:

Yeah, Yeah (I understand them well) ... Still there is some - little bit of difficulty with pronunciation - but things are getting much better. ... Yeah, I listen to them very carefully what they say and I watch TV it is a good thing. I have no access to radio. ... I try to pronounce in right way- if they still cannot understand me I will try to find some supplementary words for that one. ... The new words – what they say. I hear and learn two new words a day like 'awesome' - that's very frequently used here (laughs) and the other one I just forget. It is not that frequently used back home. So I look for new words and

how they pronounce that word. ... I have to pay full attention to him (Australian classmate) ... I try to relate the subject topic to what he was talking about ... (at the bookshop) I had to write the names of the books and course code ... Their accent - I am getting used to it but having difficulty in some regional pronunciation. But I am getting used to that. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Another participant, Suzan, initially found her participation in spoken communication was impeded by accent variation and the perceived fast articulation of native speakers. In an exploratory remark she attributed her own advancement in this area mainly to her immersion into a completely English environment:

I think there have been changes in two ways: Like my speaking English – my spoken English has also improved. Because now I am in the environment where I have to use this medium (English) only... Yeah, because of this practice, this has changed (laughs), it has improved. And also my mates are also used to my accent and the way I talk. So on their side they also can get (what I want to mean). They understand well but still I think some problems and some misunderstanding will always be there. ... [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

In another response, she noted that she also took some strategic preparation in thought processing when she wanted to impose her points of view:

... I try to –like organise my thinking now- what I want to say and how I am going to say that before I start talking- specially in the class environment and if I have to make point, I take time to think about that point so that I can make myself clear to others. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Suggesting greater engagement in interaction, she preferred deriving the meaning of an unknown word from its context to looking for its meaning in a dictionary:

So it's like the more you are involved the more you get and understand them... Yeah, by contextualising – sometimes – not looking in the dictionary (laughs) – because by the time I go back home I forget them (laughs). [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

The effects of this immersion process have also been evident in other students' performance in spoken communication.

Qursat in his initial stage admitted to having '80% of what you are saying lost' and ascribed such loss to accent variations. He reported also a positive turning point had occurred in his overall face to face communication, and illustrated in suggestive language how the immersion process was contributing to the improvement of his communication skills.

It (spoken communication) has also improved. ... When you are living with them you are coming in an environment – you can only have the bulletin in

English- like for half an hour. Only thing is the bulletins – yes, the news bulletins – they are all in English – limitation is everywhere like in your own language. So when you come here first the accent a bit different – like they are saying something to you but you don't understand what they are saying. By that time passes – like you become used to them travelling on the bus, travelling by train – you listen to them – even on the television here you are having all their channels in English. So when the time passes you get used to this one. I am also listening to the teacher all the time. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

When asked if he used any other practical strategies, making reference to his part time job at a service centre, Qursat suggested how his two-tier thought processing turned into a single tier within one semester and this helped him in instant turn taking:

Just went to the market and see [sic] (how) people are communicating ... If you speak to them in their accent – try to copy their accent – try to copy like almost 30% - 40% even less - they will be able to understand you. ... I am also working at a customer service ... when you are dealing with customers – most of the time they are coming - if you are dealing with 300 customers a day, that's a big thing. It's a big practice- speaking to 300 customers of different ages - you get all sort of people- all ages - twenty's – thirty's all of them. That improves your thinking also. So it changes – like processing thought (in) the mind first in your own languages and then speaking to person in other language - it changes with time ... I am here for almost a semester - it changes by the time. When we first came that was a very different thing. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Initially, Mita, encountered greater difficulty in making herself understood to her native English speaking teachers than in understanding them. While she did not precisely indicate any qualitative transition in her spoken communication, she held that miscommunication, particularly when it was carried on in one's L2, was likely to continue, and stressed the need for extensive practice:

It (miscommunication)'s still there- because I think it is not my mother tongue – I didn't study in English medium – so there is some difficulty. But that not a problem- that's not big problem actually. ... Actually now I think – it depends on practice. You know when I am at home I speak in Bengali that's my mother tongue – so once I am outside my house like I need to speak in English. So in that way I am keeping the practice. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

As a strategy Mita emphasized content words more than accents for better communication, and suggested short-cut means of spoken communication.

... I don't bother about that accent and all these things - the main thing is now to express myself that's it. ... If I know like if I know my subject or my contents especially what I am going to ask, if I do have all the vocabulary and then I think it's no problem to ask. Teacher – what he tries to know – only that word I don't understand the main key words, that's it. Once he gets the key word he just, you know, fix up. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Dina, who did not feel 'confident' in her first semester in talking to native English speakers and often relied on 'avoidance' and 'please say it again' strategies, also indicated some transition both in her strategy and ultimate output in spoken communication. She also reported that her success in oral communication in the first semester was hampered by her own fast articulation and poor listening skills. From a motivational perspective, she appeared to be more confident in spoken interaction and was committed to becoming more attentive:

Yeah, someone said that 'you speak too fast', so this time and all I do ... Maybe I will take care of this thing. But normally out of the classroom or in the classroom, ... I think I speak from the pile of reading. But there will be some change in the presentation. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Referring to her improved listening skills over a period of six months, Dina shared her positive transition:

No, this time I understand every thing...it is not same thing- I understand everything- I do participate ... I don't know whether my listening has improved or my teachers were good in this semester. I think my listening has improved. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

When asked to comment on her adopted approaches, Dina reported she had personally initiated some strategies and explained how television programs in Australia had helped her:

I just... as far as listening is concerned when I could not understand I put more attention. ... I thought that I am [sic] not understanding I should pay attention to it. And I think television TV has also played a role in it because in the first semester - till the end of first semester I had not TV with me. During holidays I got TV and when I watch [sic] programs on TV I try to understand those programs. I think that has also played a role. ... So when I watched the TV I really thought that I should improve my listening and I should listen to the characters or to the programs carefully. And sometime [sic] even I tried to improve my speaking as well I liked the sentence they use, the way they constructed the sentence and the way they spoke on the TV. So sometimes, not many times I wrote down the sentences and I try to put that in my mind. This is the way. Its really good sentence... this is the way I should speak. But with reference to listening TV was a good help for me. ... Speakingto some extent... [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Azabul, another student who initially found his engagement in postgraduate study in Australia very challenging mostly due to his acknowledged incompetence in coping with the English medium instruction, made considerable headway in his overall spoken communication within a semester. Attributing his initial difficulties to his unfamiliarity with the new context and also to his lack of

sufficient opportunities for adjustment, Azabul described his advancement over a period of six months:

I don't think now it is difficult – because I catch up pace and started following the accent of the lecturers and because it was my first semester, I took some time to adjust now I am feeling free. ... because I used to Australian accent and following the lecture. ... No problem (in interaction). [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Suggesting his applied strategy, Azabul remarked:

No – no problem. You follow the Australian accent – you have no problem. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

Shafi was another student who unequivocally acknowledged that his limited English impacted on his overall academic performance in his early weeks at the University, particularly in spoken communication, resulting in great strain on the listeners as he was attempting to get his message across. Given that initial experience, Shafi's reported transition in a span of five months towards better performance in communication in academic and non-academic settings on campus is notable:

I don't feel so much but as I have mentioned that I am trying to improve my skills and I don't feel that much (problem) as I told you earlier. ... No problem (in being understood) nowadays. ...It's (negotiation at the University's service desks) getting better. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Whilst he described his immersion process, he also noted his gradual familiarisation with some aspects of the local varieties of Australian English, including slang. Citing an example of the Australian endearment term 'mate', he illustrated how the immersion process helped him improve his spoken communication. However, there was no data to ascertain just how much of the complexity of sociolinguistic appropriation of such Australian terms as mate, chick, or *b*-words (eg. bloody, bastard, buggar) and their different contextual connotations he had acquired. His narrated strategies included some typical advice (e.g. given by the BBC) that is usually given in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situation, where the scope and opportunities for practising English are very limited. In an English speaking environment like Australia where non-native English speakers can immerse themselves in a more real life context, though it is not necessarily easy to get opportunities to interact with native speakers, the usefulness of such strategies may be debated. This is how

Shafi shared his adopted transitional strategies in improving his spoken communication:

... you know when I am in the tram or bus or any kind of public transport, when the Aussie people try to converse with each other I just try to listen, what's the way they are talking with each other, and what's the local slang or what their accent, I just try to follow this things [sic], and it just give [sic] me lot to understand their conversation. ... Mate means I think I don't know what's the meaning ...like friend or like that. Because the spelling is like M-A-T-E. (laughs). I have been here on campus for sometime to join my class – I have to always listen to class lectures – one of the things. I am getting used to listening to class lectures – the other thing is media like BBC and Australian news channels – I get lot of other things this way. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

The remaining two postgraduates, Arnold and Anil, claimed that their spoken communication was fluent and without strain, although the available data does not enable me to independently substantiate their claims. From the students' own adjustment stories there was no evidence of how their native English speaking interlocutors perceived their spoken communication skills, an aspect that begs further exploration in a separate study.

Adjusting to Daily Life in Australia

Given the fact that social adjustment for any sojourner is a longitudinal ongoing process and often unending and my primary interest being in academic adjustment, the narratives of the students' nine-month long quest were mainly dominated by their stories of their adjustment experiences to life on campus. Nevertheless, there were a few references to their settlement in the larger society away from the university campus. Even though some of the students claimed to be 'fully settled', the researcher perceived that their sense of 'fully settled' was in fact only partial settlement. Whilst the students reported limited opportunity for social engagement with native Australians either on campus or off campus and fell back on socialising with fellow nationals or other international students, this section will deal with the excerpts of the social experiences they shared with me that constituted turning points in their settlement.

On her arrival in Australia Mita described how she faced pressure in dealing with household tasks like shopping and paying bills compounded with academic duties, but she reported her condition eased within a period of five months. She attributed this reported easing of her situation as being due to incrementally growing familiar with the surroundings, her gradual tuning into the new culture and her comparative economic solvency. Referring to her initial ineptness, she shared her transition:

... Now I am quite familiar with the environment. Of course, I know people are the part of the environment. I also know the same classroom, the same bookshop and the same lift – everything. ... I feel more confident, because I know each and everything now. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Signalling an emerging new lifestyle accommodating the reality of the new context, Mita explained how the changes were taking place and what she had grown to value:

Economic freedom ... as a student – I can work at least 20 hours, [that's] sufficient time - to come (bring) my pocket money and more and at least my house rent. So it's like now I can work 20 hours per week ... in holiday I can work more than 20 hours. Like in the lapse of time, now it's ok, I mean I don't bother about all these stuff (household tasks), ... You can't avoid, now it is part of life, I am used to it ... Oh, yeah I remember now because, I think I was saying these words because I didn't have any responsibility other than [study at home]. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Mita also cited some examples from her lived experiences to substantiate her gradual transition towards some on campus academic norms, such as greeting teachers, and addressing them by their first names:

... before when I was passing through the corridor, I was like evasive- I don't [sic] feel my teacher, like I saw in the morning I didn't wish him like good morning John, Good morning Michael – like that, but now it's like always interactive. The moment I see any of my teacher I just say 'good afternoon, good morning'. Till now I didn't face something like that but I don't bother about now. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Dina's maintenance of the value of her original culture and lack of readiness to accept a different cultural norm discouraged her from quick enculturation. Indicating her slow perceptual change, though not attitudinal, followed by subsequent changed behaviour regarding campus culture, Dina explained how she monitored her behaviour and action to fit herself into the Australian context:

Last time I always addressed my Indian teacher 'Sir' and he also understands that in my culture it is normal thing. But I think this time I will also address ... (using first name) because ... it is not intentional because since last twenty years I am calling my teachers by 'SIR' or 'MADAM'. That's why ...

suddenly any question coming to my mind – I want to speak up then I will draw the attention by calling him ‘SIR’ or ‘MADAM’. But If I have planning of the question – today I have this question or I have to ask this question – maybe in these times, consciously I will call him or her by name ,, [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Referring her settlement in everyday life, Dina commented:

Change ... in living situation is that I am now more comfortable. Now I am familiar with all routes, transportation and the shopping centres – Yes ...now I am quite familiar with the environment and with the taboos and essentials of this culture. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Nirnanjit, another postgraduate who experienced similar cultural tension to Dina and most other respondents, particularly in relation to addressing lecturers with their first names, was rather selective in practising such norms. What he suggested in response to a question if he felt comfortable in observing that particular norm is that he acted upon the demand of the context without changing much in his perception:

Now somewhat OK ...sometime yes – sometimes not.It depends on teacher to teacher - like I can't call my Head of the dept. by his name. I respect him. I can call other teachers (by name) – not a problem now. But for my Head of the Dept. and Course Coordinator – no – I can't. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

However, target-oriented Anil demonstrated a perceptual difference in how he approached adopting the host culture and life style. Differentiating himself from other postgraduates in the study, Anil indicated a positive approach to his transition, as is evident in the following excerpt:

No, see if you are trying to live here you are trying to live here as an Australian, not as an Indian, not as a Hindu ... nothing else, just an Australian. So you should think in that way, because I didn't find any problem as such myself ... Now it's great – I think it's great. It's going on like before I was away from home, maybe, so there was some feeling of insecurity- whatever – it is a totally different culture for me , you see. Maybe – I felt a bit away from home and that feeling got weak. But in this few months – now I have lived in here – so now it feels like just that I am one of them. And there is not much of difference. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

The gradual development of his confidence was prominent when he proposed to feeling like an Australian even within the first six months and viewed differences as natural, insignificant and short-lived.

When he was asked if he adopted any specific strategies, he suggested a carefree approach:

Not really because the more the strategies you make more you mess up. So I just left it totally to (time). I didn't give much of a thought about that maybe. ... time is the best remedy for it. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

The following section sums up the transitional experiences of the postgraduates that have been discussed above under three major subheadings – transition in academic practices, negotiating spoken communication and social adjustments. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the above-mentioned discussion is that the experiences of social transition that they shared are all at the beginning of a continuum of social acculturation. While they were making progress in social adjustment, some of the postgraduates in their explicit and almost identical rhetoric (Anil, Qursat, Azabul, Dina), and the remaining others in their implied language, relied on the untheorized wisdom that time in its role as natural healer would take care of the stress and sense of dislocation they were experiencing.

This chapter has delved into the transitional trajectories of the postgraduates in their academic adjustment, negotiation of the demands of spoken communication, and social acculturation. Their transition involved either one or more of the three levels of changes: perceptual, attitudinal and behavioural or action oriented.

The transition stories further indicated that the participants' primary focus was on academic adjustment, in which they all demonstrated significant success in spite of individual variations in their ways and qualitative outcomes. The academic adjustment of the participants was mainly propelled by institutional requirements and occurred incrementally as each worked to align what they did and the work they produced to their growing understanding of their lecturers' expectations. As the participants were exposed to western academic culture, they adopted it with different levels of engagements and intensity. While some of them engaged themselves with a superficial level of understanding and acceptance, others

demonstrated deeper level of understanding and adopted new ways of learning and knowing.

