Language Learning in the Era of Globalization: The International Student’s Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has resulted in a significant increase in the number of international students on American college campuses in the past decade (Institute of International Education, 2015). The growing population of international students on campuses in higher education has resulted in a new dynamic in the classroom. Diversity of languages and cultures is blossoming in classrooms, resulting in American and international students with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds learning side-by-side in the same classrooms. The purpose of this study is to better understand, from international students’ perspectives, how learning language in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom shapes their learning experience and cultural identity. This study was conducted as an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) through in-depth interviews with students at a highly selective and globalized American university. The results of this IPA study show that international students face unique struggles in the American higher education system, and leave their home countries to participate in the perceived best education system in the world. The results also demonstrate that international students’ personal cultures and identities are shaped, largely for the better, from studying in multicultural and multilingual classroom settings. Future studies are recommended to better understand the student (both international and domestic), teacher, and administrator experiences in this era of globalization and internationalization of higher education.

Keywords: multilingual, multicultural, cultural identity, language acquisition, international students, higher education
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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Research topic

The push for globalization in higher education has resulted in an increasing rate of American and international students with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds learning side-by-side in the same classrooms (Institute of International Education, 2015). Despite growing interest in the effects of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the classroom, there is much to be learned about the perceptions students have of these factors on language learning and cultural identities. Foreign language classrooms present a unique opportunity to study the effects of internationalization of classes on culture and language learning, because culture and language are the main focus of the curricula. Students in foreign language classes where the students have diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds have a unique perspective on globalization, which needs further investigation.

Research/Problem statement

This study sought to better understand the student perspective on language learning in the era of globalization. Globalization is broadly defined as a complex process of change that has economic, social, and cultural components (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Globalization is more specifically defined as the creation of world relationships based on the operation of global free market and due to the flow of mobile capital, mobile goods and services, mobile populations, and mobile cultures (Maringe & Foskett, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The globalization movement diminishes the sense of nationality, promotes a blended identity among immigrants and international students at universities, and forces us to examine the differences and complexities of relationships (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Internationalization is
defined as the integration of international or intercultural qualities into teaching, research, and service (Maringe & Foskett, 2010). As the internationalization of higher education accelerates, it must be better understood how students, from both American and various international backgrounds perceive their language learning experiences and how these experiences may shape their ideas of what defines their individual cultures. Several studies have highlighted the particular challenges facing international students on college campuses (Yan & Sendall, 2016; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011; Martin, 2010), explained in part due to the mismatch between campus environment and international students’ needs. The lack of studies that focus on student experiences, result in the inability for teachers, students, and administrators to fully understand campus culture, and the ability to take any reflective or corrective actions to address potential inequity in resources and curricula.

**Purpose statement**

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to understand students’ perceived effects of globalization on cultural identities and the foreign language learning experience for students enrolled in elementary Italian language courses at a highly selective private university.

**Justification for the research problem**

Rubin (2014) described how international student retention rates are outpacing domestic student retentions rates, and that the international student retention rate rose 37% between 2004 and 2012. Rubin (2014) also explained the many challenges that international students face, and how universities must focus efforts on supporting international students to avoid losing retention. Banjong (2015) and Akwanwa (2015) noted how international students experience decreased academic performance due to several factors: culture shock, medical concerns,
homesickness, loss of social support, housing issues, discrimination, language barriers, lack of support services, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) also pointed out the negative academic and psychosocial effects that have been found when students’ cultural and linguistic needs are not met on campus. Halic, Greenburg, and Paulus (2009) discussed several studies which have investigated how international students re-shape their identities upon entering American universities for the first time, while Banjong (2015) noted how the process of re-shaping identity is more detrimental for international students than domestic students.

Vetter (2011) and Waheed (2009) noted the varying linguistic backgrounds of students learning a foreign language side-by-side results in some students being at an advantage and others at a disadvantage under the current foreign language teaching practices. Akanwa (2015) described how international students from the same countries or similar cultures worked best with one another. Akanwa (2015) also noted how international students bonded best with domestic students when they shared similar experiences. These studies suggest that culture and language backgrounds are important and influential for international students’ success. These factors must be better understood in order for universities to address the problems that international students face.

Considering the rapid pace of international student bodies on college campuses, and the trends of language and cultural diversification of American populations, investigations into learning in multicultural and multilingual environments will be crucial for informing future administrators, teachers, and students. Administrators would be better equipped to create policies and programs that foster equity and improved experiences for international students. Teachers could better facilitate learning, communication, and a positive cultural experience for
students. Students would benefit from improved campus structure and services, as well as being able to better understand their own and other students’ perspectives and cultures.

