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Perceptions and Experiences of Mexican Graduate Learners Studying in the U.S. :
A Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study

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Perceptions and Experiences of Mexican Graduate Learners Studying in the
U.S.: A Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study

By

María Rebeca Gutiérrez Estrada

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. degree in Education

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Abstract

The present study explores the language, cultural and social perceptions and experiences of eight Mexican instructors pursuing graduate degrees in the southwestern U.S. Identity and power relations in academia are also explored. The main research questions are: (1) How do Mexican, Spanish-speaking university instructors pursuing graduate degrees in English in the U. S. perceive their language, academic, social and cultural experiences? (2) How do they cope with the linguistic, social, and cultural demands of their new environment? (3) How do they perceive their identity (ies)? (4) In what ways does their relationship with their advisor, professors, peers, impact their life in academia and in the U.S.? The findings of this *basic interpretive qualitative study* revealed that the participants' identities as multiple, dynamic, diverse, and changing guided them in their adaptation to their new environment. Finally, the author highlights the need for the development of English for Academic Purposes curriculum.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 From My Story to the Stories of Others¹

The topic of this thesis originated from my personal experience as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mexico and as an international graduate student in Canada. I have worked at a public university in Mexico since 1995, teaching English to both the university community (students and instructors), and my hometown community (adult learners). In teaching EFL, I have encountered the misguided belief that if learners attain a certain degree of fluency and accuracy in English, they will then be able to succeed academically in an English-speaking country and at the same time be prepared for the social and cultural experiences they will encounter.

In September, 2002, I arrived in Canada to start a graduate program in education. Many years before, I had studied English as a Second Language (ESL) in the United States for a period of four years. Due to my EFL teaching background and my immersion in an English-speaking community, I naively believed that pursuing a graduate degree was going to be an easy task to accomplish. However, during my Masters program I have struggled academically, culturally, and socially and although I have had the help of many people, I began to wonder: How do other university instructors -who are not English teachers and who have never had an immersion experience- perceive their language, cultural, and social experiences while completing a graduate degree in an English-speaking country? What is the role of their identity (ies) in these experiences? How do these instructors perceive and experience issues of power circumscribed in the relationships established with professors, peers, and their advisor in the particular context of the U.S.? This research will examine how they cope with the demands of their new environment.

¹ The title of this heading was taken from Kanno (1996, p.18).

In the last twenty years, several granting agencies (see Appendix A for a brief description of three scholarships) in Mexico, along with the National Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública- SEP), have provided Mexican instructors with the opportunity to achieve academic growth and development by pursuing a graduate degree abroad. The goal of the Ministry of Education, as well as the other granting agencies, is that one day, the recipients of these scholarships will be able to: carry out research projects in their particular fields, publish articles in recognized scholarly journals, present at conferences, and accomplish other tasks academic faculty around the world are required and expected to perform. However, as recipients of such scholarships, these non-English speaking international students face many challenges in their path towards obtaining a graduate degree as well as in trying to accomplish these tasks.

1.2 The Problem

Previous research has shown that the language difficulties experienced by non-English speaking international students, pursuing graduate degrees in English-speaking countries, may partially stem from the traditional English curriculum which does not provide these students with the necessary tools required for graduate study abroad (Braine, 2002; Cotterall, 2000; McClure, 2001; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Swales, 1997). In the specific case of Mexican university instructors, who form the core of the present study, they have obtained their English training through EFL courses focusing mainly on general or Standard English. Indeed, there exist few programs in Mexico that prepare these instructors in academic English and fewer still which guide them through the multiple variables involved in living in another culture.

In light of this situation, the purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Mexican instructors currently completing their graduate degrees in the United States with respect to how well they were prepared for the language, cultural and social immersion they

are now facing. Issues of identity, more specifically, how identity and power relations interplay with the experience of living abroad and coping with the academic, social, and cultural demands of a new culture will also be explored. Although the outcome of this thesis will not translate directly into a specific English program for future instructors going abroad (English for Academic Purposes- EAP curriculum), the findings could inform instructional decisions in this area and also raise awareness of the importance of preparing future instructors in their path towards obtaining a graduate degree and becoming full members of their academic communities at home and around the world.

Many public universities in Latin America need to grow both in terms of their research output and academic fields. This growth crucially depends on the quantity and quality of publications produced by its faculty. Most universities in the world regard the publication of articles in major scientific journals, and in English, as an important avenue towards faculty development. English has become the major language of publication in the world of research and technology. According to Tardy (2004), in 1995, English made up over 95% of the publications in the *Science Citation Index* (p. 250). However, the number of non-native speakers of English is also growing; therefore, scholars who have learned English as a foreign language and remain in their native countries encounter great challenges in order to be recognized around the world. For Fairclough (2001), citing Bourdieu, this is an illustration of globalization as “a real but incomplete process which benefits some people and hurts others” (p. 207). And while it is true that globalization manifests itself in numerous inequities, countries like Mexico make an effort to provide opportunities for instructors to develop in their areas of expertise and ideally contribute to the country’s economic and scientific growth. These opportunities provide Mexican instructors with grants and/or scholarships in order to pursue graduate degrees abroad.

Several authors (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Gibbs, 1995; House, 2003; Pennycook, 1999; Swales, 1997; Swales, Barks, Ostermann, & Simpson, 2001; Tardy, 2004; Wood, 2001) have addressed the issue of English as the international language of science (EILS). They address this issue from different perspectives. The first perspective is a critical one (Gibbs, 1995; Pennycook, 1999; Swales, 1997), wherein the role of English as a colonial and hegemonic language is questioned and/or challenged. The second one is a more practical perspective (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; House, 2003; Wood, 2001), where the aim is to provide or create a curriculum that addresses the linguistic aspects of learning a language in an academic setting, as well as to identify the different kinds of discourses in the academic world. A third perspective (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Tardy, 2004; Swales *et al.*, 2001) addresses the cultural and social aspects as well as the complexities going beyond the experiences of academia in an English-speaking country. A final and fourth perspective addresses identity, language and power issues whether in the experiences of recently landed immigrants to the United States or Canada (Norton, 1997, 2000; Zou, 2002) or by nonnative speakers of English in academia (Alfred, 2003; Canagarajah, 2003; Miller, 2000; Morita, 2004; Thesen, 1997). The present study focuses on the last two perspectives.

1.3 Entering the Circle/Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Tardy (2004) believes that there are co-existing roles of English: one is that it is a necessary tool (e.g. for publication, for accessing information) and the other is the negative consequences that derive from it, mainly because research that is not published in English may be overlooked, "...important work situated in Third World countries is essentially becoming 'lost science'"(p. 251). For Tardy, international graduate students offer useful insights regarding EILS mainly because they are part of the *Inner Circle* while completing their graduate programs, and later, future professionals of the *Outer Circle* (when they return to

their countries). In the present study, the concept of *Inner Circle* scholar refers to academics (native speakers of English) based mostly in the United States, where a large percentage of publications are launched. Therefore, the concept of *Outer Circle* scholar refers to a nonnative speaker of English academic who does not reside in an English-speaking country (see Kachru, 1985 for more on English in the *Outer Circle*).

International graduate students will eventually participate actively in developing research, publishing articles, presenting at conferences. In a similar vein, Lave and Wenger (1991) use the term *legitimate peripheral participation* referring to the “process by which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation in a given community’s activities by interacting with more experienced community members” (Morita, 2004, p. 576). The ultimate goal many instructors in Outer Circle countries wish to attain one day is to be able not only to consume but also to produce knowledge and research in their fields. Wenger (1998) provides the following example:

Today, doctoral students have professors who give them entry into academic communities. Granting the newcomers legitimacy is important because they are likely to come short of what the community regards as competent engagement. Only with enough legitimacy can all their inevitable stumblings and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion (p. 101).

Entry to the academic communities is not a conflict or difficulty-free task; surrounding the entry are power relations that promote, deny, or delay international graduate students access to the academic Circle (either Inner or Outer). The theoretical contributions of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) have been adapted to research focusing on different academic

scenarios involving nonnative speakers of English as graduate students or scholars (Belcher, 1994; Canagarajah, 2003; Flowerdew, 2000; Morita, 2004).

1.4 The Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of eight Mexican university instructors completing their graduate programs in the United States (particularly in the southwest region). Listening to their stories and insights, those pertaining particularly to their language, cultural and social experiences as well as issues of identity and power relations connected to their life as international graduate students in the United States represent the focus of this research project. This study will shed some light on two major areas. First and at the macro level, institutions in Mexico -particularly the Ministry of Education- have invested and will continue to invest money in those university instructors who obtain graduate degrees abroad; therefore, the success or failure of these instructors in their graduate programs will have a direct financial impact on these institutions. Second, the traditional English curriculum -which is part of most language institutes across Mexico- does not prepare instructors and/or students well enough to succeed academically in an English-speaking environment and to access equal opportunities to develop and produce knowledge and research. By opening a small window into the participants' experiences, I wish to question and thus influence the existing traditional EFL curriculum in order to provide future instructors with the necessary tools for obtaining a graduate degree in an English-speaking country.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) How do Mexican, Spanish-speaking university instructors pursuing graduate degrees in English in the United States perceive their language, academic, social and cultural experiences?

- 2) How do they cope with the language, social, and cultural demands of their new environment?
- 3) How do they perceive their identity (ies)?
- 4) In what ways does their relationship with their advisor, professors, peers, impact their life in academia and in the United States?

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on eight university instructors completing their graduate degrees in the United States. The reasons for choosing university instructors completing a graduate program in some southwestern states of the U.S. were mainly that: I, as the researcher, had access to traveling and carrying out the interviews at the participants' locations (Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas) and the other reason was the connection seven of the participants maintain with our Mexican host university and hometown. The participants and I have jobs and families in a northwestern city in Mexico. Therefore, I was able to interview some of the participants in our hometown.

As was previously mentioned, the perceptions and experiences of these Mexican graduate students are explored with particular regard to: (1) the nature of their identity (ies) connected to their membership in a particular ethnic (Mexican) group, academic group, and to the experience of living in another country; (2) the power relations, structured in the form of their interaction with professors, thesis supervisor, peers and colleagues (both native and nonnative speakers of English) and how these relationships have influenced their study experience; finally, (3) their language, cultural, and social experiences during their graduate studies. A more detailed account of the participants, procedures, and methodology will be presented in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter will present the literature review and theoretical framework constituting the backbone of the present study. The way in which international students cope with the social, cultural, and academic demands of their new world is through the formation of multiple identities, at times in negotiation with their beliefs.

Identity is viewed as a flowing, dynamic concept which encompasses a flexibility or negotiation on the part of the individual to adapt to a new context (Ivanič, 1998; Norton, 2000; Zou, 2002). Within this conception of identity, ethnic identity, accent, dialect, and power relations are intertwined. “Language is not just a neutral form of communication, but a practice that is socially constructed in the hegemonic events, activities and processes that constitute daily life – the practices that are considered normal by the dominant society” (Norton, 2000, p. 130). The above-mentioned authors’ contributions to the research on language, identity, and the cultural and social aspects of immigrants or international students in a new culture, suggest that these individuals should be given the tools to engage in acknowledging and challenging the power structures in their new environment.

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical framework adopted for focusing on the participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding the language, cultural and social aspects of their immersion experience as international graduate students in the United States. Symbolic interactionism complements the notions of identity underlying this thesis, and will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. For each of these sections, the contributions of other important voices doing research in these areas are included.

2.1 Identity (ies)

The notion and definitions of identity underlying this study fall into the stream of critical approaches, poststructuralism, and sociocultural theory. The authors presented have

been influenced by the works of Mikhail Bakhtin, Pierre Bourdieu, Norman Fairclough, Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, among many others who are all at the same time circumscribed by at least one of the paradigms mentioned above. Their concepts of identity and power have been transformed by these theorists and therefore provide a rich mosaic of concepts. The main authors used to frame this study are: Bonny Norton (1997, 2000); Roz Ivanič (1998); and Yali Zou (2002). This section on identity also covers issues related to ethnic identity (e.g. those regarding accent and dialect both in English and Spanish) and power relations in the shape of international students' interactions with others (peers, professors, and thesis supervisor) in their new context.

Norton (2000) describes identity as a way “to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed over time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). Within poststructuralist theory, she goes on to say that the individual is represented as non-unitary, “diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space” (p. 125). The author recognizes the inability among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theorists to develop:

...a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context...they [SLA theorists] have not questioned how relations of power in the social world impact on social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers (p. 4).

Although most of the literature on identity which was reviewed for this study deals with immigrants and adult learners who will remain in Canada, England, or the United States, the conceptualizations presented by Norton, Ivanič, and Zou are applicable to international graduate students for mainly two reasons.

The first reason deals with power, prestige, and the symbolic capital that in the case of Norton's (2000) participants was evident regarding their previous status as professionals in their homelands and the struggle for recognition once they became part of 'mainstream' Canada. In the case of the participants in this study, they struggle for recognition in an academic world different from their own and hope to become, as Tardy (2004) explains, researchers of the Inner Circle. They struggle to become 'legitimate speakers' (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000). The second reason deals with the definitions of identity provided by the different authors who view identity as multiple, dynamic, (re)negotiable, contradictory, and changing over historical time and social space (Ivanič, 1998; Marx, 2002; Norton, 1997, 2000; Schechter & Bayley, 1997; Zou, 2002). As described by Norton (1997) in her longitudinal study with five immigrant women in Canada, identity and these women's experiences as second language learners and newcomers to Canada fell into three major themes. (Social) identity was multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time. The author believes that:

...every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are...engaged in identity construction and negotiation (p. 410).

In her research pertaining to adult learners entering the academic university setting and their experiences with regards to identity in academic writing, Roz Ivanič (1998) refers to herself as "a writer with a multiple social identity, tracing between competing ideologies and their associated discourses" (p. 1). Ivanič's research proves to be a crucial example in this study because it shows the interconnectedness and harmony among the different paradigms (sociocultural theory, postmodernism, poststructuralism, interactionism), disciplines

(linguistics, psychology, sociology) and reinforces the multiplicity and richness of diverse perspectives which focus on language, identity, and power.

Ivanič's work is also relevant to this study for the following reasons. First, the present study looks at language experiences with respect to the participants' perceptions of various abilities (writing, listening, speaking, reading, grammaring). Writing is a particularly important ability since as international graduate students, the participants in this study are required to comply with tasks such as writing papers, thesis proposals, and their theses. Second, the notion of 'crucial moments of discourse'² is of particular note. These moments refer to the social risks and disadvantages arising during communication that participants may experience due to the inequities of the academic context in which they are immersed (Ivanič, 1998). A third element, fundamental to this study, is the notion of identity that Ivanič (1998) sustains, which complements the concepts of identity held by Norton (2000), Schecter, & Bayley (1997), and Zou (2002). Ivanič (1998), supported by Marx (2002) and Wenger (1998), sees identity as socially constructed, possessing "a sense of multiplicity, hybridity and fluidity...plurality, complexity" (p. 10-11). She goes on to say that the word identities "...captures the idea of people identifying simultaneously with a variety of social groups...they [identities] are sometimes contradictory, sometimes interrelated: people's diverse identities constitute the richness and the dilemmas of their sense of self" (p. 11).

Zou (2002), in her article, *Multiple identities of a Chinese immigrant: A story of adaptation and empowerment*, provides a compelling tour of her experience as a Chinese immigrant researcher in the United States and her previous life in China. She states that in the past, psychology referred exclusively to the notion of self-identity "as a rigid and permanent state incompatible with alternative identities" (p. 254). She views multiple identities as "a

² Candlin (as cited in Ivanič, 1998, p. 5).

powerful instrument that facilitates adaptation to new sociocultural environments, new roles, and different circumstances” (p. 251). In light of this, she claims that multiple identities are “a significant new cultural capital” which allows individuals to function in their new and challenging cultural worlds (p. 251). Zou’s research focuses on immigrants in academia; its relevance to the present study lies in how the participants, as international students and former instructors, have experienced a transition between their world as legitimate individuals in their culture (using their own language) and their current situation in a new environment.