In spoken communication, they attempted to overcome communicative hurdles by applying a range of different strategies (e.g. avoidance and repetitions) and with growing confidence and noticing aspects of Australian communicative style. Besides a few personal initiatives like watching TV program with the specific purpose of improving linguistic competence, most of the participants benefited from the immersion process in this largely monolingual English environment. However, they all (except Anil and Arnold) admitted their needs for further improvement in communication.

The participating postgraduates' transition in social acculturation was marked by more variability, and the variability was noticed in the areas, and quality and quantity of the outcomes of their social acculturation. While everyone made meaningful transition for survival in making adjustments to daily life demands, such as paying bills and cooking, one (Mita) made qualitatively a deeper high level of transition in managing both academic and social demands and appeared to really value her economic freedom in Melbourne as well as feeling excited by her growing academic confidence. In respect of social practices and relationship, based on their individual sense of value about their culture and worldview, the participants were more selective. The postgraduates who had a liberal outlook (e.g. Anil, Mita) indicated a self-initiated transition to embrace the host culture, whereas the postgraduates who were relatively more conservative in their outlooks and expressed a high sense of value about their worldviews (e.g. Dina, Qursat, Niranjana, Shafi, Azabul) were selective in their transitions in social acculturation. Given the fact that these postgraduates had limited access to the host culture, they continued to be in a state of living between two cultures, as they juggled the demands on their time and attention of academic and daily living activities.

Chapter 6

On Being a Postgraduate

“I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro’
Gleams that untravell’d world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move”.
- Lord Tennyson

Two Semesters on: Students’ Perspectives

At the end of two semesters, the postgraduates in the study had different levels of attainment both in academic and social arenas in Australia. Although the landscape around them was the same, their contexts, which are constituted individually by each person’s surroundings in combination with how each has responded to and impacted on that environment, were different for each student. The varying levels of expectation, motivation and effort they invested yielded varying levels of attainment of their expectations and varying levels of success in adjustment to the Australian postgraduate setting. While the main indicator of their success was based on their self-reported success, the discussion below will consider how individual postgraduates reported their experiences in academic and social settings at the endpoint of this study, two semesters into their time as students at Southern University(SU).

The students’ endpoint accounts reflect a relatively uniform pattern and extent of compliance with the academic requirements at SU. This trend is consistent with what they revealed in their transition experiences. In spite of these common trends of eagerness and readiness to make a move towards the target academic culture, the extent of the fulfilment of their academic expectations remained inconsistent.

With the exception of a limited few (e.g. Shafi and Qursat with reference to teaching quality) who reflected little change to their earlier understanding, most of the postgraduates’ accounts at the end of two academic semesters provide

evidence of some noticeable perceptual and attitudinal development. For some, some of their demonstrated knowledge and perceptions at the end of two semesters were new and developed only after their arrival in the Australian academic context. Qursat's understanding of the concept of the plagiarism, Suzan's of online subjects, and Niranjan's and Mita's of closed book examinations, as well as many of them understanding expectations of analytical classes, fall into this group. In contrast, some other perceptions were refined and reconstructed building upon their initial perceptual positions including academic assignments with proper referencing for Dina and Anil, and sitting for examinations with extra reading time for Zinat .

To fulfil the aims of the study (e.g. depicting the experiences of how the individual postgraduates' adapted to Australian postgraduate environment), the following depiction will highlight how the individual participants became postgraduate students at SU. This has necessitated a shift from the approach in Chapters 4 and 5 of thematic discussion of stages in the process to consider and present individual vignettes. Accordingly, this chapter will include the portrayals of how the individual participants from South Asia became postgraduates at the end of their two semesters at Southern University.

Zinat

One of the short term sojourners, Zinat, who portrayed herself as a less than '100%' investor of effort, described her 'comfortable' state in coping with the academic needs, including her adaptation to computers and e-cultures and organising her time:

... now because one year is gone and I think I am used to computers. I tried to learn some by using the computers myself and some from my friends. ... And for email also we never used email in our country to mail to our teachers for academic purpose. But now if I mail them, they reply them. ... Yes assignment is easier because it is beneficial – because I know a lot of things now. Not only (that), I can do it whenever I like. I have a time boundary and within that time boundary I can do whenever I like. ... for assignments we know the date for submission and I can do the thing more relax[sic] way.
[Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

In spite of her claimed ‘comfortable’ state, Zinat still was struggling to conform to the technicalities of the administration of some aspects of academic assessment. Her pre-conceived formulation of examination timing led her to unnecessarily rush to finish her test:

...for exam I must say it was my fault because in our country if it says that exam will start at 2:00 PM then it starts from 2:00 PM ... if it is 2 hours then at 4:00 PM it will end. But here there is 15 minutes for reading the questions. ... I was in hurry. I finished my exam paper within two hours starting from 2:00. In fact it should be from 2:15... but I just thought ... I have to finish at 4:00 so I just had it and missed some points. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

As she continued sharing her academic attainments, even without engaging her full efforts, she talked about the confidence she had built up in presentation and the success she experienced in her examination:

I didn't put my 100% (effort) into any thing... in the second semester I had one presentation. I think I did well and I think I did not prepare my speech. I think I can [sic] manage it myself ... I had preparation but not exact speech which I had to say. I just made some slides for overhead projector and showed that and talked about that. ... But at the end when I got the result, I got distinction in that subject. I don't know how. But I was not satisfied with my exam. Though I was not very well (prepared)", [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Whilst Zinat reported her preference for assignments that necessitated her to do ‘lot of survey’, she could not fully withdraw herself from her dependence on surface learning approaches, like short-lived cramming based learning:

.... I memorize for the exams.... and I have to memorize in a short period because in our country, you know, you don't memorize whole year. When the date of exam comes, we just start reading and memorizing things. So it is little bit pressured. ... Memorization is very limited for me because there is ... that I have to memorize and then on the exam paper I just put those things. That's it. But for assignments I have to survey a lot. So I think it (assignment) is better ... if I memorize the basic thing because the things are changing every time. So I don't have to memorize the things, which I have to put in my exam paper. Not like that. But the basics are always basics. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Reporting her overall improvement in spoken communication competence, Zinat took a different position for herself manifesting an elevated social identity – an identity (re)constructed “through her discursive practices”(Orletti 2001, p. 272). Drawing from sociolinguistic and social psychological standpoints, Orletti (2001) sums up how we construct our social identity: “we define our social identity through the words we choose, the topics we discuss, the way we structure discourse and conversation, and the participants we select as interlocutors” (p.272). In spite of her better ability to manage her spoken communication, both

in the academic context (e.g. oral presentation) and in the broader social context than before, she still encountered what she perceived as L2-related problems, such as difference in accents and unfamiliar vocabulary, indicating further formulation of her identity as she would go on overcoming those shortcomings:

It (spoken communication)'s better ... I did not feel nervous this time in making presentations. ... I had control of the topic and the audience – my teacher and the classmates. The audience was eager to know about my topic ... but you know English is our second language – some difficulties are still there- but the situation is much much improved-....Pronunciation – my pronunciation was the main problem - I pronounce in one way and they pronounce in different way – some native Aussie pronunciation – those are still difficult to understand – Some new words also pose difficulty. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

In her assessment of the fulfilment of her academic expectations over a period of two semesters, whilst she remarked that more careful selection of subjects could have benefited her more in terms of her professional work, she expressed her optimism about the outcome of the next semester:

In terms of academic expectation – the subjects that I have done – two of them were core subjects – I had to do and two were electives. I think the electives were good, but I should have chosen other electives instead of those things. It did not suit my work that much. There were better subjects but they were not offering those subjects in the second semester. I think the subjects I am going to do this year will be more useful to me. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

At the end of two semesters, Zinat's perceptions about lecturers and office staff were not the same. The overall understanding about them was an admixture of both good and bad experiences. Her narrated story indicated a development of positive perception about academic staff, whereas her sensitivity with the office staff was nevertheless underpinned by dissatisfaction with the level of support:

last year there was [sic] some good things and some bad things were there... I must thank my course coordinator, he was very helpful to me ...I did not have to go to him much – at the end of the second semester I went to him to talk about the thesis – he helped me to find something related to my job. I asked him if he could be one of my referees – he cordially accepted my request and gave his card and asked me to contact him whenever I need his reference. He is very supportive. Another teacher helped me a lot in the first semester ... and the international office – it is not always supportive – not very much supportive, I must say. They give some time (appointment), when I go there they are not there. May be they are on leave. [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Referring to her general adjustment, she demonstrated herself to be more confident but at the same time her cautious remarks about her Australian classmates suggests that she had only managed to integrate to a limited extent into the host culture:

I think I am adapted now because I use these facilities quite often now. At first I was little bit afraid and shy. Specially in telephoning to my teachers – but now I phone them. They are very cordial and they are very helpful. They didn't mind. I was not used to this. ... I have a few Australian classmates, but I don't know if I can call them friends yet (laughs). [Zinat, Bangladeshi, Asian and Pacific Studies]

Zinat's observation about feeling alienated resembles what Hellsten and Prescott (2004) and Sawir et al. (2007) have remarked about the marginalisation of international students.

Suzan

Suzan, another postgraduate who was initially moderately challenged, but who then indicated significant progress in adapting to the Australian context, reported better adjustment in academic matters than in the social arena during her first two semesters. Reflecting on her initial days in the Australian academic landscape, Suzan, who earlier had experienced difficulty in linking her topics with the comprehensive lectures given in class, talked about her better accommodation and greater engagement in academic pursuits, and showed her readiness to develop an even wider academic outlook. These reported perceptual and behavioural changes took place within a span of just two semesters. However, being a minor-thesis student, her perceived academic attainments could not be directly assessed in relation to her final grades, as these were not available when her last interview was conducted:

I will be finishing in July, I think and for me obviously this environment and these contacts from the very beginning were very challenging. But, I think, with the help of teachers and fellow students and other staff – in most of the cases I have benefited and overcome the challenges ... Now I feel much more confident. I can contribute to the related topic and issues more comfortably than before. And it's also like – very interesting that teachers and students – they also want to know 'what's your opinion in the context of your country' – 'what's happening in Bangladesh' – this is very encouraging. ... [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Although Suzan appeared to have achieved positive academic outcomes, her observation about the limited breadth of subjects and limited opportunities for broader intellectual advancement and engagement beyond the fixed curriculum suggests she did not manage to have her initial expectation 'to get the best from it' fulfilled. Drawing on her understanding of the approach and quality of

education offered by the ‘English grammar school’ as being focussed on classroom teaching, she expressed regret that there was a lack of a broader extracurricular intellectual and student culture of seminars and workshops at SU:

My course is public advocacy and action and it's not only based on any particular nation or particular country – it is on a broad spectrum – so something from USA or some other countries could be included – so that we can get total information on these issues. ...when I came here – I came with an expectation that other than lectures or class-based interaction we would have some access to other form of teaching or attending extra learning like seminars or workshops – something like that. And here it is nothing more than an English grammar school. So there is no extra access to other learning. In Masters level we should get access to seminars and workshops and those should be organised ... So we could get some extra knowledge. So I think the University should give more attention on these things for the students. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Whilst Suzan considered that her spoken communication had improved over the period of two semesters, she still indicated her doubt about the ‘standard’ of her overall English competence, particularly her written English:

I think I improved my spoken communication ... basically (it is) very hard – like the language – the way we write – whether it is – standardised – standard language – or Australian way or not – still I feel hesitation about that. So I am still not confident like the way I am writing or expressing my opinion whether it is Australian way or not [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

What comes out of her emphasis on having more ‘people focused’ interpersonal relations with academics as well as with other staff indicates that her social and interpersonal adjustment to the relationships at the University was not as fulfilling as she expected. Too much dependence on educational technology means less human contact and reduction of the personal touch in any interpersonal interaction. Wu et al.’s (2001) study suggests that referring students to technology enhanced learning support designed to meet a range of foreseeable inquiries, has both positive and negative impacts. On the negative side, students may have queries beyond what the designers of the software could have anticipated. Software based learning and information packages encourage and provide opportunities for learner autonomy, but at the same time they depersonalise and reduce the scope for personal contact, thus diminishing direct face to face teacher-student interaction. At certain points, due to what Suzan perceived to be overly ‘professional’ and mechanical impersonal treatment and inadequate attention from the staff and faculty members, she was led to feel marginalized:

I think the university should be more open to the students – it's not – every thing is on the web – every thing everywhere ... but for those who are coming from the developing countries – we still – we are not confident using the web- or browsing – it takes some time – so face to face briefing and face to face orientation is what we seek more. And we seek more [sic] friendly environment. Some time it is too professional for ... the students – even we feel shy to approach. When we first got here (we did not know) how they will take our English or the way we want the service – yeah – we, international students are basically people oriented ... people focused. And here staff is too professional sometimes – professionalism is good but too professional (ism) ... sometimes ... makes students feel – to avoid the situation and not to get information – they don't feel comfortable –so from avoidance frustration may develop – and from frustration, I think, it can affect anything. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Referring to the classroom context, she observed that the fewer the international students were in a class, the greater was the extent of their sense of exclusion:

And I think when the number of international students is limited the problem is I think greater – because that one or two students – they feel more isolated – in that case there should be more intensive (care/attention) than the other. When six or seven international students are attending a class – they can organise or they can learn from each other because they are having the same type of difficulty sometimes. ... teacher and student relationship is based on only email and just assignments and no such relationship at personal level – not that much. It's very tough to get hold of teachers out of the class. They just depend on emails – tell your issue and some thing like that. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Suzan's experience of being impersonally treated on campus aggravated her feeling of a diminished identity, which stood as an impediment in availing herself of her long expected 'best experience from it':

They should respect – whether you are Masters students or whether you are an undergrad student or you are a university student – you might have some lacking – but people should be respected. It is very rare here – whether it is at the library, computer lab or anywhere. [Suzan, Bangladeshi, Public Advocacy]

Qursat

In his endpoint story, Qursat, one of the most challenged students, shared his mixed feelings about his educational experience at SU and his adjustment and attainments. A straightforward depiction of the extent to which and how effectively Qursat had adjusted to the Australian context at the end of two semesters was not possible. Considering the students' varying expectations, motivations and individual differences in attitudes and approaches, I would argue that a period of two semesters may not be sufficient for every student to have fully

acculturated to Australian university life, the process of adjustment being a complicated one influenced by many personal and social factors. Qursat was not an exception to this observation. From his account it was not easy to understand how much he had developed academically beyond his pre-arrival expectation of being associated with the ‘name of foreign university’. In some areas he showed some positive changes in his perception about the contents and teaching of some subjects that allowed him to appreciate the quality of teaching. But, in contrast, in others matters (e.g. tutorial classes taught by teaching assistants and attended also by undergraduates, and short-cut reduced lessons), he remained dissatisfied and felt shortchanged by some of his teachers and his perception of their lack of commitment to their students in coming to class late and leaving early.