Due to these areas of inequity and lack of universities to adjust to the internationalization of campuses, several studies call for further research in this area (Kathard & Pillay, 2007; Lineman & Miller, 2012; Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009). Several studies also call for universities to dedicate more financial resources to supporting international students to improve their experiences and keep them enrolled (Rubin, 2014; Banjong, 2015; Akanwa, 2015). Though language barriers are a real challenge for international students (Akanwa, 2015; Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Banjong, 2015), Rubin (2014) reported that international students were more concerned with financial and employment issues when asked why they were unable to continue at an American university. This suggests that there may be a mismatch between the universities’ perceptions of problems with international students’ perception of problems.

Gaining insight into how international students experience American universities, and more specifically, how the multicultural and multilingual environment shapes students’ learning and perceptions will be vital to ensuring optimal and equitable learning experiences for all students.

**Deficiencies in the evidence**

There is a well-established body of literature exploring students’ cultural identities at the college level, and a subset of this body of literature focusing on international and American students in the age of globalization. Also, a strong body of literature examining foreign language learning exists. There are not, however, many studies that investigate where these two realms intersect: investigation of what it is like to learn a foreign language in a classroom with culturally and linguistically diverse domestic and international students. Further, there are not many studies that consider how learning in multicultural and multilingual foreign language
classrooms may shape students’ cultural identities. Therefore, this study sought to understand the students’ perceptions of the multilingual and multicultural classroom’s effects on foreign language learning experience and, more broadly, on their cultural identity.

**Relating the discussion to audiences**

This study would benefit international students to better understand what it means to learn a foreign language in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, which students are increasingly likely to encounter in American universities based on current trends. This study would also enhance foreign language instructors’ abilities to reach their diverse students in a way that is equitable and more reflective of the specific needs of all students. Administrators and policy makers would benefit from this study in order to ensure the proper support systems and teacher and student training strategies are in place to maximize learning and positive student engagements. Teacher instruction programs would also benefit from this study to be able to better equip teachers with the skills and perspectives necessary to ensure all students have a fair opportunity to learn in their classrooms. As globalization continues to influence our education system, many studies such as this study, will need to be conducted in order to best adjust to the changing times and prepare for the cultural and linguistic diversity of the future. The findings of this study have prepared the researcher to improve teaching practices and educate colleagues through the roles of change agent and scholar practitioner.

**Significance of the Research Problem (Context)**

According to the Institute of International Education (2015), the international student population in the United States has risen by 73% over the past decade, with the 2014 to 2015 year showing the highest growth rate of 10%. The largest increases in international student
population in the U.S. were from Brazil, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia (Institute of International Education, 2015). This internationalization of college campuses has resulted in a new dynamic and balance in foreign language classrooms. Students’ prior cultural and linguistic exposures influence their language learning abilities and their experiences learning a foreign language. As classrooms internationalize, the student experience changes, and this must be better understood to best serve students from all backgrounds.

One area that is changing with the increased international student body is a more diverse language background for many students upon entering college. According to the Pew Research Center (Devlin, 2015), European students in 20 countries are required to learn two foreign languages, and many schools begin foreign language instruction for children aged 6-9. Lindqvist (2009) also discussed that European students often have a prior knowledge of 3 or more languages when they reach the college level. By contrast, in American schools, foreign language learning is sometimes not a requirement and most often does not begin until high school (Devlin, 2015).

According to Rhodes and Pufahl (2009), foreign language instruction in American high schools was around 93%, however, the languages offered were dominated by only two languages: Spanish and French. About 25% of American adults report being able to hold a conversation in a language other than English, and of this group, 55% report this language to be Spanish (McComb, 2001). Eighty nine percent of American adults who report being well-versed in a non-English language report having learned it in the home, and only 7% report having learned this language in schools (Devlin, 2015).

Overall, international students are equipped with more diverse language and cultural exposure than many American students when entering college (Devlin, 2015). Waheed (2009)
and Vetter (2011) argue that the characteristics and types of prior language exposure have major influences over the learning of a foreign language, which suggests that some American and international students may be learning the Italian language in differing ways, and that some students may have an advantage or disadvantage based on their language background. Students with diverse backgrounds may have greatly varied perceptions and experiences of learning a foreign language in a classroom with students with different language and cultural backgrounds from their own.