2.1.1 Ethnic Identity, Accent, and Dialect

This section presents a series of studies contributing to the research on issues related to ethnic identity, accent, and dialect. The first two studies (Schechter & Bayley, 1997; Martínez, 2003) involve research with Mexican and Mexican-American communities within Mexico and the United States. The reason for including these two studies is that the majority of the participants in the present study reside within the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, all of which have a large Spanish-speaking community, particularly immigrants from Mexico. Therefore, the participants’ perceptions and experiences related to ethnic identity, accent and dialect play an important role in their new environment. The third study by Marx (2002) is a narrative on the experience of the researcher as a second language learner. Although Marx’s study takes place in Germany, she deals with issues of identity and accent and how these are interwoven into the experiences of a second language learner. Moreover, the three studies share the previously presented notions of identities.

Schechter and Bayley’s (1997) research is key to the present study, mainly because the authors worked with Mexican and Mexican-American families and their notion of identity (ethnic) and language, particularly the Spanish spoken by Mexican-Americans. The authors refer to identities “as symbolic performances generated by individual choices of practices in

fluid societal and situational contexts” (p. 513). In their definition of ethnic identity, the authors explain that identities involve: “the way individuals locate themselves with a particular social and cultural framework, the orientation of representatives of dominant groups to individuals, and official characterizations...(p. 514). They view the relationship between language, culture, and identities as a dynamic construct. In choosing to include Schecter and Bayley’s study in the literature review, I was interested in discovering whether the participants’ location in southwestern states in the U.S. (which have a large Spanish-speaking population, particularly Mexican) helped to shape their notions of identities, ethnic identity, accent, and dialect.

Martínez (2003) carried out a study on the Texas-Mexican border where he found “that perceptions of dialect are not inherent in the language itself but rather are mechanisms that converge on the construction of social identity...dialect perceptions are...socially motivated and socially molded constructs” (p. 39). The author discusses the importance of perceptions of ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ Spanish rooted in the social construct of the nation-state border (p. 38). The language perceptions (from either English or Spanish) are an important aspect of academic life which Mexican graduate students are immersed in, particularly since English is their second language, and they are in the process of becoming scholars who wish to be recognized by English-speaking academic communities across the world.

Marx (2002) provides a personal account of her experience in Germany as a second language learner. She discusses identities and cultural issues, and in particular the appropriation of accent. Influenced by Kramsch (1997) and Wenger (1998), she affirms, “...identities do not exist alone but are interwoven with other aspects of the self” (Marx, 2002, p. 266). She claims that a person is able to affiliate herself with more than one culture or language; therefore, this person holds multiple identities which are dynamic in nature (p. 266).

Marx and Wenger support the notion that we as individuals -in this case as international graduate students speaking a different language and living in a new environment- engage in the negotiation and renegotiation of identity and self. Marx's account as a second language learner proves particularly relevant to the experiences of the participants in the present study since she, like they, intended to return to her native country after being in Germany for several years. Finally, an important argument raised by Marx is the notion of 'reconciliation' of identities by means of "uniting past and present into one self" (p. 277), which refers to the learners' ability to function in both contexts (L1/C1³ and L2/C2) and to achieve academic recognition in both worlds.

2.1.2 Power Relations

West (1992) maintains that identities are connected to one's "desire for recognition, quest for visibility...the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association...affiliation" (p. 20). The author also states that there is an even deeper desire for security and safety. Norton (1997), drawing from West, claims that "Such desires...cannot be separated from the distribution of material resources in society...In this view a person's identity will shift in accordance with changing social and economic relations" (p. 410). In the case of the present study, the participants had experienced being university instructors in a Mexican public university. Most of them have led or collaborated in research projects, gained a certain status within their home academic communities, and achieved prestige and recognition in Mexico. For these reasons, their experiences as graduate students and this shift in their identities (from instructors to students) play an important role in terms of power relations exemplified in their relationships with peers, professors, and their advisors.

³ Capital C stands for Culture. L1 and L2 stand for first and second language respectively

Belcher (1994), Flowerdew (2000), Tardy (2004), and Swales (1990, 1997) carried out research with non-native English-speaking scholars or with international graduate students. Their work, particularly associated with power relations in academia, is relevant for framing the present study. Belcher (1994) and Flowerdew (2000), adapted Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of *legitimate peripheral participation* to different research scenarios. Belcher (1994) studied three graduate students and the relationship these students established with their mentors. Flowerdew (2000), in a case study, focused on the experience of a non-native scholar attempting to publish a paper in a well-known scientific journal.

Belcher (1994) claims that the notion of "legitimate peripheral participation looks at the learner's interaction with the lived-in world" (p. 25). She states that the relationship between mentor and student "impinges upon students' socialization in their disciplinary communities of practice" (p. 25). The terms *communities of practice* and *discourse communities* used throughout the present study, will refer to the academic communities, in this case the American academic community of my participants' host universities. Although Belcher acknowledges that many graduate students are able to succeed without effective mentoring, her study demonstrated that 'social coparticipation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or student/advisor relationship is a key factor in the academic and professional development of some students (Belcher, 1994, p. 26). The author also suggests that her findings provide pedagogically effective types of collaboration or apprenticeships that in turn promote student growth and independence (p. 31). Belcher's claims are an important theme of the present study since I am interested in looking at the participants' experiences with their mentor/advisor and how this relationship has impacted the outcome of their studies.

Flowerdew's (2000) research explores the journey of Oliver, a nonnative English speaker and scholar attempting to have his paper published in a major scholarly journal. The

most important aspects of Flowerdew's research for the present study are the language problems experienced by Oliver in his attempt to publish his paper, as well as the "difficulties related to isolation from the mainstream" (p. 135). Oliver, an outsider was struggling to enter the Circle. Oliver also shares similar issues with the participants of the present study and myself. We all have the responsibility of completing our thesis or dissertation and of complying with the deadlines and standards set by our funding organizations (scholarship agencies, employers in the form of public universities). We also have to prove ourselves by being accepted into our particular discourse communities, in this case, the English-speaking academic community in our field. We have to do so by publishing academic papers in recognized scholarly journals or by presenting papers at prestigious conferences. Indeed, we are expected to achieve at least three of the six criteria of a discourse community: "(a) common goals, (b) participatory mechanisms, and (c) information exchange" (Swales, 1990, p. 129). In considering these criteria as well as those in Tardy's (2004) discussion of scholars as consumers and/or producers of research, I decided to include an additional question in my interview guide (see Appendix D, question 20). This question pertains to the participants' thoughts on the matter of becoming part of the English-speaking academic discourse community of their research fields.

It is important to note here that the terms: *mainstream* (Flowerdew, 2000), *Inner Circle scholars* (Tardy, 2004), *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and *legitimate speaker* (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000) are used in the present study in reference to the struggle that second language learners in academia experience in the process of becoming academic, 'heard' voices in their particular discourse communities. Regarding this issue, Srivastava (1997) claims that: "[we] continue to privilege the spoken and/or written word as

the only significant marker of thought and reflection” (p. 118); then Montoya⁴, for his part states that “speaking out is an exercise of privilege. Speaking out takes practice” (p. 118). In the same vein, Foucault (1980) explains: “power is always already there” (p. 141). Power is intrinsic to the practices of academic discourse communities. Power is represented by the symbolic and material resources we (international graduate students) wish to gain access to; these powerful social networks can give us the opportunity to speak (Norton, 2000, p. 5).

Norton (2000) applies the term ‘symbolic resources’ to language, education, and friendship; the term ‘material resources’ refers to capital goods, real estate, and money. Norton’s notion of power is influenced by the works of Foucault (1980) and Simon (as cited in Norton, 2000) who view power not as monolithic or invariant, but “a relation which always implies social exchange on a particular set of terms...it is a relation that is constantly being negotiated as symbolic and material resources in a society change their value” (p. 7). Like Foucault, Norton (2000) believes that power manifests itself in “everyday social encounters between people with differential access to symbolic and material resources – encounters that are inevitably produced within language” (p. 7). With regards to power, Norton draws also from Cummins (1996) who “argues that coercive power relations refer to the exercise of power by a dominant individual, group or country that is detrimental to others and serves to maintain an inequitable division of resources in a society” (Norton, 2000, p. 9). On the other hand, collaborative relations of power can help empower individuals rather than marginalize them (p. 9). As previously stated, the present research examines the struggle that international graduate students experience in order to achieve recognition. International graduate students respond to the demands of the powerful group (academia) as well as to the demands of their new environment (sociocultural).

⁴ As cited in Srivastava (1997).

2.2 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is the underlying theoretical framework focusing on the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the language, cultural and social aspects of their immersion experience in the United States. The reason for choosing this theoretical framework was that it resonated with looking at the participants' lives at one particular moment of their graduate program and how they perceived their experiences. Symbolic interactionism is also compatible with the methodology used in the present study, basic interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002).

Symbolic interactionism is associated with the work of Herbert Blumer; it is a theoretical approach which focuses on the study of human group life and human conduct (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism argues that meanings derived from human beings and their contact with things is essential. "Things" in symbolic interactionism are regarded as everything humans come into contact with, that is: physical objects, other human beings (brother, teacher), categories of other human beings (spouse), institutions (schools), guiding ideals (generosity), activities of others (requests, commands), and situations encountered in the everyday life of an individual. The basic assumptions underlying symbolic interactionism are that:

1. human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them;
2. the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
3. these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an *interpretive process* used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

The *interpretive process* which Blumer refers to involves the engagement and collaboration of the participants in this research endeavor; more precisely, it represents an opening of the door to their perceptions and experiences as international graduate students in another culture as well as to the language and academic demands in this process.

Symbolic interactionism has been associated mainly with the fields of social psychology and sociology. Although it primarily emerged out of Pragmatism, symbolic interactionism has proven over time to not only have been influenced by other philosophies, but also to contribute and benefit from perspectives such as: dramaturgical theory, social constructionism, labeling theory, the sociology of emotions, frame analysis, feminism, neo-Marxism, and postmodernism (Sandstrom, Martin, & Fine, 2003). By choosing symbolic interactionism as my theoretical framework, I am guided by the belief that qualitative research aims to discover how people make meaning of an event or interpret a phenomenon. Jasso-Aguilar (1999) concurs by stating that "...qualitative research methods... [take] into account the social context of people's lives, and [allow] them to express their own voice and needs as opposed to the researcher or the institution's" (p. 27). In keeping allegiance with these notions, we can aim at understanding people's experiences by listening to their voices, their perceptions, and their insights.

Other important assumptions that have been added to symbolic interactionism are those presented by Sandstrom *et al* (2003) which are: First, "...that people are self-reflexive beings who actively shape their own behavior while acting purposively in and toward situations" (p. 27). This is a key element in the notion of identities presented at the beginning of this chapter which view individuals' identities as multiple, negotiable and flexible. In this particular case, international graduate students are able to adapt to their new environment. Symbolic interactionists "stress that human beings acquire beliefs and preferences through

socialization –an ongoing, interactive process through which individuals develop identities and learn the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that characterize their society” (Sandstrom *et al*, 2003, p. 65). In light of this, the notions of identities as seen in Ivanič (1998), Norton (2000) and Zou (2002) coincide with symbolic interactionism, since from the interactionists’ theoretical stance, identities are developed through socialization, in itself a non-static, dynamic, unpredictable, and evolving process.

Interactionism underscores the fact that interaction shapes people’s identities and behavior “[placing] a greater emphasis on the negotiation of meaning and order” (Sandstrom *et al*, 2003, p. 28). Symbolic interactionists have also been interested mainly in the *understanding* of individuals in their social acts, including, and of particular interest to this study, the notion of negotiating identities. As previously stated, the participants in this study had a different status in academia before they arrived in the United States; for this reason, their adaptation to their new environment involved a negotiation on their part which was in turn shaped by their identities as international graduate students. International graduate students not only encounter a set of cultural values and relationships different from their own, but they also encounter the culture of academia. These sociocultural practices are “often best understood in the context of wider relations of power” (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 115). Power relations are essential for understanding identities, particularly when dealing with international students who, depending on their culture, regard academic authorities (professors, advisor) in different ways. The academic culture in classrooms in a different country may be revealing. For instance, students from more collectivist Asian societies are very aware of status differences (Myles & Cheng, 2003). “Students from cultures with high levels of power distance tend to accept the power of superiors as a basic feature of their relationship” (Hofstede as cited in Myles & Cheng, 2003, p. 253).

2.3 Rationale for the Study

As was previously stated in Chapter One, the purpose of the present study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of eight Mexican university instructors completing their graduate programs in the United States. The focus of this study deals with the participants' stories regarding their language, cultural and social experiences, as well as how issues of identity and power interplay as they face their new environment. Consequently, the participants' insights will provide a window with respect to how well they were prepared for their current immersion and the way they cope with the demands of their new context.

The lenses guiding me in interpreting these particular aspects of the participants' experiences are the underlying frameworks of Symbolic interactionism and the theoretical contributions of Norton (1997, 2000), Ivanič (1998), and Zou (2002). Symbolic interactionism emphasizes that through interaction with others, particularly within a larger system of social organization (e.g. carrying out a graduate degree in a foreign country, being immersed in a different culture, and speaking a foreign language), individuals are able to ascribe meanings to their experiences, construct and reconstruct themselves (identities) and their social relationships (Stryker, 1987). Individuals engage in an interpretive process which deals with or modifies the meaning(s) of lived experiences (Blumer, 1969). Ivanič (1998), Norton (2000) and Zou's (2002) notion of identities as non-static, dynamic, multiple, and evolving shapes the idea that international graduate students engage in a negotiation and renegotiation of self in order to adapt to their new environment (Marx, 2002; Wenger, 1998). By being immersed in a new environment and by speaking a foreign language, international students also face the challenges of meeting the academic, social, and cultural demands of this new context. They wish to become active members of this new community, and in trying to accomplish this, they encounter power relations which facilitate or deny them this membership.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research

Symbolic interactionism informs the methodology chosen in the present study: *Basic Interpretive Qualitative Research*, which focuses mainly on interpretation. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explained, symbolic interactionism has been one of the major theoretical platforms underlying most qualitative research methodologies. In the case of the present study, a basic interpretive qualitative research evolved from symbolic interactionism responding to the belief that “the meaning of an experience is constructed by an individual interacting with other people...” (Merriam, 2002. p. 37). Symbolic interactionism, as stated previously in Chapter Two, also purports the notion that it is through interaction that individuals are able to reshape their identities.

A major reason for choosing this methodology was that, as a novice researcher, I discovered that a basic interpretive study would best capture the essence of my research in trying to *understand* the participants’ experiences and perceptions regarding language, the cultural, and social aspects of their lives as graduate students in the United States, as well as issues of identity and power relations within this same setting. Another important reason was my concern with how the participants, as well as the researcher, construct meanings through their interactions with other people and other settings (in this case a graduate program in the United States), so that meaning can be ascribed to such experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) also state that ‘meaning’ is a crucial part of qualitative research and that “...researchers...are interested in the ways different people make sense out of their lives” (p. 32). The meaning to which the above authors refer is mediated through the researcher as *instrument*. As a graduate student myself, having had the experience of living in an English-speaking country and completing my graduate program there, I consider my roles in this study

as being those of researcher, participant, and instrument in the sense that I will give voice to my participants' experiences and perceptions as international graduate students in the United States.