At certain points, Qursat was contradictory as well. Referring to his achieved ‘happy’ grades in the first semester, he reflected on and showed appreciation of a teacher when his subjects were taught using more traditional chalk and talk explanation:

I was taking four subjects in the first semester and I got like HD in two, one was very normal (a distinction) and one was good. ...they (subjects) are now good enough to enjoy ... A few of them (teachers) are very good. If there is a point, ... one them switch off the slide show that's on the (multimedia) projector and use the other manual overhead projector ... he used to put a sheet on that and used to write on that and we all could see what he was writing. So he used to explain us each and everything while writing on it. ...it satisfies my needs. Almost each and everything he explains – if you are not getting that. If you shake just your head, he gets the signal and explains everything on board. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Parallel to his partial appreciation of the teaching quality of some teachers, he remained critical about other types of teaching. He was unhappy at the overall teaching process and at not being able to get the most from a subject due to what he perceived as low quality tutorials and shortened teaching. In an earlier interview, he described the teacher with whose teaching he was unhappy as a ‘reading machine’:

One of our subjects has tutorials – you have to take that one with Bachelors (undergraduate students) and I am doing Masters - so I have to take that one with the undergraduates. You do not feel that much comfortable in the class-not because of juniors but with the person who is teaching this tutorials ... most of them are the students – associates – teaching assistants – so they are explaining to you – if it is a teacher, that's very good but the assistants are not that good When we get a lecture on a topic from a teacher we get a higher level of exposure, but when we go to tutorials, the teaching assistant, another

postgraduate student – explains the same thing – but you can imagine what level of explanation that is. It is very much different ... He writes questions on the board and he explains with the knowledge he has got. So you will hear and be learning something from the teacher and then you will get other thing (explanation) from the teaching assistants – that’s not interesting... If the teacher comes at six and she completes one chapter in one hour and fifteen minutes and she is goanna finish at 7:15 and she is leaving at 7:15 but the time of the class is up to 8 O’clock ... so all together 45 minutes we lose. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Reiterating his earlier perception of the reputation of western universities, he indicated that there had been little value added to his academic and intellectual enhancement, and suggested reconsidering the merits of any given course before making a decision to come to Australia. Justifying his position, he referred to the subjects that he was given exemptions in:

...we can get some exemption of [sic] our previous study. So it means that the course is that same thing – all things that we have been given exemption – we were taught the same subject there back home (in Pakistan) – so that’s why they gave us the exemption here. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Advising other students not to come to an Australian university for a course that is available in their home country, Qursat continued:

Not in my field. Not in computer science. Like you can have some courses in Telecommunications like – because of facilities – here you have lot of facilities – if you choose a different field and have better facilities then you can improve your learning. ... I recommend only ...coming for the subjects and fields that are not available back home. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Qursat had experienced language difficulties initially and demonstrated significant improvement in this area. He attributed this to the immersion process during the transition period, which helped him in his better communication with native speakers. However, he still experienced strain in communication with non-native English speakers:

The other thing is that when you get used to their (native speakers’) accent of English, you still have difficulties in understanding the teachers from Malaysia... I was in a few lectures before that the teacher told us that ‘you are gonna have ten minutes break’ but we didn’t understand what he was speaking [sic]. So he told us again that ‘you are goanna have ten minutes break’. Second time too we didn’t understand what he was saying. So third time he came closer to us and said ‘you want ten minutes break or not’. Then we said ‘yes, we want.’ [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Whilst he expressed happiness over the University’s attempts to create a welcoming environment and to facilitate the academic pursuits of the students,

simultaneously he lamented the absence of other amenities, which are not absolute necessities, but useful for an improved academic environment:

... students are coming to the class and leaving – that’s the thing going through the semester.. ... There should be some student lounge. Just for get together of the students. They are now sitting in the library where you can’t make noises. It’s good that you are free to say anything – no boundaries. They are improving the library too. They have put some computers – but still there is need for more computers – because we have to wait for that. All of them are sometimes booked – you have to wait for ten minutes for that. there are no seminars to involve in. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Qursat’s perceptions about the social aspects of the University campus were quite mixed. On the one hand, while he construed some of the provisions of the University as encouraging the promotion of a multicultural environment:

...But the positive things are that this Uni is very much multicultural. You have the freedom of everything. Freedom of dress – whatever you choose – freedom of religion – like prayer rooms. That’s a positive thing. Even to a less extent, when you see this you really feel good that this Uni is providing these facilities to the students. That’s very much appreciable. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

On the other hand, he was quite cynical about some interpersonal relations on the campus. What stood as barriers to his better psychological acculturation were his cultural stress and marginalisation resulting from his sense of “exclusion and discrimination” (Berry 2006a, p. 35). Such marginalisation, according to Schmitz (1994 cited in Kosic 2006, p. 122), can be linked to factors that discourage acculturation such as “high unsociability, neuroticism, anxiety, and closed-mindedness” (p. 122). Drawing on the double standard and the discriminatory practices of University staff members, he did not hesitate to label them as ‘racist’:

I find some of the staff members – they are some sort of racist – they are like – their behaviour – the way they behave with the white – their own (local white) students is not the same they behave with the international students. It doesn’t matter where they come from – what I have experienced that mostly they are not good with the Asian students. ... International Office too - and some of them in the Students Services. Like they are very good with their own students – but they have double standard with the International students. When they mistreat us – at the same time they deal other students very nicely.... Most of the international students are having this type of experience. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

Also, there was little change in perception of cost from his initial experience until the end of his second semester, and this impacted on his overall social adjustment. Referring to his earlier perception of cost based on the low exchange rate of his home currency and its purchasing capacity back home, he commented:

It is the same. Prices are very high and culturally appropriate foods are not available. The food you can get for one dollar in suburb F (nearby) here (on

campus) you pay seven dollars – eight dollars. You can't afford it. [Qursat, Pakistani, Computer Science]

What becomes evident from his perceptual disposition and longing for a more collegial environment is that his view of his gain from studying at SU, apart from the association with its name, was much below his expectation. Whilst these perceptions may reflect the quality of teaching and student support being provided by SU in his course area, his continuing strong attachment to his religion and culture appears to have contributed to him maintaining a distance from and remaining disengaged and alienated from the host culture.

Niranjan

Niranjan's final narrative of his experience at the end of two semesters includes quite a good number of success stories. His sense of success was associated with his perceived academic and social adjustment, as well as perceptual changes in how he understood Australian university life. What becomes apparent is that he has been able to adapt to the Australian context well, incorporating in his understanding necessary perceptual changes about academic practices, such as referencing requirements, about which he held only a partial understanding initially. Despite this assessment, his learning style still bore the legacy of surface learning. Referring to his compliance with referencing practices as 'a new experience', he shared his academic attainments:

... in last semester I think I did two assignments putting that reference and all that stuff. ...Yes. It was a new experience. So I need to remember all the websites. I just noted down all the websites. Someone told me to put the time and date also when you last visited that website. So it was good. ... That's (results) good. I had ten subjects. In four I got HDs (High Distinction) and six Ds (Distinction). [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Although there were some perceptual changes in his appraisal of the quality of his taught subjects, he continued to feel that his postgraduate studies were not extending him academically, but rather were repeating material he already knew. While he indicated his realisation of the importance of meaning that signifies deep learning, he continued to be attached to the value of learning through memorisation. His preference

for closed rather than open book examination suggests relatively little change in learning style, although he places stronger emphasis on understanding than previously:

Now I think closed-book exam was very good. Closed-book is preferred. I think because you know open book exams are meant to be very tough. You have only three hours. You can't find all the answers in three hours. Open-book exam for me I think is very hard. Closed-book are easy. In closed book you are just supposed to answer questions. I mean closed book exams are linked with your memory and your understanding. Open book exam, I don't think, are linked with your memory and understanding of the subject. You just find answer. If you have got luck and you can find... [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

However, there is still room for argument about whether Niranjan's, and, indeed, a few other students', memorisation is best understood as a preference for rote learning or not. Niranjan's disdain for open book exams reflects his perception that they provide for the possibility of being able to demonstrate knowledge through 'luck' in locating information in one's notes, whereas for him true knowing and understanding only exist if no supporting documentation is required. Referring to important studies by Marton et al. (1993) and On (1996), Ramburuth (2000) suggests that the perceptions of memorisation and repetition in Western and Asian contexts are not the same. Watkins and Biggs (2001, p. 5) and Ramburuth (2000, p.6) both suggest that mechanical memorisation, which is often attributed as surface learning, and memorisation for meaning, which is viewed as a deep learning strategy, are intertwined, and it is hard to differentiate for what purpose the learners are applying their strategies – particularly when the learners are studying in a cultural context different from their own. Watkins and Biggs (2001, pp. 5-6) explain that “differences in perception of relationship between memorising and learning” often lead to misinterpretation of learning styles and strategies.

Given his claim that few of his subjects had greater depth, Niranjan considered himself to be little challenged by the subjects he was doing till the end of his second semester. Reporting his good results, “I had ten subjects. In four, I got HDs and six Ds”, he highlighted that academically he did not feel extended by the course, although from the standpoint of the university, whilst his results are solid

and strong they would not be considered to be outstanding. He also questioned, in line with Qursat, the worthiness of studying in Australia at Southern University:

Still the same (as) I think, what I was doing back in India. It is repetition.... I did ten subjects. And out of them, in two or three subjects I got deeper understanding. But otherwise, nearly the same ... it is easy. I don't feel challenge. It is easy if you want to concentrate on exam only and getting marks. Then it is easy. And otherwise if you think I am here for postgraduate study and things like that. It is not worthy studying here. ...I did computer network subject here and computer subject I also did in India. And we did the same book, same questions. We did everything. No difference. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

An interesting feature reflected in this discussion by Niranjan of his course is that he continues to conceptualize knowledge as being about factual learning of content material rather than any broader sense of having developed an array of professional attributes and skills.

In reflecting on how he had become after two semesters of study, Niranjan reiterated his confidence in spoken communication skills, and summed up that he had 'No problem' in communication with his Australian classmates as well as with lecturers.

The state of Niranjan's social adjustment at the end of his second semester reflected some perceptual changes about the norms of Australian campus life. However, Niranjan attached high value to his own culture and continues as a Sikh to wear a turban, and resisted anything inconsistent with his Sikh culture saying, "It's against your culture". It is not clear how much his reported perceptual change had really affected his attitude to Australian culture. A common cultural stress that most of the respondents suffered from was the Australian campus norm of calling lecturers by their first names and students' smoking in front of teachers. While some respondents (e.g. Arnold, Dina) devised their own unique strategies of communication without changing their well-nourished practice of showing respect, Niranjan reported having experienced some changes to his perception of showing respect, though initiated by his Australian neighbour, who nevertheless he addressed as 'aunt' rather than by name, according to Indian tradition:

I am ok now. I can call them by name now because.... I have an Australian aunt. She told me that this the way their culture is. So nothing of disrespect is linked with calling by name and all that stuff. So I am comfortable now. ...

Yes, respect is in my heart ...I think one can show respect in his eyes. I think, you can judge people that the other person respects you or not by looking at his eyes. ... I have accepted it,... if students smoke in front of teachers. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

In contrast, Niranjan's perception of cost did not seem to have changed much. He still perceived the price of a commodity in Australia in terms of what it was sold for in his home country:

Bookshop is very costly. Southern University t-shirt they will give you for I think 39 dollars. They should offer some discount to students. I cannot think even of 39 dollars for this t-shirt. [Niranjan, Indian, Telecommunications Engineering]

Mita

Recollecting her initial experiences in a brief testimony on her level of adjustment at the end of two semesters, Mita compared her achievements in adapting academically and socially. She also highlighted her move from a zero level understanding of academic requirements to being able to claim confidence in dealing with referencing practices:

At the beginning when I came from my home I did have tough time like you all (members of focus group) but now I'm very settled. Yeah my expectations were got, I don't face any problemNow it's Okay. I take fifteen days to prepare (an assignment) – so it's no more a burden. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Mita noted that she had moved to a learning style based on understanding rather than memorisation. She also reported having been able to wean herself from her initial dependence on tutors and to work effectively by herself.

Commenting on her spoken communication, Mita indicated that she continued to be better in reception than production and felt she still required more time to be more proficient:

I understand them more than they understand me. ...comparatively I am better to understand rather than delivering my words. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Adding to her transition stories about her social adjustment, while she expressed her complacency about her present level of adjustment, she appeared to have

developed self confidence and looked forward to improving further with the passage of time:

I mean I was mentally distorted (at the beginning) – you know – because of uncertainty of work and unfamiliarity with the university environment. Now things are getting improved – rather happy now – rather happy with school and work life – social life. ... But gradually when I got friends and I know so many people, I can ask anything for information and all. So now days I don't feel lonely anymore ... I am more comfortable. Also with the environment I feel that it's my own ... I think the more important thing is here adaptation – you know – I took time to get adapted. I am adapted but will take some more time to be well adapted. [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Referring to her initial pressure in dealing with outdoor household responsibilities like paying bills and going shopping, Mita similarly reported having learnt to cope in this area as well:

I am getting used to (laughs). [Mita, Bangladeshi, Business and Finance]

Dina

Dina, another internally self-proclaimed least challenged student, whose reported grades in the first two semesters ranged between high distinction and distinction, shared some changes in her initial perception about the assessment system at Southern University. With her initial shallow understanding about the SU assessment criteria, she failed to appreciate the teaching quality and also challenged the rationale for the ratio of weighting between examination and assignments. At the end of two semesters, she had developed a much better understanding of the teaching and assignments. To describe how she had adapted to academic requirements, she explained:

Yes, I have become familiar with the assignments and now I know that ...in the first semester I didn't know what exactly the requirements of the teacher were, how they mark the assignment. At the end of semester when I got back my assignment, then I came to know that this is the way that the teacher has marked the assignment but in this semester at the beginning I had the idea that they mark the assignment or like this...all these things. ... So familiarity with the environment, with the assessment method, or with the teaching techniques, so all these things helped me.