Though American universities have been quickly increasing international student populations on campuses over the past decade in particular, it is unclear how prepared students, teachers, and campus cultures are for the changes in culture and language backgrounds of the new student bodies. Kathard and Pillay (2007) argued that educators were not adequately trained to address the changing landscape of the college classroom cause by internationalization of college campuses. There are a lack of studies that investigate the intersection of students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds with their learning of a foreign language, and the cultural and linguistic environment in which they are learning. Lineman and Miller (2012) called for more studies to investigate culturally and linguistically diverse classroom settings. Halic, Greenberg, and Paulus (2009) also called for more research to be done to better understand teaching of foreign languages to linguistically and culturally diverse students and student groups.

This study demonstrated a variety of student perspectives to richly enhance the current body of literature that exists on foreign language learning and effects of multicultural and multilingual classrooms on students’ cultural identities. Knowledge from this study is intended to inform foreign language instruction and multicultural and multilingual learning environments.
Having a better understanding of how students’ perspectives of these internationalized learning environments will allow teachers and administrators to better serve and support students and provide for educational equity. Furthermore, as globalization increased internationalization of college campuses around the world, studies such as this one will inform the global education community of the perceived effects on students’ learning experiences.

Entering college for the first time is an adjustment for students, which has the potential to become an increasingly complex and rich as student populations diversify. Adams, Berzonsky, and Keating (2006) detailed the influences on college students as they re-shape their identities to transition from youth to adulthood. Martin (2010) described students’ cultural identities as complex, and discussed how students must fluidly shift their cultural identities and perspectives frequently given the context of their situation. Martin (2010) also demonstrated that students’ cultural identities were an important factor in their academic success, as well as, their ability to connect to the university culture. However, it has been shown that there can be negative psychological and behavioral consequences when students’ cultural and linguistic needs are not met on campus (Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). More studies need to be done to determine ways in which students of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds have an equal opportunity to grow positively through their college experience.

**Positionality Statement**

At the age of 19, I left Italy to attend college in the United States. I became an American citizen shortly before finishing my undergraduate studies. I went on to graduate school and began teaching the Italian language. Some of my earliest cultural identities included Northern Italian, Catholic, and European. Later, I identified with being an immigrant to the United States,
and as an international student. Even long after I became an American citizen, I still felt like an outsider in many cultural and linguistic situations. As a former international student, and a teacher of many international students, I am aware that I may view my research with special attention to the international student perspective. I worked to continually question my research methods and analysis to see if there were opposing ideas that I may not have been considering due to my biases. I am also aware of how aspects of my cultural heritage may shape how I am able to relate to the cultural nuances of students involved in my research. I was cautious of cultural and linguistic stereotypes and to question my assumptions of students’ perspectives as related to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

I am aware that my biases have influenced the conclusions I drew from my research or how I conducted my investigation, and therefore I have been dedicated to reflection and self-critique. The nature of my research, however, was rooted in examining cultural and linguistic influences and differences, from the unique perspectives of my students based on their individual backgrounds. This was, in a sense, protective of my biases. In this way, I was always trying to dissect the nuanced positionalities of my research participants in relation to Italian language learning in the multicultural and multilingual setting. Perhaps because positionality, culture, language, and biases were integral to understanding my research, I was better able to question myself and control for my biases. The use of objective peer and mentor feedback throughout the research process has also serves as a tool for keeping my biases in check.
Research Question

This qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with international and American students enrolled in introductory Italian language courses was framed by the overarching question:

What are the learning and cultural experiences of international undergraduate students in an American-based foreign language classroom?

Definition of Key Terminology

Culture and Cultural Identity – Nieto (2008) defined culture as a living, ever-changing entity that is socially constructed, created, learned, and influenced by economics and politics. All cultures are complex and cognitively challenging to understand (Hilliard, 2008).

Goodenough (1961) defined culture as a phenomenon that is created through interactions and learning. Culture is a living construct that exists at societal, group, and individual levels (Goodenough, 1961). For the purposes of this study, culture was defined as: what one learns of the things one needs to know in order to meet the standards of others (Goodenough, 1961). Cultural identity was also defined as complex, fluid, and consisting of potentially many cultures at the individual level (Goodenough, 1961).

Globalization – Globalization is broadly defined as a complex process of change that has economic, social, and cultural components (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Globalization is more specifically defined as the creation of world relationships based on the operation of global free market and due to the flow of mobile capital, mobile goods and services, mobile populations, and mobile cultures (Maringe & Foskett, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The globalization movement diminishes the sense of nationality, promotes a blended identity among immigrants
and international students at universities, and forces us to examine the differences and complexities of relationships (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004).

**Internationalization** – Internationalization is defined as the integration of international or intercultural qualities into teaching, research, and service (Maringe & Foskett, 2010).