Another important academic voice considered in the methodological part of the present study is that of Wolcott (1994), particularly in the way I approached the data. I followed his D-A-I (Description-Analysis-Interpretation) approach. The author proposes that there is no absolute combination involving D-A-I; a researcher may choose any combination which s/he considers best and by no means are all three elements mutually exclusive...”nor are lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 11).

3.2 Participants

The participants in the present study are all Mexican citizens; Spanish is their first language. There are three women: Choffis, María, and Piwis; and five men: Baali jeeka, Darío, Ernesto, Pedro, and Reloj ranging in age from their early thirties to their late forties, early fifties. Their self-assigned pseudonyms represent a range from nicknames (Choffis, Piwis), common Latin American and Spanish names (María, Darío, Ernesto, and Pedro), a native name (Baali jeeka), to the names of objects (Reloj). They all have worked as university instructors at a public university for at least two years and a maximum of twenty-five years. Seven of the participants have lived in the same northwestern state in Mexico. Only one of them (Darío) comes from another northwestern state. With regards to their studies, one of the participants (Ernesto) was in the middle of completing his Masters degree at the time that the present study was being conducted. The other seven are doctoral students. In terms of where the participants are in their program, four are in the process of completing their theses, the other three are in the midst of their Ph.D. programs. Only one of the participants (Choffis)

completed her Ph.D. and returned to Mexico to work. All participants are recipients of at least one of the three major scholarships (PROMEP, CONACYT, or Fullbright-García Robles) mentioned in Appendix A. The disciplines they are studying are: Applied Physics, Education, Finance, Linguistics, and Psychology.

Six of the eight participants (Baali jeeka, Choffis, Darío, Ernesto, María, and Piwis) are experiencing their first immersion in an English-speaking culture, particularly the academic culture of the United States. The remaining two (Pedro and Reloj) had completed part of their undergraduate studies in the U.S. Even though originally the goal was to interview only first-immersion participants, the testimonies of these two participants were included as a way to contrast and/or compare their experiences and insights with those of the other participants. The inclusion of these two participants in the present study responds to the flexible and adjustable nature of qualitative research (Eisner, 1998). With regards to their location in the United States, most of them reside in southwestern states (Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas) and one of them is in a northeastern state.

The shared background characteristics of the eight participants in this study are: 1) They have learned English (EFL) in Mexico; 2) they have had experience teaching at a public university and 3) receive funding from a granting agency in Mexico. There are several reasons for my having chosen participants with these characteristics. The first was the fact that these instructors' experiences and perceptions of the language, cultural, and social aspects of their life prior to their graduate program would provide insights into how well they were prepared in Mexico before their arrival in the U.S., particularly since all participants had studied EFL in Mexico. In moving to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree, most of them faced their first immersion experience. A second reason was the affiliation the participants have to a public university which links them to a Mexican institution; by means of holding a permanent job in

a public university or by being repatriated by one once they finish their degrees. Such affiliation provides greater insights into their perceptions and experiences with regards to contrasting both academic research scenarios, that of the Inner and Outer Circles as well as the power relations inherent in these. Finally, the location of the participants in the southwestern states in the U.S. was chosen due to the proximity to the northwestern border in Mexico, where the participants had a connection to the host university. Their geographical proximity also facilitated my traveling to their location in order to interview them. I was able to interview five of the participants at their location in the U.S. and the remaining three in my hometown where they had traveled for personal and work reasons.

3.3 Sampling and Recruitment Procedures

The type of sampling used in this study is purposeful sampling, since the participants had already been previously selected by their scholarship criteria. The procedure for recruiting the participants was as follows. In July 2004, I contacted the representative from the Academic Development Office⁵ at a northwestern public university in Mexico. He then proceeded to send an e-mail contacting a group of twenty university instructors carrying out graduate programs within the United States and receiving one of the three major scholarships. This initial e-mail contained a letter of invitation in Spanish and served as a filter (for the location of the participants); it also provided information concerning the study (see Appendix B) as well as my contact information (e-mail, phone number).

During the months of July and August of that same year, I received five e-mails from five instructors volunteering to participate in the study. Two of these volunteer participants approached three other instructors and told them about the study: these three instructors then

⁵ In spring of 2004; I had sent a letter to the Academic Director informing her of my study and requesting her help; she accepted. I then contacted the representative who helped me throughout the recruitment process.

became interested in participating. These last three participants contacted me and were included in the present study because they met most of the criteria mentioned above.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures and Procedures for Interpreting the Data

The major source of data collection in this study was a 60-90 minute in-depth one-on-one audio taped semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) with the eight participants. The interviews focused mainly on the following elements (which are covered in the actual interview): a) the participants' perceived experiences regarding language, culture, and the social aspects of living as graduate students in the U.S. before they moved there (see question 11); b) whether these perceived experiences were modified and if so, how they were modified during their stay in the U.S. (see questions 12 and 18); c) how these experiences as international students have shaped their academic studies (see questions 13 and 15); d) the participants' description of their relationship with their advisor/supervisor, professors, and peers (see questions 14, 16, and 17); and e) a description of their history as English students prior to their graduate studies (see question 4 and table in Appendix D). Issues of identity and power relations were addressed in the follow-up questions (see Appendix E) after the interviews took place.

Before the interviews took place and as an introduction to the interview itself, I described to each participant the reasons why I had decided to carry out this study and that my experiences as an international graduate student coincided at many levels with their own. My role in this study was that of an instrument, a collaborator, and a colleague. I wanted the participants to feel at ease in communicating their experiences to me. In doing so, I tried to avoid at all times what Fine (as cited in Tisdell, 2002) refers to as "othering" the participants which occurs when a researcher gathers information about the participants without providing

information about herself. In order to build rapport with them, the interviews were conducted in Spanish, our first language, to ensure a more natural, comfortable setting.

When the interviews took place, I proceeded to ask the questions in the interview guide and gave further explanations when necessary. I wanted to elicit as much information as possible from the participants without making them feel restrained or guided. During the interviews, notes were taken of anything I thought required clarification or which highlighted the core elements of the literature review. After the initial interview, I listened to each participant's recorded interview and wrote more notes, I then e-mailed the participants a set of follow-up questions (see Appendix E) that reflected some specific aspects of their interviews, for instance, the perceptions they had of accent, and the role of their identities in their new setting. When each participant returned his or her answers, I went ahead and read their responses and started to look for recurrent patterns across participants. At this point I started transcribing the interviews verbatim; all interviews were transcribed in Spanish. My comments as a researcher were edited in the transcription in order to sharpen the focus, thus allowing me to fully maintain the participants' information.

In the first member check, the participants were given the whole transcript of the interview; in this transcript an initial set of quotes were highlighted. These quotes reflected themes and/or sub-themes based on the research questions and literature review of this study. After highlighting a particular quote, I provided a brief description or asked for further detail to try to gather more information from the participants. By providing some similar examples from my own experiences as an international graduate student, I made an implicit invitation for a co-interpretation of these aspects. As a novice researcher, I tried to be careful not to prompt participants to answer based on my interpretations, but asked questions which allowed them to express themselves in detail.

“The qualitative research approach demands that the world be approached with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 30-31). This important idea guided me in preparing the second and final member check for each participant. This document included a description and interpretation of those relevant quotes included in the findings, as well as themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews and follow-up questions. I had the chance of a second meeting with two of the participants to discuss their comments on the second member check. The other six participants accomplished this through e-mail. In this last member check, participants were engaged in the interpretation process.

Wolcott (1994) explains that a way of organizing and reporting data is “to expand and extend beyond a purely descriptive account with an analysis that proceeds in some careful, systematic way to identify key factors and relationships among them” (p. 10). This is an essential reflection on how novice researchers might feel compelled to over interpret and/or analyze. Therefore, I chose to describe the participants’ journeys and provide a small peek into interpreting them by telling their stories, since as Wolcott (1994) explains, “qualitative researchers need to be storytellers” (p. 17).

In deciding what story to tell, novice researchers may be drawn to present all the data gathered from the interviews simply because we might be silencing important stories told by our participants. I followed the suggestions of three authors in displaying the participant profiles and findings (Alfred, 2003; Norton, 2000; Waterhouse, 2004). An important element discussed by Wolcott (1994) is the fact that just “...recently, the researcher has been allowed, even encouraged, to make the connections personal or part of everyday experience...” (p. 34). In light of this, I kept a reflective journal (see sample of reflective journal, Appendix F) for

two purposes. First, it describes my quest as a neophyte qualitative researcher. Second, it provides a frame of reference that was used to contrast my participants' perceptions and journeys to my own.

In this chapter I have described the methodology underlying the present study: A basic interpretive approach (Merriam, 2002). The participants' characteristics, recruitment and sampling procedures have also been addressed. At the end of this chapter I have discussed the issues of data collection procedures and the data description-analysis-interpretation approach suggested by Wolcott (1994). The following chapter will present the findings and initial discussion with regards to the participants' experiences and perceptions of language, learning, and cultural aspects of their life in the U.S. Chapter Five will focus on common themes across participants related to the themes of power relations in academia and construction of identities. Intertwined in these stories are description, analysis, and interpretation of the data.

Chapter Four: Initial Discussion of Perceptions and Experiences Pertaining to Language and Learning

This chapter reports on the findings collected throughout this research endeavor as outcomes of the research questions. The first section presents participant profiles providing information about the participants' age, the stage where they were in their studies at the time the interviews took place, program of study (Masters or Doctorate), field of study, years of experience teaching, location of their program, general information about their English language studies prior to their arrival in the United States, as well as other details describing them. The findings are organized and displayed as each of the participants' stories evolved and connections across their stories (in the form of themes and sub-themes) became apparent.

As was explained in Chapter Three, the eight participants are Mexican Spanish-speaking graduate students. They have all taught at public university level. Six of the participants, Baali jeeka, Choffis, Darío, Ernesto, María, and Piwis had not been immersed in an English-speaking environment prior to their studies. The remaining two participants, Pedro and Reloj had lived in the United States during their undergraduate degrees.

4.1 Participant Profiles

The Women

Choffis is in her early thirties; she had been living in the northeastern part of the United States for about six years prior to her participation in this study. Choffis had never lived alone prior to her arrival in the United States. In Mexico, it is culturally and socially acceptable for women and men to live with their parents until they decide to leave, e.g. to go to college, get married, or move to another city and/or country. She completed both a Masters and a Doctoral program in Linguistics in a northeastern university in the United States. Choffis had worked as

an undergraduate Linguistics⁶ instructor for two years in Mexico, and she had taught Spanish in the U.S. during her graduate studies. She learned English as a Foreign Language in Mexico as most of the other participants, starting at junior high school level and later taking additional courses during her undergraduate program. However, Choffis had read a lot of academic texts in English prior to the start of her graduate program, which made her more confident about her reading and writing skills, but not her listening and speaking skills. Choffis is the only participant who had finished her degree and returned to Mexico to begin working as a full-time professor during the time this study was conducted.

María is in her late forties, early fifties; she is completing her doctoral program in Public Health in a southwestern university where she has been living for seventeen months. *María* has taught at university level for twenty-five years. She is a psychologist, and completed her M.A. in Mexico just as *Piwis* had. *María* has learned English “all her life”, and like *Piwis* and *Choffis*, believes that it was her discipline and the amount of reading in English she had to do during her academic career that motivated her to learn more English.

Piwis is in her early thirties; she is completing a Ph.D. in Linguistics in a southwestern university in the United States where she has been living for two years. Her field of expertise is Computational Linguistics. She had three years’ teaching experience prior to her graduate program; she has taught undergraduate courses and some high school courses. *Piwis* is the only participant who had lived in another country, in the former Soviet Union, where she learned Russian. She completed her M.A. in Linguistics in Mexico before being accepted for her current degree. She regards herself as the most confident participant with respect to her

⁶ In the past, the Ministry of Education (SEP) allowed instructors to teach at the undergraduate level without a graduate degree. Since the appearance of the three major funding institutions in Mexico (see Appendix A) educational policies in Mexico, particularly SEP, require that by the year 2006 ALL university instructors have at least a Masters degree.

mastery of English. She started to learn English in junior high school, and stated that she has always enjoyed American pop culture (e.g. watching sitcoms, listening to music in English).

The Men

Baali jeeka (which means cold wind in Yaqui, a native language of the northwestern area of Mexico and also in Arizona) is in his early forties; he completed a Ph.D. in Linguistics in a southern university in the United States where he lived for four years. He has just returned to Mexico where he is currently working on the final revisions of his thesis. He is the participant with the least number of years of teaching experience. He taught some undergraduate courses for about a year while he was completing his M.A. in Linguistics at the same Mexican university where he is now teaching again. With regards to his experience learning English, *Baali jeeka* had learned English in Mexico (EFL), but felt that these courses had not helped him much. *Baali jeeka*, *Darío*, and *Ernesto* were the only participants who took English courses in the United States a few months prior to starting their graduate degrees in order to be fully accepted into their programs.

Darío is in his early thirties. He has just started his Ph.D. in Geographical Physics; he also completed his Masters at his current location, a southwestern university in the U.S. He and his family have lived in the U.S. for about three and a half years. *Darío* is the only participant who comes from a different northern Mexican state than the rest of the participants. He had been a university instructor for three years prior to starting his M.A. in the U.S., but as a Ph.D. student he has been teaching undergraduate courses in his field of expertise. *Darío* learned English in Mexico and when he was accepted into his Masters program he had to enroll in an intensive course at the same university in order to comply with the language requirement in his faculty. *Darío* stated that he had a limited mastery of the English language when he first arrived in the United States.

Ernesto is in his early thirties; he is finishing his Masters in Applied Physics in the field of Atmospheric Sciences and has already been accepted for his Ph.D. at the same university (located in a southwestern state). He has lived there for two and a half years. Ernesto has eight years' teaching experience at a public university where he taught undergraduate courses in Physics. Ernesto, as most of the participants, learned English as a Foreign Language in Mexico during junior high school and high school; he also took courses during his undergraduate program. However, just before Ernesto started his M.A. he took two English courses at an American state college. He said he had improved his reading and writing skills with these courses, but not his speaking and listening skills.

Pedro is in his early thirties completing a Ph.D. in Finance at a southwestern university. Pedro had lived in the United States prior to his graduate program. He studied part of his undergraduate program in Mexico and in an academic exchange student program; he then transferred in order to finish his undergraduate degree in the U.S. He proceeded with his graduate degrees at a different university, but in the same region of the U.S. Pedro has taught in Mexico for about a year (in between finishing and starting his graduate program), and has also taught undergraduate courses while completing his Ph.D. He is the only participant to have been enrolled in private schools since he was a child. It is common practice for private schools in Mexico to have well-established EFL or ESL programs. Pedro continued to study English during his high school years. He believes that once he began his undergraduate program in the U.S., he improved his writing skills through practice (e.g. completing class assignments).

Reloj is in his late forties, early fifties; he is completing a Ph.D. in Education in Methods and Measurement at a southwestern university in the U.S. He, like Pedro, experienced immersion in the United States during his undergraduate years. He did not

complete his studies consecutively; he returned to Mexico after his undergraduate program, taught and worked there, and then returned to the U.S. to do his Masters. After he finished, he again returned to Mexico, and finally went back to the U.S. to pursue his Ph.D. His total teaching experience has been twenty-five years at the undergraduate level. Relej learned English in Mexico at the junior and high school level. He went on to an international student exchange program and studied in high school in the U.S. for one year, took the SAT's (Scholastic Aptitude Test/Scholastic Assessment Test), scored well on them, and was then able to study for an undergraduate degree in the U.S.