Dina's acknowledgement that to do well she has had to apply herself fully suggests that she now realizes that her initial assessment that her course was not challenging has changed somewhat:

... now if I want to understand and if I give full attention and concentration, then I can understand everything. Overall this semester was easy for me. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Comparing the teaching style in Australia with that back home, Dina indicated only partial fulfilment of her academic expectations. Raising a question similar to Qursat's, Dina narrated her discontent at the superficiality of some of the teaching:

I am not happy with the teaching style of one or few teachers.... sometime the teacher just looks at the slides and read those slides. No explaining and nothing. And sometime I feel they are just telling us the formulas. He or she is not telling the logic behind the formula. ... That is based on concepts and concepts are not clarified. And for one subject...Actually I studied this subject back home... he was an amazing teacher. When I compare this teacher...I am not comparing the teacher actually. I am just comparing teaching style and the knowledge which was given to us ...I think that here in this course the teacher has emphasized on the calculations. Even in the exam we will not have any theory question ...We will have all the numerical questions. And I think that subject requires another style of teaching. That is a kind of subject in which we should have the understanding of the mechanism that how do the markets operate, how do the international markets interact, and what are the instruments available and all these things. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Attributing her limited academic engagement in the first semester to her limited listening skills, Dina indicated her greater involvement in the academic discourses in the second semester, resulting in better grades:

Now in this semester, no subject was really difficult for me. Now I think I don't have any listening problem. I think that I had the problem of listening. Even in IELTS, my score in the listening was very poor. I think my listening has improved. I can understand the lectures completely and thoroughly and course contents of the subjects were also very easy for me. ... Also in another subject I got 90%. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

In a shift from her initial perception about student assessment in Australia that put high weighting on assignments and argued for greater importance of examinations, by the end of the second semester Dina was convinced of the benefits of assignments:

In the first semester I disagreed with the assessment method I think ...as far as I remember I thought that more weightage [sic] should be given to exam. And one thing I said that there is [sic] no attendance. In this semester teachers put some weight to attendance. That was good. And as far as my assignment based assessment is concerned, my opinion is changed. ...When I did the assignments and I came to know that it is good to keep you up to date. Normally assignments given to us are based on the current issues of the subjects. That is kind of the application of the ideas which you study in the book as well. So exam should be on theoretical knowledge. ... the assignments which I was given are related with current issues. So that's good for the knowledge point of view. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Dina, who came to Australia with an expectation to study in a ‘developed country’ with modern physical facilities including the university’s own transport service, perceived that most of her desires were fulfilled. Being aware of the range of facilities a university can be reasonably expected to offer, Dina expressed her satisfaction:

Obviously there is limited number of books; there can’t be many hundred copies of books as there are many students. Otherwise facilities are good. I am satisfied. Even lecture room, multimediaall these things that’s ok.
[Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Referring to her spoken communication, she noted that she acquired better competence in listening and speaking, as well as in rhetorical skills by watching television programs:

So when I watched the TV I really thought that I should improve my listening and I should listen to the characters or to the programs carefully. And sometime even I tried to improve my speaking as well I like the sentence they use, the way they constructed the sentence and the way they spoke on the TV. So sometimes, not many times I wrote down the sentence and I try to put that in my mind. This is the way. Its really good sentence... this is the way I should speak. But with reference to listening TV was a good help for me.
[Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Regarding her social adaptation, Dina had virtually entirely retreated from the position she had during her transition period. As a transitional strategy, Dina convinced herself that she would make conscious attempts to address teachers by their first names. But in spite of her indicated perceptual changes and proposed strategies, she demonstrated limited success in acculturating herself to some campus norms. She also reconfirmed that she continued to hold the subcontinent’s traditional perception of the teacher that ‘once a teacher is always a teacher’:

But to some teacher I am still calling Sir like one Indian teacher although in this semester I am not studying from him but whenever I meet him on the way I just call him Sir. And one more teacher he was teaching company accounting but I was not attending his class. I was attending the other one’s class. I know him and in the last semester he was my teacher in one subject and at that time I called him Sir. He didn’t object. He did not interrupt me. So I still call him Sir...because he didn’t give me any angry [sic] expression that he does not like. So that’s why. Even last time my friend was with me when I went to his office to collect my assignment and he gave me assignment. I said ‘Thank you Sir’, and my friend said, ‘Don’t say like that ...Sir’- I said it’s ok I call him always Sir and he does not mind but for the other teachers, I call them by name. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

By the end of two semesters, Dina's socialisation experience had two dimensions – firstly, her relationship with university staff and, second, with fellow international classmates. She expressed her overall satisfaction over her social relationships with staff members, who, through their experience of dealing with international students, are likely to have reasonably good intercultural exposure and developed communication accommodation:

I am satisfied with the staff. Staff [sic] is helpful and facilities are sufficient.
[Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

In contrast, she reported her socialisation with international students from different backgrounds to hers had at times been stressful. Her narration about socialisation with these international students, who could be assumed to have little knowledge about her cultural differences, was consistent with what Shupe (2007, p. 750) has conceptualized reiterating that “interactions among people from different cultural backgrounds can result in interpersonal conflict. ... (and such) conflict strongly predicts poor work-related and socio-cultural adaptation, and these negative effects occur over and above the baseline effects of work stress”:

... I am not satisfied with the relationship – with some of my classmates – because one thing is there that there are many students from China and they do not ... don't feel to make friendship or not. They always get some Chinese to make friendship and same with the Indians. But I have got one Indian friend – relationship is good. I am satisfied. I can quote one more friend from Cambodia - the relationship was going very well – I helped her last semester and this semester I'm also helping her but she has some negative view about Muslim and I try to convince her that this is not the thing ... but she did not (agree)...Her idea was so strong but she was not convinced, so I now I am having some kind of feeling in my mind ...I thought she know [sic] me since the last semester she should change if previously she had any bad idea about the Muslim ... she often came to my house, even we went one or two places together and last time it was quite disappointing. [Dina, Pakistani, Professional Accounting]

Azabul

Azabul, one of the students who were most challenged initially, continued to make progress in acculturation as demonstrated in his transitional narratives part way into his course. In his epigrammatic story of how he was feeling about being a student in Australia at the end of two semesters, he highlighted how he maximized the benefit both academically and socially in contributing to group

projects involving both local and international students, in spite of his perception of a limited segregation imposed by the local students. He also had developed a positive perception of Australian education, which initially he had underestimated:

Basically there is a difference between the education in my country and in Australia. The moment you are coming, you are not expected to do the same, you are not expected to move with the same pace. ... so you need some time to adapt and how to make your assignments, how to understand lectures, how to catch the accent of different lecturers, how to prepare your notes – that I was not used to do in my country. ... I am happy with my performance. There is no regrets....Yeah, I was included a lot – both of them (teachers and students). End of the second semester we had two groups, the group projects, spent more time with that, with the groups, because at that time some people have a work and what's their behaviour, what's the culture, you get close understanding. ... There were some international students and also local students – yeah... but listen, at the end of the second semester the local students – they don't want to mix with the international students ... you can't even pull them to come and work with you and there is a problem lying there which need to solve and manage [sic] that. ...There should be some local students otherwise there is no point in collaborating with the Australian and learn about the culture – how they organize their work, how they study their report, how they interpret the project. [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

As he summed up his adjustment level at the end of two semesters, he emphasized the need to allow sufficient time for adaptation:

Because it gave me some time (semester break), the holidays gave me some time to adapt the Australian type of education and culture. So I am comfortable to adapt the teaching of the Australian education. ... As time went on I just got adapted with [Azabul, Indian, Engineering Project Management]

After two semesters Azabul opted to join another university that allowed him to undertake a longer course to enable him to gain more points towards his permanent residence in Australia.

Anil

In the academic domain, Anil revealed some perceptual developments. The much talked about subject that was so poorly received by Anil was 'Casinos and Gambling', in which he perceived the teacher taught 'nothing and gave us nothing'. While Anil had lately realized that his other subjects were similar to what he studied back home and was expecting to gain a lot from a subject not available in India, he lamented that he gained nothing in the subject:

It's, because the books and everything is the same. All Dr X used to teach, what Dr.Y used to teach in management, books are mostly the same – mostly the same topics – there are any addition, I wouldn't say so. I was expecting from Casino and Gaming, because there is no such subject in India probably because there is no casino nothing in India. I was expecting most from that subject, but I was disappointed completely I would say. ..[Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

Reiterating his disappointment at the minimum pass grade that he received only in that subject, especially given the high tuition fees, he continued:

... the final grade wasn't so okay because casino and gaming there is one subject, I was expecting better (information) but I did not get so much because he did not teach anything, yeah in the end I thought I would be fulfilled with the subject but I wasn't. Because he did not teach anything, there was no course outline, there was nothing, and in the end he just picked up assignments from nowhere, ... if the lecturer is good then the subject he teaches it really doesn't matter anyway he teaches it. The style in which you teach doesn't matter as long as you are teaching well. But if you are not teaching well, no style matters. ... I paid for that subject as equally, \$2000 ... he gave me 50.... [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

In a bid to console himself he attached some ethical issues to the subject he got the least:

I think there was some ethical, moral question about the subject – Casino and Gaming ... [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

He also reconfirmed his ability to cope with the academic formalities:

Yeah, that's (referencing) alright, assignments, yeah that's alright. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

Besides that, he continued appreciating the better physical facilities at Southern University:

... especially the free internet and everything. That's great, although they stopped that facilities, that's great. I don't think we have that much in India, we have little bit. But this is open even in the vacation and everything. Students can use whenever they want. This library I would say, facilities are great, the classrooms, the TVs and everything [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

When Anil first came to Australia, he had a very strong perception about teachers playing the role of mentors and philosophical guides. By the end of his second semester, he indicated a perceptual move from that position and he also indicated some shift in his traditional perception about teachers:

.No, I don't model my life after anyone, so it doesn't matter for me. They try to influence people like speaking about their background, like I did this. ... It doesn't matter so much. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management)

From what he shared about his hospital incident, it was difficult to get a clear understanding of what occurred and why. The only access we had was to the respondent, so could only appreciate the reported occurrence from his perspective. One thing that comes up is that Anil was experiencing financial instability and stress and this led him to opt for odd jobs, like fruit picking, and, also, that he felt unfairly detained as a result of his health scare:

I was planning to go for fruit picking, everything messed up, but everything is fine, everything is fine.... As long as you have (something for) spending. But again the medical matter I did not like so much, because I couldn't give (take) my exam, I couldn't do everything, they just kept me locked up ... They gave me nothing – no specification of my medication, nothing they gave me. I didn't like that. That involuntarily act or whatever it is, it's absolutely corrupt. [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management]

In some social interaction outside formal interview sessions, he also shared some of his strategies of coping with his financial hardship, such as going to a restaurant run by a local religious charitable organisation to take 'all you can eat' lunch at a nominal fixed price, and buying just-expired food at a lower price.

You know I go to a restaurant in Swanston street (in the city) for a vegetarian lunch. You can eat as much as can with only four dollars. They are sponsored by some Hindu religious organisations. On Mondays, I collect Lebanese bread for only 50 cents from the super market inside Footscray Market. Though the market is closed on Sundays and Mondays, that store is open. I don't mind if the bread is one day old (stale). [Anil, Indian, Hotel Management, from journal]

Until the final interview, Anil throughout had been presenting himself as a strategist who had adapted to Australian academic landscape relatively easily and with a linear upward trajectory of change and growing confidence and without any noticeable U-curve downturn. However, he suddenly became quite critical towards the end of the two semesters. For example, he was critical about the subject discussed earlier and presenting it as having eclipsed his earlier appreciation about his studies in Australia. He was also unhappy about the treatment he received in a local hospital. If these incidents were taken as fragmented unrelated events, without any logical chain, and his straightforward positive approach to the Australian context was taken into account, one might be tempted to portray him as a linear adjustor. But his reported attempts to mitigate financial crisis and his experiences of financial hardship seem to be affecting both

his health and as well as his academic performance after two semesters. Although these crisis symptoms surfaced quite late, one of the reasons for this delayed appraisal of his stress and shock could be with his high internals locus of control and strong commitment to his ultimate goal of long term settlement, Anil was able to stave off culture shock for quite a long time. So it can be argued that whether he experienced such stress and shock immediately after euphoric stage or not, he did suffer from culture shock, and had a crisis downturn that was impacting on him during his second semester.

Arnold

Arnold, another student classified as being in the least challenged group of students initially, and who remained critical throughout, expressed complacency about his academic achievements, but showed slight perceptual changes in some areas. With his grades ranging between distinction and high distinction, Arnold expressed his satisfaction with the standard and expectations of assignments, but maintained that the tests were not sufficiently academically demanding:

My performance as such if you ask me I am still good, in two subjects I got higher distinction and two subjects I did not get high distinction but distinction. So my results were all over very good, but the thing is like I myself feel that they don't put us to the limit of our studies, capacity, because the level of questions, or level of examination is not tough enough to push us to the limits of or help to push us to develop more advanced skills because the examination assessment, the assessment way, the way we are assessed does not require that much of efforts ... we find it less, I find it less challenging. ...In term of assignments it's okay. But in terms of examination I would say it was less challenging.... [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Referring to his only partially quenched thirst for knowledge in his specialized area, ever critical Arnold argued for a higher standard of course materials and an upgrade in course objectives:

They (lecturers) are more worried about what they have taught and whatever they have taught has gone through or has passed on to the students or not, that's it. They are not actually interested in knowing that if the person has actually developed things or not, and if they say like 'No this was the course structure – this was the guidance or the parameters for the subject', then I would say they should raise the parameters and the course structure to a better level. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Over a period of two semesters, Arnold made some limited positive perceptual changes in connection to his lecturers and their teaching. Earlier he used to hold a rather poor estimation about the quality of teaching. In his last observation, he suggested more room for improvement:

Relation with the teachers is very good on the personal level, I can say they are very good and the teaching level is also not bad – they are good. I don't say like they are very (good) – means they are excellent but they are good and relations with the students – the teacher-student relation is also very congenial. ... And I don't think like in just one and half hours of the practicals you can expect the students to develop the skill and confidence to use it in future. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

However, he continued to have reservations about staff treatment and the bureaucracy in the Student Service area. With his recommendation for a more user-friendly system and more compassionate dealing from the staff, he ultimately reflected the reminiscence of sufferings inflicted some time in his first semester:

I am not complaining about the different system. I very well understand the system is simplified - I am not telling the system is complex but the system is not working, that's what I am telling. ... They are not supportive to the students. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Although Arnold expressed his satisfaction at the better academic resources available at SU, in a tone similar to some other fellow postgraduates (e.g. Dina, Suzan, Qursat, Zinat), he reported a lack of extra-collegial activities at the University and suggested an improved cafeteria service as well:

From student life point of view, I would not say that it's that high to stay back, but from academic point of view, it's OK for me – the books relevant to my study are available. Computers in the library are plenty now - now it is easy to get one and it's good. Regarding fitness centre I have not been that much- I have visited there once or twice- it seems it's a good facility. I would say that I did not join international student association because nothing is happening from their side. I did not find their activities as vibrant one. Only in paper there is an International student organisation. My friends studying in other universities reported lots of activities are going on every day. In our university it is only in paper that there will be something. ... The cafeteria in the university is not up to mark. And the food is not culturally appropriate for many. They should cater to the needs of the students. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

Regarding his adaptation to larger Australian society, Arnold projected a positive picture. Acknowledging the reality of differences between the cultures, his response suggested an easy integration into the mainstream culture:

I would say people are friendly – students here are friendly- I didn't find any problem in that. It's OK. Adaptation is OK, They are friendly, a few of them are helpful also ... From social point view, it's good, I am OK. I didn't find transition part difficult. Though the culture is different, there is no social

stigma – no. I found it very smooth in transition from my culture. But the work at the university is not run smoothly. They say it will take time, but who will pay for the time? [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

In spite of his positive account of ‘friendly’ relation with fellow students, he hinted a shade of seclusion forced by the local students:

Yes, I found with other international students at least – I don’t know about the locals - what they think of us – because they don’t interact with us that much. But other international students are also talking the same, because the thing is same with them. [Arnold, Indian, Applied Science in Exercise Rehabilitation]

His reference to ‘a piece of cake costs \$3’ is again a reminder that his perception of cost changed very little, and might have slowed his process of adjustment.