**Multiculturalism** – Multiculturalism is defined as culturally responsive pedagogy where students’ backgrounds are seen as assets to them, as opposed to barriers (Nieto, 2002). Sarraj, Bene, Li, and Burley (2015) define multiculturalism as attitudes, beliefs, values, and policies that affirm inclusivity of cultural and other life pattern differences to the point of producing multicultural individuals. These recent definitions of culture and multiculturalism include a social justice perspective and were the definitions used in this study.

**Language** – Language is defined as a group of behaviors which result in utterances produced and received by a community of speakers (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009). Aronin and Hufeisen (2009) go on to explain that language is a social construct that is complex and difficult to define at its borders and to separate from cultural and social influences.

**Multilingualism** – Multilingual is defined as the person who has the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009). Historically, studies have sought to distinguish one’s status as multilingual based on language proficiency, which has proven to be difficult and faulty in its measurement (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009). Instead, Aronin and Hufeisen (2009), support more recent categorization in the literature for a holistic view of all the languages in varying proficiency levels of a person to define multilingual.

**L1, L2, and L3** – The abbreviations, L1, L2, and L3, are also commonly used in the language acquisition literature. Rast (2010) defines L1 as one’s first language(s), learned in
infancy. L2 is defined as any language(s) learned after infancy (Hammarberg, 2010). Rast (2010) defines L3 as a non-native language which is currently being used or acquired in a situation where the person already has knowledge of one or more L2s. Hammarberg (2010) makes the distinction to define L3 as an L2 which is actively being learned or investigated in a research study, which is different from prior studies which assign L3 to the 3rd language acquired chronologically. Hammarberg’s (2010) definition of L3 clarifies the terms and eliminates the need for the terms L4, L5, and so on. In this study, Hammarberg’s (2010) definitions of L1, L2, and L3 are utilized, to provide clarity and provide a holistic approach to defining participants’ language backgrounds.

**Theory**

Culture theory as developed by W. H. Goodenough (1961) was an appropriate lens through which to view this study. Culture theory’s emphasis on culture at the individual and group levels plays an important role in explaining the relationships between the students’ individual cultures and the class culture as a group. Culture theory’s reliance on principles from linguistics to define the tenets of the theory are fitting for a study that examines language learning in relation to a multicultural environment. The marriage of culture and linguistics in Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory is mirrored in the foundation of this study. This section describes the historical context of culture theory, criticism of culture theory, and the synthesis of culture theory as a theoretical framework as it applies to this study.

**Historical context of culture theory**

W. H. Goodenough (1961) wrote about culture theory after a multicultural and multilingual upbringing and after studying linguistics and anthropology. Goodenough’s work
was part of a movement called grounded theory, in which cultural anthropologists generally believed that a scientific approach could be employed in the study of cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973; Reed, 2010). Goodenough’s (2003) approach to the study of culture departed from the methods of the time. Goodenough’s (1961) approach to culture theory was focused from the perspective of the individual, at a time when culture was studied from the point of view of the researcher. Goodenough’s (2003) work was also being completed when others studying culture reduced the construct of culture to no more than a pattern of recurring events within a community, or the artifacts that a community used. In his approach, Goodenough built on the work of past anthropologists, but departed from their vantage point, setting the tone for a new way of studying culture for future researchers. Goodenough gave a direct voice to those he studied, allowing them to tell their own stories of their cultures.

Goodenough (1961) argued that culture could be studied and defined as language had been studied by linguists before Goodenough’s time. Culture is, like language, something learned by the individual so as to be able to adequately communicate and interact with others in an accepted way (Goodenough, 2003). Goodenough (2003) also argued that culture is like a living organism, which changes and mutates with each individual, and more broadly, with each new generation’s influence, which was a revolutionary idea. Prior scholars defined culture based on the inanimate objects and material items that a person used or had in their possession (Goodenough, 1961).

**Critics of culture theory**

Geertz (1973) argued against the work of Goodenough, citing it to be too formal and subjective for his conclusions to be considered as accurate measures of his subjects’ true experiences. Reed (2010) detailed how the criticisms of Geertz were an influential part of the
significant shift in perspective within cultural anthropology in the mid-1980’s towards post-modernism. The post-modernist critique of cultural anthropologists, such as Goodenough, was that there were no safeguards to ensure that any objectivity could come from the ethnographic field work that was conducted up until the 1980’s. Reed (2010) also pointed out that, despite the sharp criticism of Goodenough’s work, the field of cultural anthropology has shifted towards a more welcoming tone of Goodenough’s perspective on cross-cultural influences, as the globalization movement has risen in more recent years. Reed (2010) wrote that by taking a positivist approach, where one is open-minded and critical to the potential benefits and drawbacks to differing and strong stances, one may find current study of culture falling in between a post-modern approach and a grounded theory approach.