With the exception of Pedro and Relej, the remaining six participants: Baali jeeka, Choffis, Darío, Ernesto, María, and Piwis had learned EFL in Mexico around the time they were in junior high school. However, this group of six participants reported that it was during their undergraduate programs that a more formal English instruction took place: EFL courses at public university level. The methodologies for these courses ranged from the grammar-translation method to communicative language teaching. The participants did not come into contact with any type of Content-based instruction, EAP or ESP curriculum. The six participants described their first contact with academic English once they had started to read their course materials in their particular undergraduate programs. EFL adult courses at public universities in Mexico are characterized by strict adherence to a textbook as well as to trendy methodologies (e.g. nowadays a boom for Communicative Language teaching).

4.2 Language, Learning, Social, and Cultural Perceptions and Experiences

In this next section, each participant's experiences and perceptions are displayed as a narrative with regards to language, learning, and the cultural and social aspects of their life in the U.S. An initial discussion is presented for each of the participant's narratives. The findings are displayed in the form of themes that emerged from the research questions. Not all of the

participants' narratives follow the same structure due to the information that emerged from the interviews; each participant touched on different aspects that were relevant or important to him/her. In some cases, the participants started to discuss issues of identity intertwined with their experiences of culture, language, and the social aspects of their life in the U.S. However, I have decided to address issues of identity and power more thoroughly in Chapter Five of the present study. As given in Chapter One and repeated here for reading ease, the research questions for the present study are:

- 1) How do Mexican, Spanish-speaking university instructors pursuing graduate degrees in English in the United States perceive their language, academic, social and cultural experiences?
- 2) How do they cope with the language, social, and cultural demands of their new environment?
- 3) How do they perceive their identity (ies)?
- 4) In what ways does their relationship with their advisor, professors, peers, impact their life in academia and in the United States?

Most of the responses to questions 1 and 2 fall into the themes of *language and learning*, and most of the responses to questions 3 and 4 fall into the themes of *cultural and social aspects of life in the U.S.*

Choffis

Language

By the time the present study was completed, Choffis had obtained her Ph.D. in Linguistics and returned to Mexico after six years of living in a northeastern city in the U.S. She will be teaching undergraduate and graduate courses in the same public university where she finished her undergraduate degree. She and Baali jeeka are awaiting their repatriate

teaching jobs which will establish them in full-time tenure track positions at the same university. When I interviewed Choffis in the summer of 2004, she recalled her perceptions about language:

C: Before I started the program, I was afraid that my knowledge and fluency of the language weren't good enough and that I was going to have difficulties taking and passing courses. I was extremely worried about my academic performance, and the opinion professors would have of me, I never stopped to think about my performance in everyday things, like to use English to go to the grocery store, to talk to the landlady, to the librarian, etc.

Choffis explained that reading and writing had not been difficult skills to develop. She also explained that after a while, she had become more relaxed and more fluent in English. She is the only participant who has accomplished more academic work in the Inner Circle due to the fact that she has presented at several prestigious world conferences in her field and has also co-authored (with her former thesis supervisor) several articles in English.

Learning

Choffis talked about how, thanks to one of her classmates, she started to believe and understand that international students have more advantages in carrying out a graduate degree than native speakers mainly for the following reasons:

C: ...we speak another language and many of them (American or native speaker students) are monolingual; we already have a project in mind, clear objectives, we have a stronger motivation (maybe our scholarship agreements); whereas native speakers enter the Masters or Ph.D. as a continuum to their undergraduate program, but without having a definite project and we (international students) are on a strict deadline to finish and they (native speakers) are not necessarily on one.

The perception that Choffis' classmate had of international graduate students modified her own perception and in this case favored the way she situated herself within the academic community in which she was immersed.

Cultural and Social Aspects of Life in the U.S.

Before starting her Ph.D. program, Choffis had never traveled outside of Mexico. Her only contact with Americans was through the visiting professors who had lectured in her faculty during her undergraduate program, and an American friend whom she met in Mexico and who had been her English teacher.

C: I believe I did not have a 'stereotype' of the American citizen, what I knew about the 'culture' was what I had seen on television, movies and/or commercials. To tell you the truth I did not consider the possibility of researching a little bit about the country (let alone the city where I was going to study!), the people, the politics, the opinion people had about international students. I assumed that it was a diverse and tolerant society.

Although Choffis explained that she had not researched or inquired about the United States before moving there, she said that she perceived 'Americans as being cold'. This perception has been transformed through her interaction with peers and professors. Choffis has built an important network with other international graduate students, particularly Hispanos⁷, claiming that several traits are shared among them:

C: ...the cultural and linguistic identity, the feeling of deprivation, and the academic interest, has allowed us ("Hispano" students) to create in this last year a solid group of study and distraction. Particularly in the last months other students have been incorporated into this group...other international and American students. That forces

⁷ I have chosen to use the word "Hispanos" as opposed to "Hispanics" in Spanish since for many years there has been controversy pertaining to the use and misuse of this word in the U.S.

us (nonnative speakers), to speak more in English and to feel more confident about our development.

As this research endeavor continues to unfold, I have maintained contact with at least three of the participants, among them Choffis; it is she who brought to my attention an important issue regarding her status (researcher in the making, professor to be, bicultural citizen). She explained having had mixed emotions about returning to Mexico (before moving back and now that she is there). I became more aware of the importance of how this particular group of individuals will cope with their new status (i.e. bicultural and multicompetent citizens, scholars of the Outer Circle) once they return to Mexico: their identities in transition. Although Choffis discussed this concern with me after the interviews had taken place, I include a quote in which she initially stated her preoccupation with returning “home” but which was also associated with her status in academia.

C: To be honest, I have mixed feelings about returning to Mexico...I'm concerned with my possible academic performance in the country, whether I am sufficiently prepared to change my status, from student to professor. I'm worried about the limited possibilities of publishing in English (once back in Mexico), continuing to go to international conferences, having access to research projects (small grants) doing fieldwork or documenting native languages. It's a reality that academic production is much easier from the U.S.

It remains to be seen what this transition and change will do to Choffis and all of us as returnees, not only with regards to being scholars in the Outer Circle, but as bicultural citizens trying to function in two different worlds.

Piwis

Language

Piwis was one of two participants (the other Baali jeeka) to have studied other languages besides English before starting her Ph.D. With regards to her English language experiences prior to her Ph.D. she explained:

P: I thought I was not going to have problems because I managed reading literature (academic texts in Linguistics) in English well; my concern was with language at a social level, like going to a store, what it was expected from me if someone invited me to their home. As a speaker of another language you don't have the sense to select certain expressions and one might use rude expressions.

Piwis also explained that she believed her reading skills improved due to the amount of academic reading she did during her undergraduate program in Mexico as well as her Masters. Piwis, as previously stated, always enjoyed American pop culture; she listened to music and watched TV shows in English.

P: I used to read in English a lot (before going to the U.S.), particularly at undergraduate level, I had a lot of reading in English. I'm very frivolous cause I like watching (American)⁸ comedies in English.

Piwis describes her language learning experience as disorganized; she cannot really pin point when she started to structure or learn English well.

Learning and Academic Culture

Piwis explained that the access to technology that she has had during her graduate studies has been a great resource for her Ph.D. She said “I have to take advantage of this while I'm here”. She knows that once she returns to Mexico, these resources will be limited. Piwis

⁸ The term ‘gringo’ was used liberally by at least three of my participants. Since mixed reviews exist with regards to the use of this term, I decided to include the translation of two definitions of the word ‘gringo’ in Appendix G.

did not talk a lot about learning strategies, but she did explain why she was motivated to start her program:

P: I think it was a growing up process, deciding what I wanted to do and learn to do something...to learn and to be conscious that the field of Linguistics is very restricted and that now you are required (in Mexico) to have a Ph.D. I have to obtain my degree 'cause I want to work for a university or a research center, but I would like to work for a university 'cause I like teaching.

With regards to her academic environment, Piwis described her perceptions of Americans in academia prior to starting her program. She believed that since she was doing a Ph.D. in the U.S. there would be a high level of competition, but instead she found:

P: ...you know how in the U.S. you think people would be highly competitive and sort of snobbish, but in this small university the environment is really different, people are friendly, you don't feel like people are out to get you.

When I asked Piwis about her perceptions of the cultural and social aspects of life in the U.S., she had none and was neither surprised nor shocked by life in the U.S. I believe this was connected to her experiences both in terms of being acquainted with the culture through the media and her traveling. Through her immersion experience in Russia, although a different culture, Piwis had learned to reconcile two cultures and languages. However, when I asked Piwis whether she would like to stay in the U.S. she responded:

P: ... I want to be in a country where my language is spoken, 'cause jokes taste better in Spanish... to me a sense of humor is a very important thing.

For Piwis, language and her “Mexican roots” were very important.

Pedro

Language

Pedro was the only participant to have a higher proficiency level in English before he started his graduate program; this was in part due to the fact that since he was a child, he had attended private schools where English is taught as a second language. Therefore, his perceptions were influenced by his mastery of the language. He described how the only issue that presented problems for him was pronunciation:

P: ...Since I was a little boy I read and listened to English a lot... the main focus was on general understanding of the language. The hardest thing, was maybe the accent, one believes that s/he has a good pronunciation, but then when you arrive (in the U.S.), you realize natives (speakers) ask you to repeat things several times; so I had to work more on that and adjust my accent. I learned grammar and vocabulary well in Mexico.

Pedro explained that he had difficulties with articulating the words ‘beach’ and ‘bitch’. Most people whose first language is Spanish experience similar difficulties in perceiving and producing the vowels in ‘beach’ and ‘bitch’. Phonetically speaking the former is a high front close vowel and the latter is a slightly high central vowel. In Pedro’s case, he has opted to use other words since the social connotation of getting these two words confused or mixed up might put him in an “uncomfortable” situation.

Learning

Of particular note concerning Pedro is the fact that his education was privileged in many ways, not necessarily because he comes from a rich family (both his parents teach at a public university), but Pedro attended private schools all his life, even a private university at the beginning of his undergraduate program before moving to the southwestern United States to finish his program. Most Mexicans who attend private institutions have more access to

technology because a large number of computers are provided for the students. Additionally, a second language is frequently taught at private schools; therefore, by the time a student from a private school enters any type of university, his proficiency in English is very high. Several differences also exist concerning the teaching and learning strategies available in private schools since class sizes are smaller and more time is dedicated to students' development and improvement of their academic performance. Pedro best exemplifies this in the following excerpt when he talks about his experience at a private high school:

P: In terms of time management I did not have a hard time at all, I finished high school at the TEC (initials in Spanish stand for Technological Institute), so I was used to being in school all day. Also I was used to using computers and having access to the Internet even when it was still not available to many people, particularly email (around 1994).

Cultural and Social Aspects of Life in the U.S.

Pedro spoke little about issues related to his perceptions of the cultural and social aspects of his life in the U.S. mentioning only:

P: Personally, there were two things that I wanted to take from here (referring to the American academic culture): knowledge of finances, because that was what I came to learn, and specifically and with respect to the American culture, I was interested in the work ethic. Not the ethic for job or labor reasons, but the enterprising values and free enterprise that caught most of my attention.

However, when I asked him about his perceptions of Americans, he said:

P: ...I saw them as being enterprising, but also very liberal, very liberal and that was one of the things I was afraid of, and to a certain point I wasn't sure of racial issues, if there was discrimination, those are the two things I was afraid of.

The stereotype Pedro had of Americans prior to his arrival might have been the product of Mass Media. As a person who lived in the U.S. during four years of my adolescence, I remember how misinformed I was of American culture through pop culture. Pedro could have been influenced by these images. Later on in the interview, Pedro explained that his perceptions of Americans changed throughout his graduate program mainly because he realized they (Americans) are not superior and neither are Mexicans. He said that while in Mexico:

P: ...one tends to magnify the image of Americans because they are from the richest and most powerful country in the world, but when you arrive here (U.S.) you see there is no big difference at the individual level...there's no inferiority or superiority.

Of particular note also was Pedro's encounter with a different community when he moved to the U.S.: the Mexican-American community. The words *Mexican-American* and *Chicano* are not seen as synonyms by either academics (e.g. anthropologists, sociologists) or by the communities who label themselves using these terms (for a thorough discussion on the topic see Díaz, 2003). Pedro explained that not only is the language different, such as the use of Anglicisms (e.g. "troca" for truck or "parkear" for parking), or the use of Spanglish (i.e. an unexpected switch from one language to another), but also the way Mexican-Americans use certain symbols (see quote immediately following) to represent them or to be identified as Mexicans. He claimed to have had a 'big shock' with regards to different aspects of their identity.

P: ...I was shocked to see the difference between Mexican and Mexican-Americans...For instance how they celebrate the 5 de Mayo like it was Independence Day in Mexico⁹...I

⁹ It is important to note that the Mexican-American community in the U.S. celebrates 5 de mayo (May 5th) as a national Mexican holiday; it is a holiday, but honors "Batalla de Puebla" or Puebla's battle, which commemorates a battle that took place in the year 1862 when the Mexican army stopped the invasion of the French Empire.

realized they try to validate their Mexican-ness, their identity within the American community, because they don't feel American and because they are not in Mexico...they search for symbols that represent being Mexican, like having the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe or the Mexican flag put on their cars. So sometimes I felt like I wasn't viewed as a real Mexican.

Since the theme of identities emerged during Pedro's perceptions of Mexican-Americans I asked him if his own Mexican identity had changed since he moved to the U.S. He responded:

P: I do appreciate everything more when I'm there (in Mexico) like the culture, the art, the history of Mexico...music too, before I used to listen to a lot of American rock, and I still do now, but now when I'm here (U.S.) I listen to more music in Spanish...I guess it's like the old saying 'learn to love God in a strange land'¹⁰, ...in that sense I have learned to appreciate Mexican values more, but not to the extreme to get a tattoo of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Pedro believes Americans are intimidated by the way Mexican-Americans enhance their Mexican-ness. He thinks Mexican-Americans do this, i.e. enhance their Mexican-ness, by using certain symbols that identify them or represent them because they do not fit into either one of the two cultures: American or Mexican. I believe this is a very important issue regarding ethnic identity, the identity of immigrants, and the identity of returnees. It signifies attempting to become bicultural. This is in accordance with Kanno's (1996) definition of *home* which arose during her research dealing with Japanese returnees searching for their own space, creating their own home.

Independence day in Mexico is traced back to September 16, 1810, and it is celebrated every year on the eve of September 16.

¹⁰ This saying does not translate well, but in this context it means that we learn to appreciate things more when we do not have easy access to them anymore.

I used to think that home was something you simply stumbled into, that it was a matter of a match between a place and a person. If it was a good match, you stayed; if it was a bad match, you moved on. But now I know that home is a place you *create*, not *find*. It is a project, a process: You put your feet firmly on the ground, declare, “This is my home,” and start working at it. And it takes time (p. 3).

In search of a home, bicultural, multicultural and/or multi-competent individuals search for a place to call their own. Pedro’s own identities as multiple, diverse, contradictory, dynamic, fluid, complex (Norton, 2000; Ivanič’s, 1998; Zou, 2002) can be seen through his initial positioning outside both the university community and the Mexican-American community and his continued shaping as a graduate student in the U.S., where he is learning to share two worlds and trying to reconcile and unite these two into his new identity (Marx, 2002). He is torn by contradiction and by what he perceives to be Mexican. Pedro claims to feel “more Mexican now”, and would like people to know that there are ‘superficial’ differences to being a Mexican-American immigrant and to being a Mexican returnee (e.g. the way we dress, the symbols we use) but whatever being “more Mexican” means he claimed that:

P: ...deep inside we are all the same.