Shafi

Throughout Shafi has been a difficult case to describe and define. Even at the end of his second semester he was struggling with his limited English, a fact that is perhaps not surprising given that good proficiency in English has been shown to be one of the most important tools for acculturation in an English speaking environment like Australia (Leder & Forgasz 2004; Singh-Ghuman 2001; Wang & Shan 2007). With his limited English Shafi found it difficult to progress much in his adaptation process. As a reaction, he continued to remain critical about everything. Referring to a class in the second semester that he failed to follow, he appeared to be accusative and expressed sheer frustration:

At the end of the second semester the same scenario is going on. Like the students did not come to the class early. The same scenario is like 50% did not come. 50% if come like 5 out of 10 and they are still sleeping, they did not concentrate early in the class, and they did not feel like that this class is important for them. ... You know what happened – in the class one of the students spoke to the teacher, “This class is totally bored [sic] to me. The teacher said’ “Yes, it is boring” So you can’t believe it. How a teacher can say like this, “This class is a boring class.” Because it is the duty of a teacher to make it enjoyable, understanding (comprehensible) so that students can realise all of the things. But if it is going like this – I don’t know what will happen. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

In spite of his claim to be ‘fully adapted’ and his reporting ‘good’ grades, he nevertheless gave the impression that he was unhappy and still not well acculturated after two semesters of the study at Southern University. What is

evident from his narrative of asserted success is a sense of his continued struggle to adapt to and cope with the academic challenges of the Australian context, rather than of him having achieved substantial meaningful progress in aligning himself to the new context. He was making some progress in adapting to and coping with the new context, but his alignments to some extent appear to be superficial even though he is not aware of this. His reported success appears to be based on a heavy reliance on rote learning indicating no fundamental shift from the surface learning style that characterized his approach and expectations soon after he arrived at SU. The following unedited excerpt suggests how traumatized he was continuing to feel in dealing with aspects of the academic demands of his course, even at the end of his second semester:

Yeah actually in the second semester I have completed – I am worried about two subjects ... What happened after finishing the exam of the traffic engineering, I have got a great result, really it gives me lot of pleasure. Yeah I got above like 90%, I got 92. So basically I am happy because the thing I have to memorise in that subject it is not so much, yeah I am happy to memorise, because the teacher give me some formula with exam paper so it does not make me so much pain, so it's really helpful for me. And the computer network it's really unthinkable. I really find a – it's like a nightmare. While I thought about this computer network (subject) I always what a shaking in my body. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

His usual self contradiction was apparent when he claimed to have faced no difficulty:

Umm...I think I am now fully adapted. I know what I have to do – with respect to situations I face now. I didn't feel any difficult [sic] up to this stage. It's easy for me. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Against the backdrop of overwhelming criticism and accusation, the only positive words that were heard from Shafi were his positive perceptions towards the end of the two semesters about a few of his lecturers. Although the subjects taught by these were not excluded from his earlier criticism about the overall approach and quality of teaching, he expressed appreciation for the help he received from some lecturers:

Some of the teachers and some of the subject, especially my course co-ordinator I have (to) mention his name he is really good person, he is really nice person and he is very helpful, and or any kind of help I just visited him and he helped me a lot, and I have to mention another name like Dr.R, he taught us Tele Traffic Engineering and I have got really lots of the help from him , and another teacher like Dr P, he taught us Satellite, Microwave and Satellite, and he just helped me a lot. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

Shafi's engagement in social interactions and socialisation into the Australian context at the end of two semesters rarely crossed the boundary of him socialising with other Bangladeshis. At most it expanded to interactions with others from the greater South Asian community at SU and in Melbourne, more generally. He attributed his very limited acculturation to the mainstream Australian culture to his limited access to the host culture and also exclusion and marginalisation by local classmates and, even, university support staff:

I went the International Branch in Footscray Park – the senior lady, Jane (pseudonym) ... her behave was not so good, like she behaves in a rudely manner. So then I went to the City Campus ... I have got Australian student (classmate) in the first semester as well as second semester – but I can't adjust culturally with them. Because the people who are from Asia like India Pakistan, Bangladesh – when I go to them and try to discuss the lecture or whatever thing - they are interested about this thing. But this Australians are not interested. They just come to the class - attend the class – listen and go. ... Actually the place I am living – there is no Australian people – all of them are from India, Bangladesh and that kind people. So I didn't have any opportunity to mix with Australian community but in my community I am very social. [Shafi, Bangladeshi, Telecommunications]

To conclude, I have summed up what the endpoint narratives of the postgraduates have thus far brought to the surface under three major headings: level of academic adjustment, managing spoken communication, and level of social acculturation. In academic culture, all the postgraduates indicated incremental progress towards the expectations of their lecturers, however, with varying levels of success. Some of the postgraduates' behavioural compliance was triggered by perceptual and attitudinal development about some aspects of the academic culture (e.g. Suzan's coping with wide ranging lectures, dealing with Web CT; Mita, Dina and Zinat's engagement with assignments), while others' academic conformity was probably mechanical and based on superficial understanding of the requirements (e.g. Shafi's, Niranjana's and Qursat's dealing with referencing). It may be a useful reminder that while the postgraduates have been labelled with broad categories, they do not represent a thoroughly uniform pattern, rather there are subtle differences among their orientations and performances.

Regarding their spoken communication, all the postgraduates made some headway, again with varying level of competence and success. The two self-

claimed ever confident postgraduates (Anil and Arnold) reported experiencing no difficulties in spoken communication. While the remaining eight reported their relative improvement in their communicative competence and performance due to the immersion in Australian all-English environment specifically, two among them reported taking extra personal initiative (e.g. Dina utilized TV programs for improving spoken strategies, and Mita use online resources to enrich her vocabulary) to enhance the quality of their overall English proficiency.

Socially, the postgraduates displayed more variability, though in limited routine day-to-day living matters all the postgraduates managed to do well by renegotiating their lifestyles with the demands of the context. Though stressed initially, they were able to deal with bills, shopping and time management in the new context within a short period.

In broader social acculturation their success was influenced by their personality factors such as their attachment to their worldviews, religions and culture, and their readiness to accept changes. Due to their strong attachment to their own religions and cultures, Niranjana (Sikh), Azabul, Qursat and Dina (Islam), and Arnold (Hinduism) appeared to be more selective in their acculturation to Australian culture. Dina's change of her dress within her religion's broader framework, and Niranjana's continuation of using his traditional turban are only a few examples. This finding has some consistency with Singh-Guman's (2001) and Stodolaska & Livengood's (2006) observations that religious beliefs of migrants influence their acculturation process. If their religious belief is similar to that of their host culture, their acculturation is quickened, and vice versa. These postgraduates mentioned above have dared to take the risk of being identified as aliens and have not compromised with basic religious principles.

Social acculturation was also dependent on how much access they were able to have to the host culture. While some of the postgraduates were able to make some extra progress in social acculturation by utilising whatever opportunities they had to have access to the host culture, such as through utilization of mixed background student study group for both academic and social acculturation (Azabul) and working as a part time taxi driver or in other customer service roles (Azabul,

Arnold and Anil) others utilized natural immersion process to the best of their abilities. But they all reported either in explicit or implicit language they were subject to being marginalized.

What the endpoint narratives suggest is that all the postgraduates had gone through a U-curve acculturation process, although the timing and severity of their downturns and crisis varied considerably. Most were well settled and had adjusted to the new academic culture effectively well before the end of their second semester.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

“Nature’s music is never over;
her silences are pauses, not conclusion.”
- Mary Webb

The recurring controversy about making generalisations in qualitative studies highlights the contentious nature of what it is methodologically feasible and credible to draw out of qualitative research. Referring to Denzin (1988), Williams (2007) debates two propositions; on the one hand that interpretivists deny the possibility of generalisation, or they ignore the issue, but they inevitably do generalize, or, on the other hand, that generalisation in interpretive research is impossible. Regarding the first proposition, Williams (2007), citing instances from some qualitative studies, such as Geertz’s (1979) study of the Balinese cockfight and Fisher’s (1993) study of children and fruit machine gambling, has argued that when any research is designed and conducted, there is always a desire to find an answer to the research question, and that qualitative researchers often make generalising statements about their studies without explicitly calling them ‘generalisations’. The second proposition has been defended by saying that in qualitative approach, the “aim of inquiry is to develop an idiographic body of knowledge. This knowledge is best encapsulated in a series of working hypotheses ... generalisations are difficult to draw since phenomena are neither time - nor context free” (Guba & Lincoln 1982 in Williams 2007, p. 429). While both the propositions have some convincing arguments in their favour, I feel inclined to accept the first proposition. Much of this debate seems to hinge on exactly what is meant by generalisation, not as statistically defensible measures of central tendency, but rather as identification of general trends and themes that encapsulate important dimensions of experience. Whatever the theoretical rhetoric about qualitative research suggests, qualitative studies, taking the benefit of semantic space, can contribute to achieving deeper understandings and insights

about the human condition and experience that have broader applicability than in the precise research context in question. I do not see any harm in highlighting the major findings of any study through some summarising statements. I also believe that such statements, despite their contextual and time-related limitations, assist in making sense of the researched, and that has encouraged me to draw out some general themes and insights from the stories of the adjustment experiences of the postgraduates whose lives we have followed through their first two semesters at Southern University. As a consequence, in this chapter, I have described the postgraduates in question in relation to the broad types they represent, whilst acknowledging their individual differences.

Besides attempting to draw out some key themes and to classify the respondents and sum up the variations in their adaptation experiences, this chapter will also suggest some implications and measures that may contribute to facilitating international students' adjustment to Australian universities.

The study's main focus has been on the academic adjustment of the postgraduates, including their adjustments in both formal academic spheres of activity, such as lectures and tutorial classes, assignments, examinations, teacher-students and student-student interactions, and less formal, but nevertheless academically important aspects of university life, such as interactions outside the classroom at other locations on the campus of the University (egs. International Office, Student Services and the Library), and including their adaptation in social communication and socially. The study has identified six themes that appeared to be important in making sense of differences in orientations and approaches adopted to the adjustment process by the participating postgraduates. These themes are discussed in detail below.

Camouflaged Motivations: Professed and Emerging Intentions

The first theme that emerged that appears to have impacted on the adaptation process of the postgraduates involves the dissonance between their reported initial motivations for coming to study in Australia and the motivations that gradually

became apparent. Their pre-arrival expectations and initial motivations can straightforwardly be summed up based on their reported statements, as being that most of the respondents came to Australia to upgrade professional qualifications leading to the enhancement of their expected employment opportunities, with one of them expressing this in terms of an intention for self improvement, but also linked to better employment prospects. Initially, none of the participants candidly reported that one of their agendas was to seek permanent residence in Australia, but as the time passed, new motivations emerged. For many of them, parallel to their instrumental motivation for improvement of academic and professional qualifications for better employment opportunities, a new stimulus of becoming permanent residents was added. As a consequence, seven of the ten participants eventually were able to obtain permanent residence in Australia. Out of the remaining three, two, being AusAid grantees, were obliged to go back to their home country (Bangladesh), and the tenth (Shafi) moved on to another country, Germany. This outcome has led me to believe that the primary goal of most of the participants was to seek permanent residence in Australia, and their chosen educational path was not only a strategy of professional development, but also a means of attaining this goal.

Looking back at these desired and achieved outcomes has also prompted me to identify two groups: the long term settlers (Anil, Arnold, Azabul, Dina, Mita, Niranjana and Qursat,) and the short term sojourners (Zinat and Suzan). Although there was not enough data to explain precisely what caused Shafi to move to a third country, meaning that he did not fit neatly into either group, there was some probability of him opting to move on because his camouflaged intention to stay in Australia more permanently had been foiled by his inability to cope well with the academic demands of his studies in Australia.

Worthy of further consideration is whether the postgraduates who opted for long term settlement had had the agenda of becoming permanent residents in Australia even before coming to Australia, leading them to take up an academic program in Australia, or whether this agenda emerged gradually after arriving in Australia and enjoying life and study here. Although the data did not explicitly uncover that their pre-arrival agenda included prominently the possibility of seeking permanent

residence, some of the decisions taken and implemented by many of the postgraduates as well as insights from other recent research (e.g. Baas 2006; Birrell et al. 2006) would lead one to believe that this was a pre-arrival agenda for many, and might have been as strong as to influence them to decide to come to Australia under the broader pretext of academic improvement. Some of the postgraduates (e.g. Mita and Azabul) who ultimately secured permanent residence altered their course and/or university in order to implement this agenda. Another point to consider is that the postgraduates from India came to Australia with interest bearing bank loans and they were obligated to start paying back six months after the completion of their degrees. Unless they had planned some measures for recovery of such large bank loan, most likely they would not have taken such financial risk. Besides that, some of the postgraduates who were critical and unsatisfied with the Australian education standard could have opted to relocate to another country with a reputation for offering quality education, but instead they preferred continuing their study in Australia. Citing the statistics of the high rate of migration of South Asian students to Australia (e.g. Pakistan 67%; Bangladesh 71% and India 73%), Baas (2006) has observed that the main object of Indian students in Australia is to obtain “permanent residence” (p. 8), and “they (Indian students) are students but with worries and responsibilities of migrants” (p.12).

In line with the findings of Baas (2006), the two distinctive groups in my study – long term settlers and short term sojourners – adopted different approaches to their adjustment to the Australian academic context. The long term settlers’ approaches to academic adjustment being influenced by their responsibilities towards becoming permanent residents in Australia were more strategic, yet in some ways more superficial in nature. Instead of being actively engaged in academic self-development through their studies, they tended to be what I have chosen to call *system compliers*. No doubt this approach to their engagement and adaptation at Southern University was partly attributable to the amount of their energies that were going into other aspects of their settlement into Australian life, including their focus on learning to survive financially and positioning themselves in relation to the broader Australian society external to the university in a way that enabled them to feel secure and assured in their futures. For some, this positioning

was primarily about finding a place for themselves within the South Asian diaspora community of their ethnic/ethno-religious heritage, whereas others had a stronger focus on integrating themselves within the broader Australian multicultural society.

In contrast to the long term settlers, the two short sojourners were always geared towards their return home, but each drew on this knowledge in different ways. Suzan adopted a highly engaged approach, strongly driven by a desire for self-improvement and new knowledge to take home, whereas Zinat appeared to be what I have chosen to call *a minimum doer*, whose overriding aim was to get by and enjoy her experience at SU without putting herself under unnecessary tension or strain. One of the reasons for such discrepancy of the approaches of these two sojourners may be their individual differences in locus of control. Suzan presented herself as a student with a strong internal locus of control, while Zinat predominantly presented as having an external locus of control. However, it needs to be emphasised here that this study did not include any psychological test or measuring scale to assess the participants' locus of control. The observation made here about the locus of control of participants is based on the behavioural patterns that studies on locus of control have attributed 'internals' and 'externals'.

Learning for Self-improvement versus Learning to Conform

The second theme that distinguishes the approaches of the postgraduates relates to the orientation they adopted in locating themselves in the Australian academic context. In analysing the postgraduates' adopted strategies in coping with the academic challenges which affected them, discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I found it was a useful starting point to associate them with the different levels of overall difficulty they appeared to experience in adapting the Australian university context. The initial challenges faced by the postgraduates and their self assessment of the perceived difficulties in dealing with the academic demands of their courses, led me to broadly classify them into three groups: the least challenged (e.g. Arnold, Dina and Niranjan), moderately challenged (e.g. Mita, Anil, Suzan and Zinat), and most challenged (e.g. Azabul, Qursat and Shafi).

Returning to consider the students after their full two semesters at SU and reflecting on their adaptation and learning processes and the patterns of the strategies they adopted the Australian postgraduate context, I feel it is more apt to classify them into two broad types: the internally driven *initiators of self development* (e.g. Suzan, Mita), and the externally driven *system compliers* (i.e. the remaining eight others).