María

Language

María has been a university instructor for 25 years. She is the only participant who had published articles in Spanish prior to the start of her Ph.D. program. She completed a Masters in Mexico in Clinical and Experimental Psychology and had also attended and presented at conferences in the U.S. and Canada. Since María had learned EFL in Mexico prior to the start of her Ph.D., she had limited exposure to different dialects/accents. Once she encountered a diversity of dialects/accents in English, she explained her struggle in this way:

M: A big struggle I encountered in that sense was that I had a lot of international professors, therefore I was confronted with English spoken by an American, by a Hindu, by a Korean, by a Chinese, by a Mexican...I was facing five or more dialects of English, five ways of structuring grammatically and five ways of pronouncing differently, and that made me cry.

Among her strategies, María stated that when confronted with different dialects/accents, she tended to “disconnect” herself. By this, she meant that she did not focus much on every single word the person said, but inferred the meaning of the messages by contextualizing. Another of María’s strategies in terms of language was that she tried to “anticipate the context”; in doing this, she practiced sentences beforehand or structured them prior to meeting with others, which prepared her to speak. According to María, written language did not present much of a challenge, but she did work quite hard at it as she explained:

M: it cost me blood, sweat, and tears.

Learning

María’s strategies were shaped by her language experiences and her abilities in English.

M: Another strategy...I have used to compensate for my deficiencies in English is to be very exhaustive with my work and to write very thorough papers, very detailed, investing a lot of time and effort, this way the teacher does not focus much on how well I construct my sentences in English. I dedicate an enormous amount of time to doing my work.

Like other participants, Maria has adjusted to the demands of academic language by developing learning strategies or modifying her practices (e.g., being more exhaustive with her papers, dedicating more work hours). These strategies compensate somewhat for her lack of knowledge in certain abilities related to language proficiency.

Cultural and Social Aspects of Life in the U.S.

Intertwined with cultural and language experiences and perceptions, María talked about the importance of learning “everyday rules” when living in a different country, such as knowing how to carry out different daily tasks. She mentioned:

M: Rules associated with the system in which you are living, daily things, mail, garbage, rent, bills, and other simple things, it wouldn't hurt if we know how these things operate and that they are important to know about this context...you have to imagine what is expected of you in certain contexts, simple but relevant things, how to greet, etc.

María talked about body language and distance referring specifically to the concept of physical distance in some cultures as compared with that in Mexico, e.g. touching someone's arm while you talk to them, a common Mexican practice signaling intimacy, or lack of distancing. María referred to this distancing as a form of ‘excuse me’ which I interpret as “stay out of my space” and which is not common in Mexican culture. She stated that “it wouldn't hurt to know how to use these conventions so we could live with others in harmony”. She says she has never felt ‘inadequate’ in any context, but she does know people who have.

An interesting example that emerged from the follow-up questions and which was related to both language and to the notion of “living harmoniously” which María referred to, was that when I asked María whether she thought speaking English “correctly” would improve her academic status in her particular discourse community, she responded, to my surprise:

M: ...In classroom interaction there are noticeable signs of disapproval when a nonnative speaker of English participates because s/he has difficulties expressing her/himself. During my stay I have had experiences with people who show their rejection towards Hispanos or foreigners in general. I have been able to notice how upset they get if you obtain a good grade or a good comment.

Although the topics of accent and dialect that emerged among the participants will be discussed more in depth in Chapter Five, it is important to highlight the notion of *legitimate speaker* supported by the findings. For María, as well as for other participants, speaking English “correctly” (e.g. speaking without a noticeable foreign accent) was connected to how native speakers of English perceived them as international graduate students, their performance in their graduate programs, how intelligent they were. María’s awareness of what she terms “rejection” could facilitate or delay her access to her particular discourse community, making it even more difficult for Outer Circle scholars to make a smoother transition into the Inner Circle.

Although María believes that there has been a clear-cut rejection towards Hispanos, she also recounts that being in a largely Hispano-populated community affects her language skills as when she states:

M: I feel that (being surrounded by a large community of Hispanos) has been an obstacle (in her ability to learn the language better), I constantly have to switch from language to language.

To María, being surrounded by a large community of Hispanos is a sign of support, but the fact that she is not able to practice English much also presents an obstacle to her proficiency in the language. María feels that maybe in another context (a state with a smaller community of Hispanos), she would have improved her English. María’s perceptions and attitudes towards her language, her country and the community of Hispanos are similar to Pedro’s: a portrait of confusion and contradiction. They both reveal how identities shift and then are negotiated within our sense of selves in different environments. An important question with regards to how María and Pedro perceived the Mexican-American community remains unanswered:

Would these participants' perceptions of Mexican-Americans have been modified if they had remained in Mexico?

Ernesto

Language

Ernesto had turned in the final draft of his thesis by the time the present study was completed. Ernesto, Baali jeeka, and Darío were the only participants who had taken English courses (lasting a month or two) in the U.S. just before the beginning of their graduate program. Ernesto described what he perceived to be important with regards to language:

E: I thought the most important thing was to know how to read, reading comprehension, I assumed that American teachers were very organized and that if I read a text I would understand them, another important thing to learn was to write and not because of homework, but because I learn by writing.

Ernesto believed that every time he had to write an assignment his writing improved and so did his grammar. One of his major problems with language was vocabulary. Ernesto explained that he encountered difficulties with academic vocabulary as well as everyday vocabulary because his Masters in Atmospheric Sciences was a new field to him and he had to learn about it as he progressed throughout the program.

Ernesto, like María, had difficulties with dialect/accents of non-English speaking professors; however, while in the U.S. he had ESL teachers who were also nonnative speakers. With reference to this he said:

E:...the difference is that a (nonnative-speaking professor) who teaches atmospheric sciences doesn't worry about pronouncing well, on the other hand a nonnative speaker teaching ESL/EFL, in the case of my teachers had studied to be an ESL/EFL teacher...is concerned with pedagogy.

Learning

Ernesto feels that speaking English does not “come natural” to him, even though he mentioned that he was beginning to code switch from English to Spanish and Spanish to English. He feels that he was not able to learn English to the best of his abilities mainly for the following two reasons:

E: ...when my mind was open to learning a language, any language, I was in junior high school...but the programs were not very good...later in high school, it was my ideology that influenced my decision not to learn English...besides I didn't feel it was necessary...I wanted to do a Masters in Mexico City, so I didn't need English.

Ernesto and Baali jeeka openly stated rejecting American culture and attributed their difficulties in learning the language to their rejection of English. Ernesto, for example, claimed that he purposely speaks “English like Spanish” (i.e. with a strong accent) in order to be identified as Mexican. This rejection can be thought of as transforming one’s self and one’s ethnic identity through becoming “Anglicized” and hence relinquishing one’s accent.

Cultural and Social Aspects of Life in the U.S.

Ernesto’s rejection of American life is not without contradiction. Ernesto, his Mexican-American wife (also a Ph.D. student) and his U.S. newborn child are living with him. Both of them are receiving Mexican scholarships and hold a permanent job at the same university at different faculties. Therefore, once they finish their graduate degrees, they are expected to return to Mexico. His perception of American culture before he moved to the U.S. was:

E: ...I believed that the culture of the U.S. was the culture of McDonald's, junk food, the culture of the uncultured...no roots...everything light, very ignorant Americans.

Through interaction with Americans, particularly a friend who is married to a Mexican woman, Ernesto’s perception changed somewhat:

E: my perception hasn't changed much; however, I can say that I have seen differences, I have seen very interesting people, not everything is the culture of McDonald's, although the big majority is...but something I have learned to value in the U.S. is not the cultural richness, but the richness in cultures...that you probably won't find anywhere in the world...the U.S. is probably one of the countries where you can find a big number of cultures together, more people from everywhere....and the way each of these cultures manifests their traditions, although lighter than the original culture, but it's there.

Ernesto's multicultural surroundings have opened his eyes; he favors interaction with international students over "average Americans", although his American friends have lived abroad. He views this experience as enriching. Ernesto is experiencing a transition to his new environment, adapting to new roles, and challenging these cultural worlds (Zou, 2002). In doing so, he has developed multiple identities which "constitute the richness and the dilemmas of [his] sense of self" (Ivanic, 1998, p. 11). In Ernesto's search to unite and reconcile both worlds, he recognizes that being bicultural represents a struggle if he feels his Mexican-ness is at stake or that he is entering the "McDonald's" culture as he termed it.

Baali jeeka

Language, Learning, Culture, and Identity

Baali jeeka is now in Mexico; he is finishing revisions and will soon submit his final draft to his thesis committee. He has started to teach and, like Choffis, awaits a full-time teaching position in a public university in Mexico. In choosing a way to display Baali jeeka's experiences, I became aware of how several anecdotes of his life as a graduate student were intertwined. Therefore, I am linking these experiences to language, learning, culture, and identities.

Several times during the interview, Baali jeeka, like Ernesto, asserted his rejection of the U.S. culture which according to him, obstructed his language-learning process. This was not only something that he felt, but was also perceived by some of his international classmates (e.g. an Argentinean friend told him about it). With regards to language learning he stated:

B: ...I have seen that people learn a language not because it's convenient to them...but because they like the language and they like the culture where the language is spoken.

Baali jeeka claimed that he had little interaction with the culture outside of academia, which in his view, limited his language ability even more.

B: ...an important thing is how immersed you are in the culture when you are doing a Ph.D. I didn't have much practice talking to others, maybe at lunchtime, but everybody works independently, and when in class you are talking about certain topics...so you are immersed only in the academic culture.

Baali jeeka compared his language experiences to those of other classmates and thought that a lot had to do with how you perceive or feel about the culture where you will be living, which impacts the way you become part of it or remain outside, a foreigner.

B: ...I feel it has to do with personality...and if beforehand you have a rejection towards the culture, it doesn't help...but I saw other classmates who were very "Americanized" ...they wanted to stay in the U.S. and they were living the "American life" ...they are Americans before they arrive.

In his perception of peers who "adapted better", he believes it was their effort to remain in the U.S. that facilitated their immersion in the culture as well as their language ability.

Baali jeeka identifies himself as a member of the gay community. He is very extroverted, outspoken and jokes constantly. A lot of his frustration with English deals with the inability to transfer that "humorous" and outgoing energy from Spanish.

B: When I talked to the guys (classmates) it would kill me that they would make jokes that I wouldn't get and that I couldn't answer in English as fast as they did, because I have a "fast tongue" in Spanish...an even though I'm a very confident person...that made me feel stupid...the first year...that I couldn't answer a professor's question or that I couldn't ask a question, not because of content, but the language, it was awful.

An important incident about Baali jeeka is that after the interview was over, I had a chance to meet with him for the follow-up questions. He told me that he had presented a paper at a prestigious conference in Germany, and that right after finishing the question period, as he took off his jacket, he said: "That's it the show is over". He heard some people laugh and that made him feel very comfortable. This happened in the summer of 2004 when he had just turned in the first draft of his thesis. It is possible that once he obtains his degree, his confidence level in English will increase due to his prestige as a Dr. in Linguistics. However, Baali jeeka's experiences during his Ph.D., are still evidenced in his struggle and contradictions with regards to language and identities.

B: My identity never changed while living in the U.S., but I never adapted well. I didn't socialize outside my study group and even with them my ability to express myself in English was always limited. As a reactionary response if I had the chance to speak Spanish I would do so and I didn't care, even if there was only one person in the whole group who was able to understand me.

It remains to be seen what Baali jeeka's and Ernesto's futures hold given their overt rejection of American culture. Ernesto, who will remain in the U.S. for a while, might choose to reconcile and unite both cultures, as his own daughter will someday become a bilingual and bicultural woman. Baali jeeka, on the other hand, has just returned to the periphery and he is

now faced with choosing whether he wishes to maintain a strong connection to the Inner Circle (the English-speaking academic community) or remain in the Outer Circle.

Darío

Language

When I interviewed Darío he was starting the third year in his Ph.D. program and he was about to take his comprehensive exams. Darío, Baali jeeka, and Ernesto had decided to take English courses in the U.S. prior to the start of their program in order to improve their proficiency in the language. Darío like many of the other participants, perceived that it was his speaking and conversational skills that were weak when he started his Masters. He said:

D: ...I was worried about being able to carry out a conversation, before I had a certain ability to read English, but mainly I was concerned with speaking fluently and this preoccupation was more evident when I paid a visit to the campus before I started my program and tried to contact professors who were going to be my teachers...I realized I was having a hard time expressing myself in a fluent manner.

Darío explained that throughout his Masters program he felt that his conversational skills were not improving; however, once he began his Ph.D. program and worked as a TA (Teaching Assistant), he started to feel more confident about his speaking and conversational skills.

D: ...I'm starting to feel better about myself (in terms of conversational skills), specially since I began to teach...this has been a stepping stone, having to talk more, pushing yourself to pronounce better, to understand the students better...this has helped me a lot.

Darío says that he learned to write and read well in English in Mexico because he took what he called “English in Spanish” courses. What he meant by this was that he took English courses that were taught in Spanish with a heavy emphasis on writing skills and grammar. From Darío’s description, these must have been grammar-translation courses, using very

traditional teaching methods. For Darío this was a useful tool since he “asked exactly what he wanted in Spanish”.

Learning

Darío had been a laboratory technician in Mexico prior to his graduate degree; he claimed that he had no experience in research and therefore had to learn everything there is to learn about doing research as well as other academic tasks that constitute part of a graduate program. With reference to this he said:

D: ...the strategy that I have used the most since I moved here has been the search for information or resources. When I first arrived I was faced with a totally different system to what I was used to in Mexico...and well you have to carry out the learning process, the content of the courses, adaptation to a new language, the culture, and you have to be able to learn all these strategies on your own and to apply them to your own learning...so I had to do it.

Among Darío’s learning strategies was *time management*, which in his case has played an important role during his life as a student, a father, and a husband. Since he has had to “juggle” many responsibilities, he explained that his time management skills help him spend time exclusively with his family on the weekends.

D: ...I have always tried to organize myself to the best of my ability, specially since I have two little girls, so I can make use of personal family time, because although one is required to finish and comply with our scholarships...so one has to consider the circumstances...the good thing is I have my family with me.

Cultural, Social, and Personal Life in the U.S.

Darío’s story reveals many responsibilities. During the interview, he spoke liberally about his family and explained how he was able to juggle all the responsibilities linked with

coming to a different country. It was not an easy experience, but he did not complain or quit and he is now able to look back on it and reflect. When he arrived in the U.S., his wife was pregnant with their first child. Darío was starting his Masters in August and his wife was having their baby in September. He had to function in two spaces: family and school, and in addition, do so in a different country, speaking a language with which he was still struggling. With reference to culture and his arrival in the U.S., he explained:

D: Even though I had lived on the border between the U.S. and Mexico, I wasn't familiar with the culture or the system...when I arrived here (in the U.S.) I realized I was in "diapers" in terms of knowledge of the system...the first days I was really worried about learning everything away from school because my daughter was going to be born, my wife was coming...so everything was very fast.

Darío's first daughter was born in Mexico because he did not have time to arrange everything necessary for her to be born in the U.S. (e.g. medical insurance). His second daughter, however, was born in the U.S. because Darío had learned how the system worked. Darío did not really supply details about his perception of culture and the social aspects of life in the U.S. because as he had previously stated, his family has always been his first priority. His life revolves around his family and how he must learn and do things outside the academic culture to respond to his family's needs.

D: ...graduate life is most of the time for single people...they get together at bars, go for a few drinks...at the beginning I didn't go to these gatherings because of my deficiency in English, but now it is simply that I don't feel that is an environment for my family...our circle of friends is different, people with children, for that reason my circle of friends at the faculty is very limited...there is also the fact that my wife doesn't speak

English...so when we have gone out to faculty parties she doesn't feel comfortable. Our circle of friends is a family circle.

Darío told me that his wife has been one of his strongest allies as he pursues his degree; in his words “she has sacrificed her career in order for me to do this” (referring to the completion of his graduate degrees). Although Darío did not go into detail, I assume that his wife had held a job and had given it up for him to be able to study for his Masters and Ph.D. In Darío’s story, both he and his wife have been able to negotiate their identities in a new environment not only for professional goals, but also in order to grow and be empowered as a family.

Relej

Language and Learning

Relej is the second participant who had had an immersion experience before he started his graduate program. He, like Pedro, had completed his undergraduate program in the southwestern part of the U.S. Relej’s language perceptions were intertwined with his undergraduate and graduate experiences, as he explained:

R: ...I didn't have the chance like others to study language courses in an institute (when he arrived in the U.S. during his undergraduate program), my experiences were very different, mine was immersion, but I did have difficulties in dealing with academic writing.

Relej had a difficult time writing papers for the first two semesters of his undergraduate studies; like many of the participants in the present study, he overcame these difficulties through perseverance, hard work, and dedication.

R: ...autonomous work, in those times there weren't a lot of helping centers (writing centers for nonnative speakers of English). So I had to work hard and continue...I realized years later that once I wrote my Masters thesis I had become bilingual.

Cultural, Social, and Personal Life in the U.S.

An important characteristic of both Reloj and Pedro was not only the fact that they had been immersed in the culture of the U.S., but also that both had had a great deal of mobility in both countries (i.e. moving back to Mexico to work and later returning to the U.S. to study again). Hence both were becoming bicultural and multi-competent individuals, attempting to function in two contexts. Multi-competence “refers to the overall knowledge that combines both the first language and the L2 interlanguage – the knowledge of two languages in the one mind” (Cook, 2001, p. 195). In Reloj’s particular case, he has been able to develop research projects involving his Alma Mater and his place of work in Mexico.

R: ...having contact in Mexico, I’m able to maintain academic relations...and the work that I’m doing now requires a lot of technology and resources that would be complicated to access there (Mexico)...so being here (U.S.) facilitates this project.

Reloj explained that one of the things that he has not been able to cope with is the way people in the U.S. address professors or academic authorities. “Protocol” he called it:

R: ...I can’t get used to calling my professors by their first name...I call them Dr. This or Dr. That...it might be that I come from a traditional upbringing...it might be my age as well.

Reloj also explains his awareness of minor, but sometimes important, cultural differences, and that being immersed in both cultures does not create a problem for him. With regards to time, for example, he explained:

R: ...if you have a meeting in Mexico, let’s say at 10:00, and then it starts at 10:30 that is inconceivable here (U.S.)...meetings here (U.S.) start at 10:00 and finish at 12:00... the way these things are set up sometimes depend on bureaucratic decisions...parties here

(U.S.) also start and end at a specific time...I have started to integrate and wherever I am, a half an hour doesn't bother me.

For Reloj, his family has been very supportive and understanding, particularly with regard to his constant transition from one culture to another.

R: ...I have seen cases where people bring their family over and their family cannot stand living here (U.S.) and they go back, all of them...my family has been extremely understanding, my wife and two kids...they said "we are going to adapt to this particular situation because there is a project underway" and this has been very meaningful.

Creating a home is not something that occurs only with or is exclusive to the participants in this study: their families are also becoming bicultural. Families are an important support network that make for an easier reconciliation of the two cultures.

In this chapter I have described the participants' perceptions and experiences of the language, cultural, and social aspects of their life in the U.S. Moreover, I have also provided an initial discussion of these findings. The participants' stories reveal insights into how they coped with their new environment. We can see how the participants' interactions, prior to their arrival in the U.S. and once they had settled in, have shaped their perceptions and experiences. Some of these perceptions and experiences have been modified: how they viewed the U.S. culture, the concept of their new home, and the process of becoming bicultural/multi-competent.

The next chapter will deal with the participants' perceptions and experiences pertaining to constructions of identities. Identities and power relations are the major themes; and as sub-themes, I will highlight several aspects focusing on accent, dialect, ethnic identity, and the relationships with supervisors and peers.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Perceptions and Experiences Pertaining to Construction of Identities

5.1 Identity and Its Many Facets

The present study views identities as multiple, dynamic, diverse, changing over time, contradictory, (re)negotiable, complex, fluid, and as an empowering instrument for adaptation to new environments (Norton, 2000, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Zou, 2002; Marx, 2002, Schechter & Bayley, 1997). Within this view of identities, the participants, although not consciously, hold multiple identities. Entangled within this notion of multiple identities are issues regarding ethnic identity, accent, dialect, and power relations. Most of the labels that I have used throughout this discussion reflect the themes which emerged from the participants' perceptions and experiences.

The stories of the participants in the present study have revealed the nature of their identities as multiple, and seen through their adaptation to the changes in their environments (Stryker, 1987). However, the participants' multiple identities have also revealed contradictions as can be seen in Baali jeeka and Ernesto's rejection of the U.S. culture, while attempting to conciliate and unite their bicultural-ness. In María and Pedro's case, these contradictions came to light with regards to dialect and certain emblems of the Mexican-American community. In view of this, the next section will give voice to the participants' experiences regarding accent, dialect, and power relations in academia.

5.1.1 To Be Fluent...to Be Intelligent, Lose Your Accent

A general consensus among all the eight participants was that in one way or another speaking fluently in English, or having a less noticeable accent in English provided them with more opportunities to engage in reciprocal communication with their peers and professors.

Bourdieu (1977) explains: “(linguistic) competence is also the capacity to command a listener” (p. 648). Language is not exclusively an instrument of communication; it is also an instrument of power (p. 648). The notion of *legitimate speaker* is viewed not only as the ability to command a listener, but also as the means with which international graduate students search and struggle for recognition as they attempt to access symbolic and material resources in order to be recognized and achieve the prestige so necessary in their particular academic discourse communities.

This notion of *legitimate speaker* is revealed in the following quotes from the participants:

Quote 1:

I was worried also about the possible evaluation/opinion of my professors, that they would think that I wasn't smart or intelligent enough to have been accepted in the program because I couldn't express myself fluently ...I feel Americans evaluate my intelligence connected to my fluency in the language (Choffis).

Quote 2:

The perception of 'intelligence' that a culture has, if you have an adequate mastery of the language, I think they (native speakers of English) believe they are among equals and they feel free to discuss anything without the barrier of 'cautiousness' in order not to offend 'those who don't know (nonnative speakers)' (Maria).

These quotes are clearly linked to their accent as nonnative speakers of English.

Pedro and Reloj shared, with the other participants, the notion of privilege and recognition obtained when English was spoken or written “appropriately”; however, from their stories we can assume that they were the only two participants who had made a smoother transition into the graduate academic world. We could attribute this mainly to the fact that they

were the only two who had been immersed in the academic culture of the United States prior to their graduate studies. The perceptions and experiences of this group of Mexican instructors reveal the imminent need to prepare future instructors who wish to pursue graduate degrees in English-speaking countries. Six participants were enrolled in EFL courses before they left Mexico to pursue a graduate degree in the U.S. Their language courses focused mainly on listening and speaking skills, placing little emphasis on reading and writing which are crucial to carrying out academic work. The participants' contact with any type of academic English experience (e.g. academic texts, conferences) occurred during their undergraduate programs; however, their experiences with academic English were not linked to any language instruction. Therefore, EAP research would provide the "edge" that participants like Pedro and Reloj had; i.e. they were well prepared in the language before their graduate degrees started and maintained this "edge" throughout their program of studies. This type of curriculum (EAP) is not exclusive to the study of genres and discourse in academia, but as more recent research (see Benesch, 2001; Raymond & Parks, 2004) has shown; it also provides nonnative speakers with tools to acknowledge the power struggle involved in academia, deal with it and also challenge it and become empowered individuals.

5.1.2 Dialect

María, Pedro, and Reloj were the only participants who clearly distinguished between the dialects of Spanish spoken by Mexicans and by Mexican-Americans; they viewed the latter as grammatically incorrect. Martínez (2003) states that perceptions of 'correct' and 'incorrect' Spanish are rooted in the social construct of the nation-state border (p. 38). The author explains that the perceptions that both communities on both sides of the borders have about their dialect of Spanish impacts the way they see each other (i.e. ethnic identity). For example, Mexicans claim 'superiority' because they speak the 'correct' form of Spanish,

whereas Mexican-Americans perceive Mexicans as ‘stuck up’ (Richardson as cited in Martínez, 2003). Heller (as cited in Hansen and Liu, 1997) explains that language may “symbolize group identity and become emblems of that identity, especially when there is contact with other groups whose ways of being are different (p. 569)”.

María and Pedro talked about their perceptions of Mexican-Americans in terms of their ethnic identity: how they used certain symbols (e.g. a tattoo of the Virgin of Guadalupe) in order to be clearly identified by their community. In María’s case she explained how living in a large Mexican-American community hindered her English learning ability (i.e. constantly having to switch from one language to other). “Language has the power to include and exclude people (Kanno, 1996, p. 6)”. I cannot help but wonder about the implications that becoming bicultural represent for both the participants and myself. We have struggled to cope with the different demands of two environments. Have we become unaware of others who have gone through the same process? If so, we are sadly and most definitely contributing to the exclusion of others simply because of our perceptions of “correct” and “incorrect” language.

5.2 Power

5.2.1 A Matter of Legitimacy: From Outer to Inner

The notion of *legitimate speaker* (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton 2000) became even more salient once the interviews were completed. When I first encountered the notion of *legitimate speaker*, I realized that the concept of prestige to which Norton (2000) refers, was inherent in the effort made by the participants to obtain recognition in their particular discourse communities (whether the Outer or Inner Circle). Not all the participants talked about this particular aspect, but for most of them, having made the effort to move from one country to another to do their graduate programs demonstrated their willingness to grow and achieve a better status both academically and professionally in their particular fields of expertise.

María was the only participant who had achieved such a prestigious status in her particular discourse community in Mexico before doing her Ph.D. Although Relej had worked on several projects, it was María who had published the most and had also presented at conferences in the U.S. and Canada. María was also the only participant who described being aware of the influential academic groups in the field of public health in the U.S. She clearly stated that membership in such an academic group would enable her to become a well-known scholar. The remaining participants: Baali jeeka, Ernesto, Choffis, Piwis, and Pedro had presented papers at conferences or co-authored articles with their supervisors; therefore, they were on their way to achieving such status and prestige; in other words, they were trying to enter the Inner Circle or become solid academics in the Outer Circle. According to Bourdieu (1977) and Norton (2000), legitimacy is obtained through access to symbolic and material resources; individuals obtain such resources in their search for recognition and affiliation (West, 1992). Outer Circle scholars seek these opportunities; the participants in this study are an ongoing example of this process.

How can the participants access this recognition? As Belcher (1994), Flowerdew (2000) and Tardy (2004) have suggested, a way to provide Outer Circle scholars with the tools to make the transition to the Inner Circle is through the help of academics in the Inner Circle. Thesis supervisors/advisors play a key role in this process. The experiences and perceptions of the participants with regards to their relationship with their thesis supervisor will be described and discussed in the following section. Inherent in these relationships are the power relations established within the context of academia.

5.2.2 Supervisor/Advisor: The Drop Out and the Mentor

Two sub-themes¹¹ originating in the descriptions that the participants provided of their experiences with their thesis advisor/supervisor came to light. Piwis was the only participant who did not have a thesis supervisor when I interviewed her. Of the remaining seven participants, María and Pedro's supervisors had left the universities where they were working and had lost contact with both María and Pedro, hence the reason I chose to label the sub-theme as *drop out*. Baali jeeka, Choffis, and Darío's supervisors were what I labeled *a mentor*, an Inner Circle member who developed a close working and collaborative relationship that promoted the newcomer's academic growth. Ernesto's and Reloj's supervisors were also very supportive; however, their anecdotes with regards to their thesis supervisors were very brief and not clear in terms of their relationship (e.g. they did not provide specific examples of their relationship).

The Drop Out

Although María and Pedro studied at different southwestern cities in the U.S. they had similar experiences with regards to their thesis supervisors. Both their former thesis supervisors had left the programs to which María and Pedro belonged because they had been offered other jobs in other cities. In María's case, prior to her supervisor's departure, their relationship was built around ambiguity. María always showed great respect for her supervisor, but nonetheless pointed out several issues during the interview. One of them was the fact that her supervisor did not inform her of research projects or grants she could apply for and which he was part of. Her thesis supervisor was a department chair and was always very busy. María remained on the "outside" looking for opportunities to present themselves. There were very few exchanges between María and her supervisor, and when she did have a

¹¹ Since these are themes and sub-themes that emerged among two or more participants, I have chosen particular situations that cut across two or more participants.

chance to work on a project with him in another city, he was “too busy” and did not interact much with her. María attributed this to her age, since she had started her Ph.D. in her late forties, early fifties and she felt that a lot of the professors, who were approximately her age or younger “felt intimidated” by her. As previously mentioned, she has worked for 25 years as a university instructor, and also has a great deal of experience in working in the public health sector. When the interview took place in the summer of 2004, María was still looking for a new supervisor.

In Pedro’s case, he had established a “productive” relationship with his supervisor prior to his departure. Pedro’s field of expertise is a very innovative area in which only a few students and his former supervisor had experience. Pedro had co-authored some articles and was working on his thesis when I interviewed him. However, when Pedro’s supervisor was offered a job, he promised Pedro to remain on his committee and continue to help him. This did not occur. During the interview, Pedro explained that he was very “disappointed” by his supervisor’s lack of interest and response. Pedro would continuously e-mail him, but the supervisor would not respond to his e-mails. Pedro explained that his supervisor had gone through some personal problems (e.g. broken off his engagement). Although Pedro wanted to be sympathetic to his supervisor, the lack of communication deeply affected him. Pedro now has another supervisor and as he said, he will be able to finish. On the other hand, this new supervisor is not an expert in Pedro’s research area, so he has asked Pedro to restructure much of the work that he has carried out in the last two to three years. Pedro will continue, but his “frustration” is very palpable.

The experiences that both María and Pedro have encountered during their graduate programs are not exclusive to international graduate students; however, as explained before, this particular group of participants is expected to return to Mexico and “produce” research in

their areas. As Belcher (1994) claims, “social coparticipation is a key factor in the academic and professional development of some students” (p. 26). María’s and Pedro’s entry into their particular academic communities has indirectly or unintentionally been momentarily denied.

The Mentor

Choffis described her supervisor as a very “enthusiastic” and “reliable” individual. In addition to being a very renowned academic, he is also a department chair. Unlike María’s supervisor, Choffis’s supervisor has always found time for her (e.g. set time aside in order to read her drafts, or answer her questions). Choffis has had the opportunity to co-publish several articles with her advisor; I believe that he was a true mentor to her, providing opportunities for Choffis to enter the Circle (from Outer to Inner). In Lave and Wenger’s (1991) terms, she has had access to “legitimate peripheral participation” wherein her advisor promoted her growth and development as a young researcher.

Despite language limitations, Baali jeeka and Darío’s mentors have continuously stood by them. In a very emotional description, Baali jeeka mentioned an incident occurring on his first day on campus as he was walking alongside his advisor. His advisor showed him where the convocation ceremony takes place in that university and said: “that will be you in a few years and your Mom will be watching you from the bleachers”. Baali jeeka and Darío’s mastery of the English language was the lowest when compared with that of the other participants when they arrived for their program of study. However, this did not hinder their communication and relationship with their mentors. In Darío’s case, both he and his Master’s supervisor have decided to remain working together now that Darío has entered the Ph.D. program; this is due to the continued support that as Darío explained has been offered by his mentor. The mentorship displayed by these participants’ advisors is a clear example of how

they as newcomers have been granted legitimacy, a transition that could facilitate entry to the Inner Circle.