From among the moderately challenged respondents initially, Suzan, a short term sojourner with a three semester AusAid scholarship, who had come to Australia to get the ‘best’, emerged as an internally driven self developer. She followed a self-actualization process towards her goals. She was efficient in perceiving the reality and the challenges of the new academic context, and endeavoured successfully to manage her mainstream academic program, which commence simultaneously with her Introductory Academic Program (IAP), even though for most of the AusAid students, the IAP course precedes their mainstream course. Being task-centred and willing to suspend her initial surprise at the range of contexts she was being expected to engage with, she gradually managed to grasp what she perceived as widely focused lectures that initially posed a challenge, and she was able to establish the relevance of these lectures to her specific needs. Displaying her tolerance of uncertainty, she moved forward in taking an online subject in spite of her lack of preparedness for online learning, and despite some initial difficulties, she finally managed it well. She remained unquenched in her ever increasing quest for upgrading her qualifications, and expressed her willingness to attend and readiness for engagement in extra collegial activities (e.g. seminars and workshops). While she was able to cope with academic requirements (like the writing of a minor thesis, and referencing requirements) quite well, she was not complacent with the quality of her written English. Her self appraisal of her written English that she was ‘not confident’, highlighted foremost her desire to strive for further improvement, rather than being content with her ability to fulfil tasks well. She acknowledged that there was always room for further excellence. A ‘people-focused’ Suzan, who had had experience of working in an NGO prior to her study in Australia, was dissatisfied with the limited access she had to the host culture, and this limited her in achieving the level of social acculturation that she had hoped for.

Mita was another *initiator of self development*. Using her high enthusiasm and strategic implementation, she made significant progress from having initially the lowest level of understanding of academic requirements to achieving an acceptable level of fulfilment of academic practices, reflected in her reported good results. By asserting her ability to do assignments within a short time span, she ascribed an empowered identity for herself. Mita also indicated her perceptual changes in her learning style. She was very explicit in sharing how she had moved both perceptually and behaviorally from surface learning that featured her dependence on private tutors and memorization, to meaning-focused self-monitored deep learning. She also developed her own strategy of spoken communication emphasizing keywords and minimizing worries about accents. By the end of her first two semesters, Mita had made some headway in regard to her spoken communication, and being able to greet her teachers in the university corridors and to take part in class interactions, she proclaimed her emergence with a different identity.

In contrast to Suzan and Mita, the other eight postgraduates can be described as externally driven *system compliers*. The *system compliers* of this study are characterized by being driven primarily by their desire to fulfil what the Australian postgraduate system required them to fulfil. In other words, they lacked in a self-initiated enquiry driven approach to their learning and personal development. In the academic context, they complied with what they perceived that they needed to do to survive and maintain their status as postgraduate students. They preferred to take the line of least resistance.

The *system compliers* appeared to be externally driven, and for all of them the driving force behind their fulfilment of requirements was a knowledge of the University's, as well as of the Australian government's (through the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship) standards and expectations, and their judgement about the behaviour they needed to adopt to conform with these. Despite individual variation, it was interesting to note that there was at least one common trend in their adaptation process – they all made significant adjustment to academic requirements and were able to survive within the new academic culture in Australia at SU. However, Shafi's withdrawal from one university and

moving to another university suggests he may have been less successful than the others in learning to comply. Irrespective of their various expectations and camouflaged or more explicitly expressed life plans, they all had to be, first and foremost, students to justify their presence in Australia, and that obligated them to comply with academic requirements. Their status to stay within Australia would have been jeopardized, stopping them from realising whatever goals they had, if their student status was not maintained.

Another notable aspect of the *system complier* postgraduates' adaptation and approach is that, while on campus, their activities were exclusively confined to their formal academic studies. None of them reported participation at the University's fitness centre or in any other social clubs. This reinforces the impression that this group had an overarching tendency to comply with the system by doing the minimum.

The dominant tendency of system compliance among the postgraduates in this study may be linked to their cultural and academic orientation in their home countries. According to Hofstede and Hofstede's (2005) Power Distance Index, in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, 'high power distance' exists in the broader societies. That cultural dimension of power distance is also well reflected in social organisation in academic institutions, impacting on teachers and students relationships. The teachers' authoritative role and the students' perception of teachers as an embodiment of knowledge may be partially responsible for these postgraduates' way of thinking about what their learning task is and how best to approach it through learning to comply with the rules as they perceive them. The overall academic system in South Asia, including the assessment criteria which require making judgements about and learning to fulfil specific teachers' set criteria mould the students with a system complying attitude.

While the *system compliers* all focussed on achieving a satisfactory level of compliance with academic requirements, they were found to have varying levels of enthusiasm, effort and resistance and this was reflected in their resulting output. Niranjan, who was classified as least challenged in terms of how difficult he perceived the adjustment to be, was one of the *system compliers*. Although his

narratives provided evidence of a few perceptual changes (both in academic and social aspects), he used some short-cut means to adjust to the academic differences in the Australian context like the strategists who, according to Kiley (2003) and Bochner (1994), tend to identify the newness in the new context, learn how to fit in and adopt strategies to manage it. While his overt statement of shifting from crammed learning to deep learning suggested a positive and quite important shift in his orientation to learning, his preference for closed-book examination and its linkage to memorisation could also be interpreted as evidence of his underlying allegiance and attachment to his previous orientation to surface learning.

Among the *system compliers*, Dina projected herself somewhat differently with her relatively wider exposure to postgraduate studies compared to other respondents. She found the course content least challenging and, perhaps, as a consequence, displayed a low level enthusiasm parallel to high-level ‘I can do it’ type confidence. Her endpoint statement signified that the academic demands did not provoke much of her enthusiasm, and so did not require a full investment of her effort:

... if I want[s] to understand everything – I can understand everything ... sometimes it happens that I don’t want to listen to teachers because that’s very easy and sometimes I feel that what a boring topic it is ... that is very basic for me.

By employing an analytical approach to the differences, Dina was able to bring about perceptual changes in her views of the differences that she identified between the Australian context and her home context, and was able to acknowledge differences in assessment practices, such as the rationale of weight-ratio between examination and assignments. Her successful adjustment to academic requirements ultimately resulted in her reporting good academic grades. While she was able to fulfil most of her expectations of studying in a ‘developed country’, she suggested that she remained unquenched by the depth of postgraduate studies in her discipline and showed her eagerness to be involved in more advanced academic engagement. Socially, Dina appeared to be integrative, but selectively so. While she made some adjustments to her dress, she still conformed within the broader constraints in dress code of her Islamic culture, by

shifting from traditional Islamic dress to full sleeve shirts, long trousers and with maintaining a covering hijab.

Another *system complier*, Arnold, who consistently had a high estimation of his own ability, suggested that his repetitive subjects, without involving deeper understanding, could not draw much of his enthusiasm. His assertion that the examinations of his course were ‘not tough enough to push’ him to his limit suggested that he did not feel required to invest his full effort. His lack of positive approach, often accompanied with criticism of the Australian education system, slowed him down in making any significant positive perceptual changes about the Australian academic context. Given his critical and, at times, almost dismissive attitude, and his reflection of this in doing the minimum he perceived was required to comply with the new system, it seems difficult to explain why he nevertheless preferred to obtain permanent residency in Australia, than return to India. However, one probable reason may be that he had not yet been able to reach the stage when sojourners or visitors develop ‘cultural empathy’, which Bennett and Bennett (2004) have described as a state that enables sojourners to “organize experience through a set of constructs that are more characteristic of another culture than of one’s own” (p.156).

Goal-oriented Anil appeared to be different from other *system compliers* in the study. He approached the differences in the new context with a positive attitude initially. With a spirit of ‘Be Roman when you are in Rome’, he reported gradually conforming more and more to the academic requirements. Although back home he was dependent on pre-digested notes, and not used to referencing norms, he made a smooth transition to Australian academic practices, and recognized the benefit of standard textbooks, and complied with academic requirements. However, at the end of his second semester, he reported some examples of culture shock associated with financial hardship, a significant health problem and an academic setback. The probable explanation for his acculturative behavioural pattern could be that his euphoric stage lasted longer, or/and that he managed to absorb earlier shocks and preferred not to share. He did not report any resistance to the host culture either, except in the hospital incident. He was straightforward in adapting to what was required, but without any evident strong

sense of engagement and enthusiasm in his personal and academic development. So Anil, with his early openness in approaching the new culture, also was categorized in the group that followed U-curve in their acculturation, and was primarily motivated by a desire to comply with the new system.

Zinat, another moderately challenged short term sojourner, demonstrated herself as having limited enthusiasm in her approach, leading her to be classified as a minimum doer, making less than a full investment of effort. Her self reported investment of less than '100%' effort and fulfilment of bare academic requirements can be attributed to her short trajectory in Australia. Her determination not to take home possessions symbolic of the Australian culture, such as trousers and a short blouse, but rather to leave these behind at the 'airport', was an indication of her desire to adjust only as much as was needed in the new, but temporary context. Such attitudes and approach partially provided her with the hues of Kiley's (2003) strategists and conservers. Her system complying was always envisaged by her as being a response to a short-term demand, whilst she conserved her allegiance to the culture and practices that she always knew she would be returning to.

The most challenged three postgraduates (e.g. Azabul, Qursat and Shafi,) invested their agencies to a maximum level, but that did not bring quantitatively equal results for each of them. Qualitatively all of them were able to make quite a significant level of adjustment, though all were aiming primarily and instrumentally at meeting the formal academic requirements associated with their courses. While all three experienced serious constraints, which mainly stemmed from their limited English, and unfamiliarity with their subjects (for Azabul and Shafi), Azabul and Qursat managed to handle these relatively better than Shafi. Both Qursat and Azabul as part time workers providing customer service availed themselves of the opportunities this provided for improving their English, which ultimately contributed to their academic attainments. In contrast, Shafi continued struggling with making his academic effort meaningful, and at a certain point decided to transfer to another university. The reported good grades, which Shafi termed as the indicator of his success, were attributed by him to his memorization

of mathematical formulae. This group's (Qursat, Azabul and Shafi) reported compliance with academic requirements such as examination, assignments, and referencing norms, appeared to be very mechanical rather than as indicating a strong commitment to meaningful learning.

All these *system compliers* show some resemblance with Kiley's (2003) 'strategists', and Xu's (2005) 'problem-solvers'. Similar to Kiley's 'strategists' and Xu's 'problem solvers', the *system compliers* of my study attempted to have a precise idea of what is required, were all strategic in approach and the nature of their engagement was more mechanical, rather than constituting an interest driven self-assertive effort. In addition, like Kiley's strategists, the *system compliers* also lacked earlier first hand exposure to the western education system. However, the *system compliers* of this study also differ from Kiley's 'strategists' in some important aspects. For example, all Kiley's strategists had entered their postgraduate studies in Australia with a bare minimum IELTS score of 6.5 or even less. This suggests that her 'strategists' were influenced in their approach by the constraints that their English language deficiency placed on their capacities to make innovative, self-actualising efforts. Thus, they were prone to adopt a simplistic approach and to focus on fulfilling the bare necessities. In contrast, in my study, a number of the *system compliers* could not be characterized as being limited by their English proficiency. Some of them entered SU with an overall IELTS band score higher than 6.5 (e.g. Arnold 7.5, Anil 7, Niranjana 7), and expressed confidence in their English yet still tended to be *system compliers*. For these students their system complying strategies appeared to result from other contributing factors. One explanation of such tendency may be that for many of them, their academic obligations were being influenced by their greater responsibilities of establishing themselves locally and setting themselves up to become permanent residents in Australia. Being innovative and engaged at SU would not only have taken more of their time, leaving less opportunities for part-time employment and socialisation into the broader society, but it also carried greater risks, both academically (through misjudging expectations) and socially, and ultimately also from a career and financial perspective if it jeopardized their hidden agendas of obtaining permanent residence. Instead, the *system compliers* preferred a risk-free strategy of complying mechanically with the system. In

addition, there was no indication that Kiley's 'strategists' and Xu's 'problem solvers' had any agenda of becoming permanent residents, and the reference that Kiley makes to her 'strategists' having worked hard to obtain scholarships suggests that, like the short term sojourners in my study her respondents were obliged to return to their home country (Indonesia), and this may also have been a contributory factor in the approach they adopted.

Neither Fully Assimilatory nor Integrative

The third theme encapsulates the accumulated acculturation of the postgraduates at the end of two semesters. The endpoint of the acculturation of the postgraduates has been viewed from two different perspectives – academic and social. An analysis of their adaptation processes suggests different acculturation patterns in the students' adjustments in these two spheres of activity.

With regard to academic matters, on the one hand, all the postgraduates appeared to adopt a uniformly gradual, linear assimilatory acculturation pattern. The linear assimilatory acculturation pattern created a melting-pot impact for them. Melting pot impact does not encourage manifestation of the features of the acculturating ethnic groups. As has been discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, in an assimilatory acculturation process, the visiting group (here the international students in the study) has less awareness of and commitment to holding their original cultural values, and they strive to adopt and meet the demand of the host culture without resistance. In addition, the visiting minority group are rather forced to accept, or there is a compulsion to accept the host culture. The postgraduates in their earlier academic pursuits in their home countries were accustomed to a kind of academic literacy different from that in Australia. Replacing their back-home experience of passive learning depending mostly on lecturers' transmitted knowledge, being assessed by examinations that required reproduction of memorized answers and assignments that reproduced the lecturers' materials often without acknowledging authorship of the sources of the knowledge, they had to engage themselves in analytical class activities, and being assessed through a combined process of class presentation, well researched and

referenced written assignments and examinations. As the postgraduates emerged in the Australian academic culture, they were required to accept the Australian academic norms and practices, and were compelled to relinquish any norms of their earlier academic culture, if these conflicted with those of the host culture. As postgraduates found the analytical class lectures and multifaceted assessment criteria to be philosophically convincing from a student learning perspective and widely preferred this approach, they were non-resistant as well as being driven by undeniable requirements. This resulted in their acceptance of Australian academic practices and ultimate assimilation, though with differences in how well they appeared to have fulfilled the requirements of the Australian academic context, and some differences also in the extent to which their attitudes to the Australian requirements had changed to match their changed behaviours.

In contrast, in social acculturation, the postgraduates adopted a range of different approaches. The students used their individual agencies in making decision as to the extent and nature of their desired integration. All of the postgraduates, except Anil, appeared to be integrative to some extent, although with varying levels of acceptance of the host culture. While nine of the postgraduates reported following a broadly integrative approach to social acculturation by adopting the host culture and simultaneously holding values of their original cultural traits, five among them, Azabul, Dina, Niranjana, Qursat and Shafī, were more selective than the other four, Suzan, Arnold, Mita, Zinat, in accepting the Australian culture. The lifestyles (e.g. dress, food habits) and social relations (e.g. relationships with teachers, interactions with opposite-sex fellow students) of the more selective ones were still dominated by their original cultural norms. In contrast, the tenth postgraduate (Anil) tended to be an assimilator in social acculturation. The variation in the approaches to and the levels of success in social acculturation of the students might have some link with their individual personal traits, what Judge et al. (1999, p. 623), Soldz and Vaillant (1999, p.209) and Ward et al. (2004, p. 138) have referred to as “Big Five” personality factors: neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness. However, the research approach adopted in this study does not enable psychological analysis of personality in relation to acculturation.