Belcher (1994) explained that the relationship between mentor and student “impinges upon students’ socialization in their disciplinary communities of practice” (p. 25) and although this was true to the participants’ experiences, I, like Belcher, think that there are still many questions (see Belcher, 1994, p. 32) that remain unanswered: Was gender a significant factor in the mentor-student relationship? What about age (Maria’s case)? What about disciplinary and personality differences among mentors and students? These unanswered questions lead us to the importance of further research involving international graduate students and their mentors.

5.3 With a Little Help from My Friends

Although family support was discussed in Chapter Four (see Darío and Reloj), friends and peers played a key role in the experiences of some of the participants. In Darío and Ernesto’s case, it was during the beginning of their graduate programs that a mutual friend, John, helped them in coping with the cultural and academic challenges they faced when they moved to the U.S. John (a pseudonym) is a bilingual American (he speaks English and Spanish), married to a Mexican woman. He was enrolled in the same graduate degree when Darío and Ernesto moved to the U.S. As both Darío and Ernesto explained during their interviews, John had helped them in understanding the “local culture” as well as in giving them a hand with their academic work. For example, when this study took place, Ernesto was going through different revisions of his thesis and John edited major parts of it. Darío and Ernesto are very grateful to John and still remain friends now that John has moved to another state. John made their transition to a new culture smoother.

Choffis also had the support of an American bilingual friend when she moved to the U.S. Since she had never been in the U.S. prior to her graduate program, Choffis explained that she had “no clue” about many things surrounding life in a different country. Her friend George (a pseudonym), whom she met while in Mexico, flew to see Choffis immediately after she moved to the northeastern city where she would start her program. He helped her in renting an apartment, explaining the local culture all the while. Choffis is very grateful to George and although an ocean now divides them (he lives in Europe) their friendship remains.

Most of the participants also talked about the importance of having had the “enriching” experience of meeting people from other cultures, as well as those who shared their language (e.g. Spanish-speaking classmates), their same roots. Upholding the idea of interaction with other foreign/international students, Marx (2002) explains that during her experience as a second language learner in Germany she viewed foreign students “as more open and accepting towards other foreigners, due to the common experience of living in a non-native environment” (p. 271). María explained that the connection with other international or Spanish-speaking students “constitutes an important support, we share experiences...” Interestingly enough, my participants did not openly discuss their status as multi-competent or bicultural individuals; however, this status was viewed as a major goal and accomplishment across all of them.

This chapter has addressed the perceptions and experiences of the participants regarding the construction of identities and power relations. Dialect and accent were sub-themes which emerged from the participants’ narratives. Some of the participants referred to notions of “correct” and “incorrect” English and/or Spanish among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Most participants also mentioned that possessing a native-like accent in English is a significant marker of intellect; this notion was shaped by their experience as graduate

students in the U.S. This chapter also discussed power relations -in the form of advisor-student relationship- which were an essential part of the participants' development in their graduate degrees, as well as in their path to achieving legitimate peripheral participation in their academic communities (whether Inner or Outer). Finally, the relationships and support networks built by some of the participants and other members of their academic or social community proved to facilitate their adaptation to their environment.

Chapter Six: Concluding Discussion

As a window into this final chapter, I would like to begin this discussion with my own story. Although I did indeed keep a reflective journal when my journey as a novice qualitative researcher began, I decided not to talk about myself during the writing of the present study. However it is here that I would like to include my journey and share some of the thoughts contained in my reflective journal focusing on my experience returning to Mexico and as a neophyte researcher. In this chapter, the main findings of the present study are summarized, as well as the major implications for further research and concluding remarks stemming from the present study.

6.1 Reflection: Becoming Bicultural, Multi-competent, a Foreigner in My Own Land

Last summer when I returned home to carry out the interviews for my study, I was not yet fully aware of the transformation that living in Canada had wrought in me, let alone how this experience had shaped my life and my future. I had, of course, read about identities, immigrants in Canada and the U.S., second and foreign language learners, reverse cultural shock, and had even heard stories from close friends who had shared similar experiences as they returned to their countries. The eight participants and I are expected to remain in Mexico and work for a minimal period representing the length of our graduate programs (e.g. four to five years for Ph.D. students). In doing so, we continue to experience constant renegotiation of self; we are attempting to reconcile and unite more than one culture, one language (Marx, 2002; Wenger, 1998); therefore, we hold multiple identities.

Coming back “home” has been harder than I thought. The notion of home is somehow split for me: a home is not necessarily a place where you reside; it has become for me a place I still have not found, but I need to build (see Kano, 1996, p. 3). There are many dimensions to be considered in returning to one’s native land after having lived and studied abroad. I am

confronted with political, social, cultural, language, academic, and personal issues. I am now working as a full time instructor juggling with the idea of doing further research. With regards to being in the process of becoming a known-academic in the Inner and Outer Circle, I have submitted proposals to three conferences (one Inner, two Outer Circle) and have been rejected by two while I await a response from the third. I am aware that this is not a scenario exclusive to Outer Circle scholars, but also to anyone around the world who wishes to gain access to academia.

6.2 Confessions and Reflections of a Novice Researcher

On the Participants-researcher Relationship

One of my major concerns as this research endeavor unfolded was the fact that all the participants and I were connected in some way or another. Almost all of them had studied or worked in the same city that I have, and most of us are expected to return to the same university once we complete our graduate programs. Therefore, I was worried that having this link to the participants could have influenced their decision to participate (*volunteer bias*). In my view, however, our connection did not obstruct the research journey. They always clearly demonstrated their availability (e.g. in setting up a time to meet) and willingness to provide a window into their experiences.

On Methodology

From this journey, I have learned that in doing qualitative research, novice researchers have to keep a very open mind and accept the unpredictable nature of their endeavor. One must always think *ex post facto*: If I had to do it all over again, what would I have changed? My responses in the reflective journal are extensive, but in an attempt not to bore the readers I will only briefly describe some details regarding the interpretation of data and the translation process.

The only source of data for this thesis was a one-on-one semi-structured interview. A follow-up e-mail questionnaire was used as a complement to the interview, and its focus was on information obtained from the interview itself. When data interpretation began, my reflective journal guided me, providing a form of internal dialogue that contrasted my experiences and my apprenticeship as a novice researcher. I jotted down notes in my journal throughout the entire research process. When beginning the interpretation of the data, I was concerned with Wolcott's explanation (1994) that as novice researchers we are faced with the challenge of not over or under describing, interpreting, and/or analyzing the data, obtained from our participants. Which stories to tell? What content to include? Where to stop? Our guiding framework is the expected answer, but it is not the only one. I decided to select not only the participants' experiences and perceptions that connected them to the research questions and the framework, but also those that touched on personal previous experiences or experiences lived by other classmates during my graduate degree in Canada. Since all of the data is in Spanish, an overwhelming concern, once I started to translate (into English) the selected excerpts that were to be included in the present study, was that I was going to lose the 'essence' of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and stories: "...we all know translation is always one level removed from the original" (Kanno, 1996, p. 14). How far above the original had I gone? And was this level consistent for all the data and for all the participants? As I grappled with this situation, I felt that I am the instrument that gives voice to the participants' struggles and their triumphs; and I share these with them as well. The way in which I have chosen to give them voice renders them legitimate.

6.3 Summary of findings

The goal of the present study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of Mexican instructors completing a graduate program in the U.S. These perceptions and

experiences pertained to: language, cultural and social aspects of life in another country, as well as to how they are entwined with issues of identity and power.

With respect to the language, academic, social, and cultural perceptions and experiences of the eight participants, it was clear that the nature of their identities as multiple, at times contradictory, dynamic, evolving, and with a sense of unification/reconciliation of their two homes (Mexico and/or the U.S.) proved to be the essential ingredient in their journey as international graduate students in the U.S. Participants were also able to create and develop strategies that allowed them to compensate for their lack of mastery of the language. In doing so they were able to carry out their programs despite some difficulties (e.g. not having a thesis supervisor).

Most participants showed that their perception of “correct” English (e.g. mainly pronunciation) was an important element in their attempt to become legitimate speakers (Bourdieu, 1977; Norton, 2000); therefore, having a noticeable foreign accent would cause them to be ignored, whereas not having a noticeable foreign accent caused them to be heard (see quotes on page 72). Another important aspect regarding participants’ perceptions and experiences regarding language, cultural, and social issues of their life in the U.S., was the fact that for many of them this was the first time they were confronted with diverse dialects of English and Spanish as well as their perceptions of other cultures (e.g. American, Mexican-American) and their own ethnic identity.

The participants also experienced power relations –sometimes rewarding, others detrimental- in academia during their graduate programs. These power relations evidently promoted, delayed, or denied the participants’ access to the Inner Circle. However, most the participants had the support of their supervisors, professors, family, or friends who, beyond

any obstacles, empowered them as individuals facing a new environment full of challenges and rewarding experiences.

6.4 Implications for Further Research and Concluding Remarks

By the time this study was concluded, two participants had already returned to Mexico: Choffis and Baali jeeka. Choffis has already finished her Ph.D. program, while Baali jeeka is currently working on final corrections to his thesis. As they await job openings, I reflect on the possibilities of further research examining their life as returnees (Brabant, Palmer, & Grambling, 1990; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Kanno, 1996) their reentry into Mexico, their becoming bicultural, multi-competent, and their academic and cultural environment. This is an important issue to explore, particularly concerning the major granting agencies (CONACYT and PROMEP) which continue to provide individuals with the opportunity to study abroad. A possibility for these granting agencies would be to create prerequisites for scholarship hopefuls to fulfill: a) EAP courses prior to leaving to study abroad; these courses would mainly focus on language and academic skills; b) orientation to scholarship candidates regarding the academic and job market in both the Inner and Outer Circles. This would promote research contextualized in Mexico's current social, educational, and economic issues.

Another area for expanding the issues addressed in this thesis is the traditional English curriculum still so entrenched across Mexico at several public universities. For most of the participants, this traditional curriculum did not facilitate their immersion into academia, but rather left them feeling inadequately prepared and in need of further English instruction. Baali jeeka, Darío, and Ernesto are testimony to this situation, where they had to take additional English courses to comply with the language requirements set by their particular program of study. A greater focus on English for Academic Purposes curriculum for students preparing for study abroad, might help to ease the transition of Mexican instructors studying in an

English-speaking context. This particular aspect has become even more apparent in the curriculum renewal process that many public universities across Mexico have undergone. The new curricula present two parallels: on the one hand, English has become a requisite for undergraduate students; on the other hand, current teaching faculty (e.g. Engineering, History, Psychology) at many public universities do not themselves possess the level of proficiency envisioned for students. Therefore, there is an imminent need for EFL instructors to engage in the recognition and implementation of EAP curricula to meet the demands of the existing Outer Circle scholars (e.g. university faculty) and those of Outer Circle scholars-to-be (e.g. undergraduate students).

“Will [teachers] construct EAP exclusively as academic and workplace preparation or also as a place where students can shape and transform what is being offered to them?” (Benesch, 2001, p. 136). One of the purposes of the present study is to raise awareness towards the construction of the latter: a critical EAP program responding to the imminent power relations in academia across the globe. Among the viable solutions for Outer Circle scholars, Swales (1997) calls for ‘rhetorical consciousness-raising’ on the part of the [English-speaking] cultures, to promote and accept linguistic diversity (p. 380), whereas Tardy (2004) and Flowerdew (2000) propose collaborative work and mentoring between Inner Circle advisors and their departing students. The promotion of exchange programs at the undergraduate and graduate level among universities in Mexico and other Inner Circle universities would also be a viable solution. Mexican public universities also benefit from the expertise of visiting Inner Circle scholars. These alternatives already occur at many public universities in Mexico, but are not fully exploited. In these alternatives we can find that there would not only be an academic exchange of ideas and expertise, but that cultural, social, and power relations are also encouraged.

It is important to note that the granting agencies that have provided financial support to all the participants, as well as myself, would greatly benefit from an understanding and appropriate institutional response to the issues raised in this study. These funding agencies provide these scholarships in the hopes that one day we all become Inner and Outer Circle scholars, thus strengthening our country's economic and scientific growth. But in order to carry out these solutions, policy makers and language teachers in Mexico (and in the rest of the world) have to be made aware of the effects of globalization in our country (ies).

...[We] should understand the timeliness of globalization as a theme for sociolinguistics as an internal development, motivated by sociolinguistics' own familiar priorities – being accountable to language data in social environments, pursuing issues of social value in language variation, and critiquing the linguistic and discursive bases of social inequality (Coupland, 2003, p. 465-466).

As an Outer Circle scholar-to-be, I strongly support the need for Outer Circle academics to enter and participate in the 'production' of research in English, as a way to legitimize their work in their areas of expertise (Tardy, 2004), and to be recognized around the world. However, it is evident that many Outer Circle scholars may feel more comfortable *reading* than *producing* English-language texts; as a result, these scholars are often excluded from participation as central members of the international academic community (Duszak as cited in Tardy, 2004, p. 251).

Finally, and of major concern to the present study, is the notion of ethnic identity which surfaced from some of the participants' stories with regards to their language perceptions of a particular community: The Mexican-American community in the United States. I consider this an important issue for further research in these times of imminent globalization, due to the fact that Mexico is a multicultural country and yet, as a nation, we are still struggling to recognize

our own ethnic diversity. As educators we have to constantly challenge and advocate that both teachers and students recognize the conditions in which they teach and learn and by doing so, provide opportunities that will empower and improve our societies, our nations.

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Appendix A

Granting Agencies

In this appendix I have summarized the three main scholarships the participants and I receive as Mexican graduate students. We all receive at least one of these scholarships or a combination of one of these with another funding agency (either a Mexican university or the host university in the United States). As recipients of these scholarships, the participants and I have signed an agreement and are therefore required to return to Mexico to work at either a public university or at a research center. The federal government in Mexico has created repatriate programs (as in the case of CONACYT) that provide returnees with jobs in their areas of expertise once they complete their graduate or postgraduate programs.

PROMEP

In 1996, SEP¹² created a national program in Mexico, which allowed most full-time tenure track instructors working at public or technological universities to have access to scholarships that would allow them to complete graduate and postgraduate programs in the Mexican Republic or outside the country. As a result, PROMEP (Programa de Mejoramiento al Profesorado-Development Program for Professors) was created. PROMEP's main objective is to prepare full time instructors to develop expertise in diverse research areas, particularly within public universities. Its goal has been to ensure that all full time tenure track instructors complete at least a Masters program by the year 2006. This goal was established in order to enrich the academic and research environment in Mexican public universities. SEP also provides a variety of research grants to those professors who had already completed graduate programs before the creation of PROMEP.

CONACYT

The Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología-CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology), was created in 1970 by the Federal Congress of Mexico. Its objective (as it is PROMEP's) has been to facilitate financial support to those individuals interested in pursuing academic and professional development in their areas. As declared in their mission statement, CONACYT wishes to promote and strengthen scientific development

¹² Secretaría de Educación Pública-Ministry of Education in Mexico, at federal level.

and technological modernization in Mexico by providing resources to encourage and sustain specific research projects and the promotion of scientific and technological information (see <http://info.main.conacyt.mx/>). CONACYT works most of the time in conjunction with public universities and since it was created before PROMEP, it gave instructors - who were not tenure track - the opportunity for academic advancement. CONACYT not only offers full time scholarships, but complementary scholarships to those students who are receiving funding from their host university. I believe that this will somewhat ensure that the scholarship recipients return to Mexico since they have a commitment with a federal institution, as well as a guarantee to be repatriated who will hold a job in a public university or research institute. In order to accomplish and reinforce this, CONACYT created the: National System of Science and Technology (SNI initials in Spanish¹³) which offers grants for recognized researchers in Mexico. CONACYT hopes that by the year 2025, Mexico's economic system will be one of the ten strongest in the world.