Similar but Different

Exploring the adaptation experiences of the South Asian postgraduate coursework students at Southern University has allowed me to highlight a fourth theme: trends and differences in their academic and social adjustment. While some of the observed phenomena are consistent with the findings of earlier studies, others are unique to them. For example, in agreement with some earlier research (Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997; Kiley 2003; Mulligan & Kirkpatrick 2000; Wu et al. 2001), the study has highlighted how this group of South Asian international students experienced, though to different degrees, difficulties in coping with their academic needs in Australia due to their limited English. While two of the ten participating students (e.g. Anil and Arnold) reported not experiencing any language related problems, we had no evidence of whether their native English speaking lecturers and classmates viewed their L2 English in a way that was concordant with their perceptions. The other eight postgraduates all reported difficulties in managing class lectures and other academic genres (e.g. presentations and assignments) that they linked to their limited English.

Another area of agreement of the findings of this study with earlier studies related to the impacts of cultural difference on the conceptualization of knowledge and learning approaches. The cultural attitudes to knowledge and teaching-learning strategies of international students that Ballard and Clanchy (1997) have highlighted have been reflected in the approaches to learning taken by this group of postgraduates. Agreeing with Ballard and Clanchy (1997) and Volet's (1999) study about CHC background students, six of the participating ten postgraduates, influenced by their home countries' academic orientation, reported initial difficulties in coping with the Australian broad-spectrum analytical approach to learning. Some of the postgraduates – particularly from social science courses (Suzan and Zinat) and the engineering project management course (Azabul) – initially encountered greater challenges resulting from the analytical approach of lectures that drew upon a wide range of issues including Australia-specific knowledge, in comparison with the postgraduates from courses like business, engineering, exercise rehabilitation and hotel management, which those students

found to have more or less uniform themes and content globally. For example, Anil commented: “Hospitality, silver service, what is hospitality – it’s universal ... nothing is different”. However, they all were able to learn to manage the academic differences they experienced. Notably though as a result of the new learning demands being made on them, the postgraduates from the social sciences and engineering project management courses changed their learning styles the most as they learnt to adopt what they perceived to be the more analytical approaches being demanded of them. In contrast, the postgraduates from the accounting, exercise and engineering courses, who perceived greater similarities with their previous learning approaches were more likely to cling to or remain oriented to numerical and formula based approaches.

The postgraduates’ academic adjustment process did not align in certain respects with some earlier studies. Unlike MacKinnon and Manathunga’s (2003) observation that international students are disadvantaged if the assessment process follows the dominant culture of literacy, none of the postgraduates reported any negative impacts on them due to different assessment criteria; rather they expressed their satisfaction over the grades they had achieved through the Australian assessment process and some expressed also satisfaction with what they perceived to be a more transparent approach to explaining and marking to criteria on the part of their Australian lecturers. While one of the postgraduates, Dina, initially expressed dissatisfaction with the proportion of weighting of assignments, examinations and class presentation, and some others, Mita, Anil, Arnold, Niranjana and Shafi, had felt temporary excitement in closed-book examinations in the first semester. Their excitement was basically stemmed from the understanding that open-book examination would relieve them from strenuous crammed learning required for closed-book examination that they experienced back home. Their misconception about open book examination was, however, cleared later. All the postgraduates ultimately accepted well the Australian assessment criteria and approach to assessment.

Townsend and Lee’s (2004) findings in relation to the acculturation process are partially relevant to my study. They observed that international students follow a U-curve acculturation process, which includes a crisis period, and that the crisis

period lasts for the first two semesters. All the postgraduates of this study, in conformity with Townsend and Lee's (2004) findings, experienced crisis periods in their adjustment to Southern University, but there was a lot of variation in the length of the students' crisis periods and no evidence of a uniform length of crisis period as claimed by Townsend and Lee (2004). With the exception of Anil, Shafi and Qursat, the remaining seven postgraduates reported almost uniform euphoric phase and similar starting point of recovery from the crisis period at the end of their first semester. In the light of Anil's belated reflection on his crisis period, it was difficult to ascertain how long his euphoric state lasted, and when his crisis period started. For Shafi and Qursat, their crisis periods were lengthy and lasted far beyond their first two semesters.

Discovering a New Sense of Self

The fifth theme underlines how the postgraduates made sense of their new identities after being involved in postgraduate studies, and getting acculturated to Australian culture.

Reconstructed Identity

The phenomenon of students' changing identities is also supported by the insights from my research. What Chapman and Pyvis (2005), Kashima and Loh (2006), Norton (1997, 2000) and Orletti (2001) have reiterated about identity being remoulded and reconstructed over time and space has been endorsed in this study. With the attachment to SU – both physically and academically – and their social engagement in this western country, the postgraduates continued constructing incrementally more empowered personal identities, having initially felt personally diminished and compromised in their sense of self as a result of their new status as members of international student and South Asian minorities who are to some extent stigmatized in the broader Australian society. Eventually by securing permanent residence, and thus by creating a space for themselves in the dominant culture, six of the eight *system compliers* (except Zinat, who went back home, and Shafi, who moved to Germany) and one *initiator of self-development* (Mita) were

able to establish new multifaceted identities that suited their new lives in Australia. The other *initiator of self-development*, Suzan, and the remaining *system complier*, Zinat, also claimed to have constructed a new identity with their improved academic qualifications and enrichment due to exposure to the outer world, in general, and to a western university, in particular.

Neither Australian nor Anti-Australian but non-Australian

To answer the question how much the postgraduates had adjusted to the academic context and acculturated to the Australian social culture at the end of two semesters, it may be useful to set a parameter first of successful acculturation. Drawing on Ward (1996), Liebkind (2001) reiterates that a successful acculturation should be viewed in terms of “mental and physical health, psychological satisfaction, good self-esteem, competent work performance, and good grades” (p. 391). While Berry emphasizes the need and ability to cope with stress as an indicator of acculturation, Liebkind (2001) views successful acculturation more holistically as “an individual adjustment and adaptation to a new culture”(p. 391). In the light of these working definitions of successful acculturation, the answer to the question of the postgraduates’ acculturation level is that none of the postgraduates managed to be fully adjusted or socially acculturated. The study has observed that an expectation of full acculturation by the postgraduates in two semesters would sound as impractical as what Clifford Geertz has referred to in his famous statement that understanding other’s culture is “more like grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke... than it is like achieving communion” (Geertz 1993 [1983], p. 70). The endpoint of acculturation of the postgraduates after two semesters academically and socially reflected a hybrid state – a provocative concept often referred to as the ‘third space’ coined by Homi Bhabha (1994) initially to mean the abstraction of culture and fluidity of identity in post-modern and post-colonial contexts. The accumulated academic adjustment of the postgraduates in question over a period of two semesters indicated significant realignment to Australian culture, but with ongoing fluidity and change still occurring.

In relation to feeling a sense of belonging to the broader university community, the study has found points of intersection with some earlier studies. In line with Dao et al. (2007), Li and Gasser (2005) and Leder and Forgasz (2004), this study has observed that the postgraduates experienced a lack of opportunities to integrate with local native Australian students. This slowed down their acculturation to the mainstream culture, as well as contributing to them not feeling as if they truly belonged to the broader university community. Kashima and Loh (2006, P.472), referring to Furnham & Bochner (1986)'s three types of social ties of international students – mono-culture network (close relationship with co-nationals), bicultural network (with lecturers and local students) and multicultural network (with other international student different from his/her own) – have argued that the greater the social ties, the wider the acculturation. Having little access to mixing with local students and the broader society, the postgraduates in this study reported their primary dependence on co-cultural and multicultural networks. The route of social acculturation that these postgraduates followed due to limited entrée to the target culture can be analogous to Geertz's (1993 [1983], p. 6) metaphor of "making detours and going by sideroads". The postgraduates could see the "highways" to the destination of the target culture, and even assuming that they were aspiring to move along these, they were unable to access the highways because they were closed to them, and the only option available to them was using the "sideroads", which for obvious reasons meant that it would take longer than otherwise for them to reach their desired level and state of acculturation. At the end of the two semesters, adapting Bhabha's (1994, p. 251) words, the postgraduates appeared to be neither Australian nor anti-Australian, but still non-Australian.

Spoken Communication

The final theme that was apparent concerned how the postgraduates coped with spoken communication. Initially, most of the postgraduates experienced difficulties in spoken communication that resulted from not being familiar with and used to the Australian variety of English with its distinct accents and specific connotations for certain vocabulary. In line with Leder and Forgasz's (2004)

findings, the spoken communication of some of the postgraduates was also impeded by an additional phase of thought processing in their L1 first and then in the target language – English. Students from multilingual societies like India, where English is one of the major lingua franca, reported less difficulties in spoken communication, whereas the postgraduates from relatively monolingual societies, like Bangladesh and Pakistan, where nowadays English functions more as a foreign language than as a second language, experienced a greater amount of difficulties. Most of the students felt awkward and endured shame and a diminished identity at times of miscommunication. The most common strategies adopted by them were repetition, paraphrasing and avoidance. The spoken texts produced by the participating postgraduates by the end of their first two semesters continued to manifest a unique interlanguage marked by the mixing of elements of the Australian variety of English and their home varieties.

Recommendations

The collective voice of the international students that has been echoed by the postgraduates reveals that the space that the international students deserve in this Australian university by virtue of their significant representation in the student body to some extent has been denied to them. The study suggests that, as a policy of the University, such ‘space’ linked to the identities of the international students, including these South Asian students, needs to be acknowledged and allocated. International students should not be subject to any imposed diminished identity and have the right to feel fully included in the academic and social life of the university.

The findings of this study should encourage Australian universities to focus more vociferously on the concerns of their South Asian students. Although some of the issues of international students are culture specific, most of Southern University’s, and indeed other Australian universities’, attempts to facilitate international students’ adaptation processes are on an ad-hoc basis. Better understanding of these educational consumers would certainly help universities to design and implement more effective academic programs as well as support services for this

group of students, both through enhanced management and leadership and in on the ground academic teaching programs.

A number of the postgraduates voiced their concern about the quality of the courses they were attending at SU. While it is true that any single course may not satisfy different cohorts of students with diverse background and needs, students who had completed directly related undergraduate studies often felt that their postgraduate experience was repetitive rather than building on prior knowledge. In some cases this may have been because of a misperception of what was required, in other cases, it reflects that the course/s the students were in were actually specifically designed to reproduce at postgraduate level the sort of learning that can take place also in an undergraduate degree (e.g. professional accounting). More flexibility in postgraduate coursework structures and resetting prerequisites might partially address these perceptions.

As a managerial initiative, the pre-arrival briefing module and post-arrival student support service module may be upgraded. A few of the postgraduates who attended the pre-departure briefing found some relevance on arrival, and suggested the briefing should be more comprehensive than what they attended to. The pre-arrival briefing module, which may be administered by IDP Australia, Australian diplomatic missions overseas, or any other competent authority, should have two components: general socio-cultural and academic, and should include comprehensive information about academic and social cultures, visa requirements, transport and housing systems, basic safety measures, and tips for surviving in an adverse climatic conditions. In the academic module of the pre-arrival briefing, there should be focus on the standard academic practices, lecturers' expectations from the students and assessment criteria that are common in the Australian context. While this pre departure briefing can be quite intensive, the participation in it should be made compulsory for all incoming students. The academic aspects can further be reinforced in the post arrival introductory academic programs.

On their arrival international students are in a particularly vulnerable state and generally experience a critical period. Their first contact is with university administrative staff for enrolment and other initial formalities, so the

administrative staff members have a great role to play in making them feel at home. This study has observed that many of the participating postgraduates' initial experiences with the administrative staff at Southern University were rather uncomfortable. The reported seclusion and exclusion of international students (e.g. Azabul, Dina, Shafi, Qursat, Suzan, Zinat, and Nirmal) were linked, at least partially, to their perceptions of racism that was inflicted on them by some staff members as well as by local students.

Against this backdrop, staff members need better training in how to deal with international students more professionally. The staff members need to develop a sense of appreciation of cultural differences – rather than considering international students in terms of the otherness of their cultures. Better levels of intercultural sensitivity are expected to prevent ethnocentric misinterpretations of behaviours and also to improve intercultural communicative competence. Furthermore, administrative staff members, who deal with international students would benefit from some specific intercultural communication training. After training they should be monitored as to how effectively they are making use of such training.

The post-arrival introductory academic programs offered by SU should be reconstructed to provide comprehensive understanding of academic norms, including how the students are expected to perform in different academic activities, and in relation to different assessment criteria, and referencing requirements. The introductory academic program should also have a strong focus on the Australian variety of English.

As learning is a continuous process, the process of reinforcement of academic training should continue - beyond introductory programs – into the mainstream teaching. Detailing such students' academic quality enhancing initiatives, Ladd and Ruby (1999) have suggested that at the beginning of the semester, the instructor should meet after class with the international students specifically to discuss methods of teaching, expectations, class rules, and so forth, as well as the students' concerns about the system. Such after class debriefing also provides an opportunity to practice pronouncing the students' names and to overcome language barriers. Because many international students are dependent on their

instructors, the brief time at the beginning of the semester will go a long way to promoting their understanding of classes and the system as a whole.

Lecturers can also play an important role in assisting international students' integration into mainstream culture. This study has documented how international students sometimes have been made to feel alienated not only by the SU staff members, but also by their fellow local classmates. Similar findings are common in other studies. For example, Ahmad (2006, p. 5) reports that while Indian students in Australia 'expect friendly classmates with the "same level of calibre as themselves"', they do expect a few "snobbish, unfriendly and racist students". Bondi et al. (2003), recognizing the fact that white students' attitudes to students of colour, though in the US context, are racial, suggest "university administrators develop proactive strategies targeted to an individual's psychological understanding of racism issues and prejudice" (p. 80). Lecturers may initiate some integrative measures such as formation of study groups with both local and international students.

If the influx of overseas students is desired to give a true sense of internationalisation, opportunities should be created for more interaction between international students and local students as well as local communities. The staff members also need to show a higher degree of cultural tolerance and accommodate greater cultural diversity. Otherwise, the present trend may end up with commercialisation only rather than internationalisation, which aims at "enhancing all students' understanding and appreciation of the richness of other culture" (Volet & Ang 1998, pp. 20-1), and "promoting goodwill and understanding among nations" (Kalantsiz & Cope 2000, p. 127). Each and every international student is an encyclopaedia of culture. The University should take initiatives to establish a mechanism within its academic setting so that the 'cultural encyclopaedia' (Roebuck 2008) that international students bring with them can be well utilized.

For more effective teaching, recognising the diversity of the international students' academic cultures and the level of preparedness they come with, some kind of adjustment in teaching can be considered. Biggs' (1996) 'constructive

alignment' (discussed in Chapter 2) is a useful concept to consider here. Mere imposition of requirements on the students may not be the only way to solve the problems that the students themselves and their lecturers are experiencing.