Fullbright-García Robles

The Fullbright-García Robles scholarship is a program that as well as the other two, works in conjunction with other scholarship programs (CONACYT) to provide financial support to academics in diverse areas. Fullbright is an organization that also provides funding in the United States and in Canada. In Mexico, the organization Fullbright-García Robles¹⁴ offers scholarships to academics who wish to complete a graduate program and/or do research in the United States (academic exchanges).

¹³ The SNI offers grants to Mexican researchers according to certain standards: number of publications, research projects. If granted, SNI offers a monthly complimentary salary to those researchers who maintain the standards established by CONACYT and SNI. For further information SEE <http://info.main.conacyt.mx/>

¹⁴ www.ujat.mx/publicaciones/paradigmas/may_jun2002/becasfullbright.html

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation (English)

Date

Dear professors,

I am writing to you with the intention of extending to you an invitation to participate in my Master's thesis Project. I am currently a full time student at the University of Ottawa in Canada. I am completing a Masters in Language Teaching and Learning at the Faculty of Education. My thesis project involves _____. My study adopts a qualitative stance and involves the following activities: an interview ranging from 60 to 90 minutes, audio taped with guided questions. Following the interview I will either phone or e-mail for any further clarification required. There will also be two sets of documents to read, one, the full transcript of the interview verbatim and the other will be a document which will include a series of excerpts from the interview. The objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of instructors completing their graduate program in an American university (regarding language, learning, and cultural aspects). This project has been submitted to the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa; therefore, all the information regarding this study, including your identities, location, and other revealing data will be held in strictest confidence. The use of a pseudonym will be employed at all times.

Professors interested in participating will be expected to meet the following criteria:

- 1) Participants should have learned English as a Foreign Language in Mexico;
- 2) Participants should not have lived in an English speaking country previous to their arrival in their graduate program; and
- 3) Participants should be registered full-time in a graduate program in the United States (preferably within the states of Arizona, California, and Texas).

Thanks for taking the time to read this information. If you decide to participate please notify me at the following e-mails

e-mail addresses

Sincerely,

Name of researcher

Letter of Invitation (Spanish)

Estimados Maestras(os):

Por medio de la presente les hago llegar un cordial saludo así como extenderles la invitación a participar en mi proyecto de tesis de Maestría. Actualmente me encuentro inscrita en la Maestría en Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Lengua en la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Ottawa en Canadá. Mi proyecto de tesis concierne _____. Mi estudio, de carácter cualitativo involucra una entrevista grabada de entre 90 minutos a dos horas (audio grabada), así como comunicación via correo electrónico con preguntas guiadas (dependiendo de la entrevista original). El estudio busca explorar las percepciones de maestras (os) en un país anglófono (con respecto al aprendizaje de lengua y otros aspectos). Dicho estudio será registrado ante el Comité de Etica de la Universidad de Ottawa (REB: Research Ethical Board) en donde se garantiza total anonimato a los participantes así como uso de pseudónimo en la presentación de resultados en el trabajo de tesis final.

Los participantes de mi proyecto deberán cumplir con los requisitos:

- 1) Haber estudiado inglés como lengua extranjera en México previo a su estancia en Estados Unidos,
- 2) No haber vivido en un país anglófono previo a sus estudios de posgrado y
- 3) Estar inscritos y completando estudios de posgrado (maestría, doctorado o posdoctorado) en Estados Unidos (preferentemente en Arizona, California y Texas).

Agradezco el tiempo que se hayan tomado en leer esta información. Sí deciden participar, favor de notificarlo a su servidora por medio de correo electrónico.

A T E N T A M E N T E

Correo electrónico

Nombre de investigador

Appendix C

Sample of Consent Form (English)

Consent Form

Researcher's information	Supervisor's information
Researcher's name	Supervisor's name
Faculty	Faculty
University of Ottawa	University of Ottawa
Researcher's e-mail	Supervisor's university address and phone number
	Supervisor's e-mail

I, _____, agree to participate in the Masters thesis project conducted by (name of researcher) of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The project is under the supervision of (name of supervisor). The purpose of the research is to identify the perception of language, learning, and cultural experiences attributed to a population of Mexican graduate students pursuing a degree in an American university.

My participation will consist essentially of attending four sessions which consist of 1) a one on one **audio recorded** interview lasting between 60-90 minutes where the researcher will ask a series of questions regarding my experience as a graduate student in the U.S.; 2) a phone call or e-mail requesting additional information regarding the initial interview; 3) going over the full transcript (verbatim) to verify that the information provided is accurate; and 4) going over the quotes selected by the researcher and provide further clarification. The sessions have been scheduled for the months of July and August of 2004.

I am aware that my participation in this research is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research project at any time, before or during an interview, refuse to participate and refuse to answer questions.

I also understand that the information I offer as well as data obtained from the interview will be used mainly for the thesis research; however, a summary of findings may also be presented at an academic symposium or a scholarly publication. During the research process, all information provided will be kept confidential. My name and identity will be protected by using a pseudonym as well as any other potentially revealing data (including location of university where I am studying). I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential.

Sample of Consent Form (Spanish)

Formato de Consentimiento

Información del investigador

Información del supervisor

Nombre

Nombre

Facultad de

Facultad de

Universidad de Ottawa

Universidad de Ottawa

Número de teléfono

Número de teléfono

Correo electrónico

Correo electrónico

Yo, _____, acepto participar en el proyecto de tesis conducido por Nombre de investigador de la Facultad de _____ de la Universidad de Ottawa. El proyecto esta bajo la supervisión de Nombre de Supervisor. El propósito de esta investigación es el de

_____.

Mi participación consistirá esencialmente en asistir a cuatro sesiones las cuales consistirán de 1) una entrevista audio grabada de persona a persona que tendrá duración entre 60-90 minutos donde el investigador efectuará una serie de preguntas en relación a mi experiencia como estudiante graduado en los Estados Unidos; 2) una llamada por teléfono o via correo electrónico donde se me solicite alguna información adicional en relación a la entrevista inicial; 3) revisar la transcripción completa (verbatim) para verificar que la información sea veraz; y 4) revisar las citas seleccionadas por el investigador para proporcionar alguna clarificación adicional. Las sesiones han sido calendarizadas para los meses de Julio y Agosto de 2004.

Estoy consciente de que mi participación en esta investigación es voluntaria y que soy libre de declinar mi participación en este proyecto de investigación en cualquier momento, antes o durante la entrevista, renunciar a participar y rechazar responder preguntas.

También entiendo que la información que yo ofrezco, al igual que los datos que se obtengan de la entrevista serán utilizados esencialmente para la investigación de la tesis; sin embargo, un resumen de los resultados podrá presentarse también en algún simposio académico o en publicaciones escolares. Durante el proceso de investigación, toda la información que se proporcione será mantenida como confidencial. Mi nombre e identidad serán protegidas mediante el uso de un pseudónimo al igual que cualquier dato que potencialmente me identifique (incluso locación de la Universidad donde me encuentro estudiando). He recibido la seguridad por parte del investigador de que la información que yo comparta será estrictamente confidencial.

Las cintas grabadas de las entrevistas y datos obtenidos serán mantenidos de manera segura. El investigador conservara las grabaciones en un lugar seguro (en un gabinete cerrado en la oficina del investigador) y las grabaciones y otros datos serán conservados por un periodo de cinco años.

Appendix D

Interview Guide (English)

English Language learning

1. Is English your 2nd, 3rd, 4th language?
2. At what age did you begin studying English?
3. Where did you learn English? For how long have you studied English?
4. What kind of courses did you take? Please describe content and pedagogy used.
Example: Speaking courses, where the content was general English, students engaged in conversations, etc.

Use the chart below to describe your English language study history. Include any information you believe to be important¹⁵.

School	Approximate dates		Type of Study (e.g. level, length of time, teaching focus, content, etc.)
	From	To	
Foreign Languages Department UniSon		Present	TOEFL course (practice exercises for the TOEFL test, listening exercises, reading exercises)

Educational and occupational background

5. What is your discipline or area of expertise? (e.g. Physics, Psychology, etc.)
6. What degree are you working towards?

Masters _____ Doctorate _____ Post doctorate _____

7. For how long have you worked as an instructor?
8. For how long have you worked for the University of Sonora?
9. What were the reasons why you decided to pursue a graduate program abroad? Why did you choose this university?

Main interview questions

¹⁵ Table adapted from Waterhouse (2004). This table will be completed by the researcher as the interview is being conducted.

10. For how long have you been living in _____?

11. Before starting your graduate program, what were your perceptions of the following needs regarding language, learning, and life in another culture? Please feel free to expand your responses:

- a) What was important to know about particular skills in English, i.e. writing, reading, etc.? Did you face any problems regarding these skills? What kind of problems? How did you resolve these problems?
- b) What learning strategies have been the most relevant to your program of study (e.g. library skills, time management)?
- c) What was important to know about the culture of _____?
- d) What was important to know about the modus operandi of living in a different culture, society, country (we refer to these as “survival skills”)?

12. During the program, in what ways have your perceptions about the particular English skills, the culture of _____, and survival skills been transformed?

13. What particular events and/or experiences have been significant to the completion of your program? Why and how?

14. Which key people have influenced the completion of your program? (family, friends, spouse, and peers) Why and how?

15. What role has motivation played in the completion of your program?

16. Provide specific examples of your relationship with your advisor/supervisor. How has this relationship influenced, if at all, your studying?

17. Provide specific examples of your relationship with other professors. In what ways, if any, have these relationships influenced your studying?

18. How has the experience of living in another culture shaped your future professional life?

19. Do you plan on going back to Mexico when you complete your program? Why or why not?

20. Do you want to become a ‘producer’ or ‘consumer’ of research in English? Do you want to publish in Spanish?

Interview Guide (Spanish)

Aprendizaje del idioma inglés

1. Es el inglés su segunda, tercera o cuarta lengua?
2. A qué edad comenzó a estudiar inglés?
3. Donde aprendió inglés? Por cuanto tiempo?
4. Qué tipo de cursos ha tomado? Por favor describa el contenido y pedagogía utilizada.
Ejemplo: Cursos enfocados en la habilidad oral, donde el contenido es inglés general, los estudiantes participan en conversaciones.

Utilice la siguiente gráfica para describir su historial de aprendizaje del idioma inglés. Incluya la información que usted considere¹⁶.

Escuela	Fechas aproximadas		Tipo de cursos (e.g. nivel, duración, énfasis, contenido, etc.)
	Desde	Hasta	
Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras UniSon		Presente	Curso de TOEFL (ejercicios de práctica para el examen de TOEFL, ejercicios de audición y lectura)

Información de educación y profesional

- 5.Cuál es su disciplina de especialidad? (e.g. física, psicología, etc.)
- 6.Cuál es el grado que obtendrá?

Maestría _____ Doctorado _____ Postdoctorado _____

7. Por cuantos años ha sido maestro?
8. Por cuanto tiempo ha trabajado para una universidad pública (u otra)?
9. Cuáles fueron las razones por las cuales decidió llevar a cabo estudios de posgrado?
Porqué eligió esta universidad?

¹⁶ Gráfica adaptada de Waterhouse (2004).

Preguntas principales

10. Por cuanto tiempo a vivido en _____?
11. Antes de comenzar sus estudios, cuales eran sus percepciones de los siguientes aspectos con relación al lenguaje, aprendizaje y vida en otra cultura? Por favor sientase en libertad de expandir sus respuestas:
 - a) Qué era importante saber acerca de habilidades particulares del inglés i.e. escritura, lectura, etc.? Enfrentó usted problemas entorno a dichas habilidades? Qué tipo de problemas? Cómo resolvió estos problemas?
 - b) Cuáles han sido las estrategias de aprendizaje mas relevantes e importantes durante sus estudios (e.g. búsqueda de fuentes bibliográficas, administración de tiempo)?
 - c) Qué era importante conocer de la cultura de _____?
 - d) Qué era importante conocer sobre el modus operandi de vivir en otra cultura, sociedad, país (aquí nos referimos a las “habilidades de sobrevivencia”)?
12. Durante su programa de estudios, en que forma se han transformado sus percepciones acerca de las habilidades del idioma inglés, de la cultura de _____ y de sus habilidades de sobrevivencia?
13. Qué eventos en particular y/o experiencias han sido significativas para el cumplimiento de sus estudios? Porqué y cómo?
14. Quienes han sido las personas clave que han influenciado el cumplimiento de sus estudios? (familia, amigos, pareja, compañeros) Porqué y cómo?
15. ¿Qué papel ha tenido la motivación en el desarrollo de su programa?
16. Proporcione ejemplos específicos de su relación con su supervisor/asesor. Cómo ha esto influenciado, sí del todo sus estudios?
17. Proporcione ejemplos específicos de su relación con otros profesores. En que forma, sí alguna, han estas relaciones influenciado sus estudios?
18. Cómo ha la experiencia de vivir en otra cultura transformado su vida profesional futura?
19. Planea regresar a México? Porqué o porqué no?
- 20.. ¿Desea usted convertirse en un consumidor o productor de investigación/conocimiento en su área (publicar en Inglés)? ¿Desea publicar en español?

Appendix E

Follow-up Questions (English)

1. Some of the participants have mentioned the importance of speaking English “correctly”. Do you consider that speaking English “correctly” is important in the development of your Masters or Ph.D.? Do you believe it would improve your academic status?
2. Taking the previous question into consideration, Do you believe that you would have the same academic status (as a researcher and/or academic) in the U.S. as in Mexico? Yes/No, Why?
3. Since you arrived in the U.S.: Have you seen any changes in yourself (attitudes, perceptions of others) in this new context with regards to your contact with others (other cultures)?
4. How do you see yourself (an academic/researcher in the making, etc)? How do you see yourself in this particular context (e.g. academic culture, etc)?

Follow-up Questions (Spanish)

1. Algunos participantes mencionaron la importancia de hablar inglés “correcto”, mi pregunta es ¿Consideran importante que en el desarrollo de su doctorado o maestría el hablar inglés sin un acento marcado, escribirlo mejor, etc. les dará o dio un mejor status en el círculo académico en donde se encuentran?
2. Tomando en cuenta la pregunta número uno ¿Piensa usted que en Estados Unidos tendría el mismo status de profesor que ha tenido en México? Si/No, ¿Porqué?
3. ¿Desde que llegó a Estados Unidos, ha observado cambios en usted mismo (actitudes, percepción de otros) con respecto a su nuevo contexto y al contacto con personas de otras culturas?
4. ¿Cómo se ve usted (académica/o, profesor/a en formación, etc.)? ¿Cómo se ve usted en el actual contexto?

Appendix F

Sample of Reflective Journal

Participants' journey	My journey
<p>Participants have not lived in an English-speaking country before doing their graduate program (non-immersion experience).</p>	<p>I lived in the U.S. for four years (immersion experience). However, I did not learn to use English in academic contexts.</p>

Appendix G

Definitions of “gringo”

1. **Gringo**, adjective and noun, (Colloquial). (a) A person who is from the United States of America, that is part of this country or is related to it somehow; an American. (b) Someone who is blond and speaks a foreign language (Diccionario del Español Usual en México, 1996).
2. **Gringo**, (from discursive etymology), adjective, colloquial. A foreigner, particularly a native English speaker and in general a speaker of another language that is not Spanish (Diccionario de la Lengua Española, 2001).