The university through its central support areas, and schools and faculties should consider how it can increase students' access to extra-collegial activities and enhance their capacity for engagement in the broader intellectual and social life of the university. To enable this it is also important to circulate information about university clubs and events well, so that students can know what is going on and can make a choice to join any they feel interested in, and thus can enrich their intellectual repertoire beyond mainstream academic areas.

Limitations in This Research

In its exploration, this study was mainly focussed on the academic adjustment process of the students, despite academic adjustment and social acculturation occurring side by side and being complementary to each other. The main question areas focussed on academic related adjustment, so the social aspects of acculturation could not be accounted for as comprehensively as required to fully make a sense of their impact on academic adjustment. Whatever clues were available, came as a by product of the academic adjustment questions. As a result, the drawing out of a fully composite adjustment process could not be achieved, and this is worthy of further research.

In addition, another resulting endpoint outcome with all the respondents, except the two who were restricted by their scholarship regulations and the one who left for another country, was acquisition of permanent residence in Australia. While collecting data through interviews, this study did not reveal as many insights as had been hoped for about permanent residence issues. Any available information about the postgraduates' permanent residence was shared by them in social interactions after the data collection period. So future studies should include some focus on social adjustment encompassing some mechanism to extract information

about to what extent students' expectations are influenced by their goals to obtain permanent residence in Australia.

There were some methodological constraints that impacted on the study. First, the smooth conduct of the data collection was hindered due to the delayed final approval from the University's Ethic Approval Committee, which caused failure to recruit necessary number of postgraduates for the study in one single semester. This resulted in dealing with two sets of participants. Intended recruitment of more Indian postgraduates, who constitute the largest proportion of the South Asian student cohort, was partially jeopardized by the socio-political tension that existed between India and the researcher's country of origin.

Besides this, most of the participating postgraduates were reluctant to make time either before or after their classes for interviews with the plea of needing to go to their part time jobs. As a result, intended interviews were rescheduled many times and the initially proposed gaps between interviews could not be maintained.

Future Directions for Researching International Student Experience

Whilst this study has made a start in uncovering aspects of the trajectories and lived experiences of a range of postgraduate coursework students from South Asia studying at university in Australia, there is still more to understand about this cohort of students.

The research in this study has focussed entirely on understanding ways of becoming from the perspective of the students themselves. It was possible only to infer from the students' narratives certain aspects of how their performance was viewed by their lecturers. A valuable area for further investigation would be to explore and triangulate lecturers' perspectives on the students' academic adjustment trajectories and outcomes with those of their students.

While the study could identify that many of the postgraduates' academic adjustments were mechanical and not driven by perceptual and attitudinal motivations. The data available for this study was not sufficient to enable exploration of what stopped them from being perceptually and attitudinally convinced towards accepting Australian academic norms. Future study may focus on this area.

Another noticeable finding of the study was that 80% of the postgraduates were what I have referred to as *system compliers*. With the given data, the study could only identify the non-academic expectation of the postgraduates, such as their goal to obtain permanent residence, and the partial influence of their background cultural values and practices as contributing factors to such a tendency. Because of such a high incidence of a system complying approach, this aspect deserves further exploration.

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Appendix A: Summary of Recruitment of Respondents and Interview Timetable

Summary of Recruitment of Respondents and Interview Timetable

Name	Date of Recruitment	1 st Interview	2 nd Interview	3 rd interview	4 th Interview	Focus Group 1	Focus Group2
Dina	38-8-04	14-9-04	21-10-04	29-3-05	22-6-05		
Arnold	22-8-04	12-9-04	28-3-05	24-6-05	30-8-05	28-8-05	20-12-05
Azabul	30-8-04	17-9-04	4-2-05	29-6-05			
Qursat	21-3-05	28-3-05	22-6-05	22-9-05	9-12-05		
Zinat	15-3-05	17-3-05	23-6-05	1-1-06	4-1-06		
Mita	1-4-05	5-4-05	10-9-05	16-1-06			
Shafi	20-3-05	21-3-05	30-6-05	7-9-05	17-12-05	19-9-05	
Anil	20-3-05	25-3-05	12-9-05	19-1-06			
Suzan	18-3-05	18-3-05	27-6-05	30-12-05			
Niranjan	24-3-05	24-3-05	21-6-05	10-1-06			

Appendix B: Sample Copies of Participant Information Sheet and Background Questionnaire

Invitation to Participate in Research

I would like to invite you to be a part of the study titled ***Non-native Speakers' adjustment to Academic Culture: How South Asian Students cope with linguistic and cultural stress in a new postgraduate environment.*** This project is a part of Ph.D. course in the School of Communication, Culture and Languages, Victoria University.

The aims of the study are to explore South Asian postgraduate coursework students' experiences in adapting themselves to the Australian academic culture, with a particular focus on their experience in adapting to the spoken language genres relevant to formal and informal academic contexts. The study is expected to provide a better theoretical understanding of South Asian postgraduate students' experience of acculturation to Australian university, and in turn, will create a basis for developing more effective strategies for assisting students in adjusting to a new academic environment.

In order to get a better picture of adaptation experiences of South Asian students to Australian university, I am seeking participants who will consent to meet with me regularly over their first two semesters of study at Victoria University in private setting at a time mutually agreed to be interviewed about their experiences (no more than 8 meetings in total). Participants will also be invited to attend two focus group discussions with a small number of other South Asian students.

Although the information that participants provide in the interviews and focus groups will be recorded for purposes of the analysis, the identities of all participants will be kept entirely confidential. Your lecturers will not know of your participation in the study and when the material is written up for publication in the thesis and other research forums no identifying information will be provided and pseudonyms will be used. Only the main researcher, Waliul ISLAM and his supervisor, Associate Professor Helen BORLAND, will be aware of your name.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. You also have the right not to answer any questions you may prefer not to answer.

If you agree to be a part of this study you will be required :

- i) to be available for to be interviewed (45-60 mins. Max.) at a mutually agreed place/time each month for two semesters (total not exceeding 8 sessions) .**
- ii) to attend a maximum two focus group sessions (one each semester) of approximately 1.5 hours duration.**

The interviews and group discussions will cover topics such as:

- Your impressions about how studying in Australia is different from studying in your own country
- Experiences of misunderstanding and/or miscommunication and how you have dealt with these
- Experiences of understanding your lecturers and tutors in class (e.g. accent, words they use)
- Experiences of communicating with your fellow students (e.g. can you understand them? How well do they understand you)
- How you have overcome difficulties you have faced in adjusting to studying in Australia

Participating in this project will give you the opportunity to regularly reflect on and discuss with a sympathetic person of South Asian background your experiences of adjusting to academic life and study in Australia. This will take place in a confidential setting.

Any queries about your participation in this research project may be directed to **Dr. Helen Borland, Head of the Dept. of the School of Communication, Culture and Languages, Victoria University, at phone # (03) 9688-4444**. If you have any queries or complain about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Secretary, Human Research Ethic Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box: 14428, MCMC Melbourne (the street address is: 6 Geelong Road, Footscray, Vic.3011).

Thanking you for your attention.

Yours truly

AKM Waliul Islam

Adjusting to Australian Postgraduate Studies

Background Information

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study of South Asian students' adjustment to Australian Postgraduate Coursework Studies. We would appreciate your cooperation in giving some background information about yourself.

Name/ Identification Code:Date _____ Tape #: _____

Part 1: Previous Educational History

Country of SECONDARY (Grades 6-10) Education: _____

What secondary qualification did you complete: _____

What was/ were the main medium(s) of instruction: _____

If more than one, how much time a week/ what proportion
of weekly teaching time was used for each medium of instruction
: _____

How many years did you get formal lessons on
English at secondary level? : _____

Did you take part in any extra-curricular activities that
involved use of English : _____

Which of the following best describes how you perceive yourself
in terms of academic achievement as a student in your country.

(Please circle one) Outstanding Excellent Good Average Poor

Student ID Code _____ Date _____ Tape #: _____

Country of HIGHER SECONDARY (Grades 11 &12) Education

: _____

What higher secondary qualification did you complete

: _____

What was/ were the main medium(s) of instruction

: _____

If more than one, how much time a week/ what proportion of weekly teaching time was used for each : medium of instruction:

For how many years did you get formal lessons on English at Higher Secondary level

: _____

What was the frequency and duration of such English classes?

: _____

Did you take part in any extra-curricular activities that involved use of English?

: _____

If yes, what were those activities:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Describe how effectively you felt you were able to communicate in English when you were in higher secondary?

: _____

Subject ID Code _____ Date _____ Tape #: _____

How many TERTIARY qualifications have you completed? (Please list with completion date.)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Completion date</u>
a)	_____	_____
b)	_____	_____
c)	_____	_____

What was/ were the main medium(s) of instruction:

If more than one, how much time a week/ what proportion of weekly teaching time was used for each medium if instruction. _____

For how many years did you get formal lessons on English during your degree studies: _____

What was the frequency and duration of such English classes: _____

Did you take part in any extra-curricular activities that involved use of English: _____

If yes, what were those activities:

a) _____
b) _____
c) _____

Appendix C: Information about English Proficiency

Adjusting to Australian Postgraduate Studies

Part: II Information about English Proficiency

Name/ Identification Code: Date _____

Tape #: _____

How many times did you take IELTS test?

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

What was your band score? Speaking Listening Reading Writing Overall

	MM/	YY						
1 st time (date)	_____	/	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 nd time (date)	_____	/	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 rd time (date)	_____	/	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you attended any IELTS Preparatory Course before taking IELTS test?

:Yes No

If yes, how long was that course?

Where did you attend IELTS preparatory course? _____

Were your (IELTS preparatory course)

instructors native speakers of English? : _____

If not, Who were they (Please tell us something you know _____

about their professional aspects) _____

What was mainly taught in such IELTS preparatory course? (grammar, listening, speaking, reading or writing?) : _____

Was your IELTS preparatory course based on individual skill-modules or four integrated skills : _____

Were you taught English grammar during the course?: _____

Did your IELTS preparatory course include any lessons on

socio-cultural issues of Australia or other English speaking countries? : _____

How useful did you find the course? : _____

As you had repeated the Test, how would you explain your improvement? (What strategies did you adopt that led to the improvement of your scores?)
: _____

What were your IELTS scores prior to acceptance in Australian university?

Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing	Overall
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

How confident are you with your present English proficiency level to meet the academic requirements in Australia ?
: _____

If you are not confident, how do you plan to over come such language problems? :

Appendix E: Sample Interview Schedule

Adjusting to Australian Postgraduate Studies

Interview Schedule

Part: IV Academic Adjustment Experience

Name/ Identification Code: Date _____ Tape # : _____

What subjects are you studying?

Can you tell a bit about what subjects you are doing and what you are learning in each subject?

a)

b)

c)

- Impressions about how studying in Australia is different from that in your own country.

i) What was your expectation / pre understanding of studying in an Australian university?

ii) What was your expectation / pre understanding of Australian lecturers?

iii) What did you think the Australian classroom would be like?

iv) From your experience to date how does your actual experience relate to your expectation?

- v) Have you been surprised/ shocked / overwhelmed to see the reality?

- vi) Is there anything that you expected to be here but now see missing?

- From your experience what similarities have you found between aspects your studies in your home country and those in Australia in terms of:
 - Course structure and presentation

 - Student participation

Mode of teaching

Teacher - student relation

Assignment

Assignments

Anything else?

- What are some of the differences that you notice between your studies in Australia and in your home country, particularly, in terms of?
 - i) Course structure and presentation
 - ii) Student participation
 - iii) Mode of teaching
 - iv) Teacher - student relation
 - v) Assignment
 - vi) Assignments
 - vii) Anything else?

- Student's understanding of what is expected of them by their lecturers and tutors.

How well are you aware of academic requirements that you are expected to meet?

- i) What do you think is expected of you as a student in the following contexts in your classes here? (Can you explain what you think your lecturers expect from you when you are in:)
- a) lecture session?
 - b) tutorial class?
 - c) laboratory / workshop?
- ii) If you don't understand something that has to be dealt with in the class what do you think you should do?
- in Australia
 - and back home

Have you done this? Yes

Why?

No

Why not?

Acknowledging Authorship:

- i) How different are the requirements regarding assignments in Australian university from those in your home country?
- ii) What is your understanding about plagiarism?
(Has your understanding about plagiarism changed during the last two semesters at Aus. univ)?
- iii) Can you explain how the norms and styles of referencing (both in-text referencing and end-note bibliography) in Australia and your home country are similar or different?
- iv) How demanding do you find referencing requirements

in Australian university

- v) If your previous understanding of referencing requirements is too different from that of Australian university, how are you going to fulfill those requirements?
- Experiences of misunderstanding and/or miscommunication and how the student has dealt with these.

How often do you communicate with your Australian classmates?

- How comprehensive are those communication (detailed or limited)?
 - Why do you think so?
 - Have you ever been misunderstood / experienced miscommunication when communicating with native English speaking fellow classmates?
 - If yes, please describe some of your experiences.
 - Why do you think you were misunderstood?
 - (Did they fail to understand your words, accent and speech style?)
 - What led to misunderstanding?
 - (Did they ask you to repeat? Words/ speech style etc)
 - How did you feel when this happened?
 - How did you manage to overcome such miscommunication?
- Could you take part successfully in class activities with classmates, or ask tutors for clarification?
 - What sort of class activities are you required to participate in?
 - How effective was your participation/ negotiation in such activities?
 - Please tell us something about your experience in the laboratory.
Please tell us something about your lab presentation.
 - How successfully could you explain/ demonstrate your experiments to the fellow researchers and tutors in the lab?
(response may be dug deeper using some relevant prompts)
(Do/ Did you have to repeat and rephrase your statements/questions to make them comprehensible to the other party?)
 - How do/ did you feel when people asked you to repeat?
 - How did/do you manage in such difficult situations

- Experiences of understanding lecturers and tutors in class (e.g. accent, words, methodologies they use.)
 - To what extent do you enjoy lecture and tutorial classes?
 - Do you think lecturers and tutors here follow any special/ different approaches?
 - Did you face any difficulty in understanding your lecturers / tutors?
 - If yes, what was the nature of such difficulties?
Please give some examples, if possible.
 - If you had difficulties in understanding your lecture/ tutor how did you finally manage your note-taking/ understanding?

- Do you find Australian postgraduate academic system, environment, and requirements different to your experience of that of your home country?
 - Please describe some areas of differences and similarities between the two academic environments?
 - Have you ever been surprised/ shocked to see any differences between the two situations?
 - How well did you fulfil the academic requirements of this university?
 - How do you find your postgraduate studies here?
 - How challenging do you find it?)
 - What strategies do you adopt to adjust yourself in this new academic environment?

- Experiences of understanding other people around the University who are providing support services and other assistance.
 - How often do you visit to university's support services like bookshop, Student Resource Center, Fitness Center, and international office?
 - How effective was your negotiation in those places?
 - Did they understand you well?
 - Did you have to repeat or paraphrase what you intended to say?
 - How did you feel when they had not understood you well first time?

- Please tell us something about your experience in the library.

(utilizing the system, negotiating with the staff)

- Please tell us about your negotiation at:

i) the international branch.

ii) Student Counselling:

a) Academic (CEDS)

b) Non-academic

(Student service,

Recreation centre,

Student career dev)

iii) Counter Services:

a) Bookshop

b) Student Administration

c) Cafeteria