**Synthesis of theoretical framework**

Despite the critiques of culture theory as impossible to be objective, it is a fitting lens through which to examine this study. Though culture theory encourages an attempt to be objective, this study will allow for acknowledgement of potential biases in studying culture and language. This study will rely on the cultural principles of the culture theory without strictly adhering to the methodological approach taken by Goodenough (1961) in his own field work. A different methodological approach will be melded with the theoretical framework of Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory.

Goodenough (2013) argued that culture was a phenomenon that arose out of learning and interaction. Culture is what one learns of the things one needs to know in order to meet the standards of others (Goodenough, 1961). From this definition, this study is able to examine how students’ cultural identities arise from their learning experiences in a foreign language classroom. Goodenough (1961) also defined culture as consisting of what is, standards for what
can be, standards for deciding how one feels, standards for making decisions, and standards for how to go about actions that were decided. Culture at the individual level is referred to as the propriospect by Goodenough (1961), and is described as having the potential to contain many cultures, to be used by the individual given the social context of any given interaction. The idea of culture down to the individual level informs the data collection and analysis of this study. This study will rely on the principle of the propriospect to make sense of students’ individual cultural identities.

Goodenough (1961) defined operating culture, as the particular propriospect that an individual is employing at a given time due to their interaction at the time. One may use propriospect to understand and interpret the cultures and behaviors of others (Goodenough, 1961). This study will allow the subject to reflect on and explain their personal culture, as well as their operating culture in the foreign language classroom. Goodenough (1961) was adamant about the nature of studying culture: observation alone was not enough; specific conversations about culture with those being studied were necessary to fully grasp meaning of the culture and its terms. Goodenough (2003) also posited that one must have some understanding of the subjects being studied in order to successfully study a culture. These arguments shaped how this study was planned, designed, and implemented to ensure careful crafting of interview questions that seek to understand students’ unique perspectives.

Group culture was defined as being made up of all the individual propriospects of the group members (Goodenough, 1961). Goodenough (1961) argued that group culture may be shaped by a process called normative selection, whereby the variances in propriospects were contained within a dynamic system of standards created by the group interactions. Subcultures, with specific traditions, may form side-by-side within a group culture (Goodenough, 1961).
Goodenough (1961) likened subcultures to dialects of languages, where groups were formed due to their similarities and/or sharing of specific traditions. This concept of group culture guided this study’s evaluation of the student’s perceptions of the classroom or campus culture, and how it intersects with the students’ individual cultures and language learning experiences.

Society’s Culture (with a capital C) was defined as the overall system of mutually ordered public cultures of all the individuals in the society; in other words, the sum of all the contents of each individual’s propriospect (Goodenough, 1961). Goodenough (1961) elaborated on many other aspects of the theory of culture with respect to society and change, which are not necessary for the scope of this study. In order to focus in on the individual student and the group cultures, this study does not address the broader aspects of culture on the societal level, though this would be important for future studies to consider.

**Conclusion/Forward**

As globalization continues to spark further internationalization of college campuses, there will be a growing need to understand the complexities of language learning in multicultural and multilingual settings. Better preparing teachers for these rapid changes will be essential to ensuring equitable learning opportunities for both American and international students (Kathard & Pillay, 2007). This study was meant to begin to understand the phenomenon of foreign language learning in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. This study also was meant to contribute to the beginning of a conversation on multicultural and multilingual learning in the era of globalization, from the student perspective.

The literature review of chapter two presents the understandings that already exists in the separate worlds of language learning and multicultural classrooms. This study attempted to link
the two separate realms of research: linguistics and culture. Chapter three describes the research design. Chapter four will showcase the students’ perspectives on cultural identities and language learning in the multicultural and multilingual classroom setting. Lastly, chapter five will provide an analysis of the various student perspectives collected.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature regarding learning in multicultural settings and language acquisition. This study focused on the intersection of these two bodies of literature, where a current gap exists. As globalization changes the landscape of higher education in the United States and around the globe with growing numbers of multicultural and multilingual classrooms (Fischer, 2015; Maringe & Foskett, 2010), more research must be done to better understand the ways in which students learn, live, and grow in these settings. Currently there are a lack of studies that examine how students learn foreign languages in multicultural and multilingual college classrooms, and how this experience may shape students’ cultural identities.

This study sought to examine students’ perspectives of language learning and cultural identity in multilingual and multicultural classrooms. This review of the literature follows two major strands. The first strand in this literature review is learning in a multicultural setting. The second strand in this literature review is language acquisition. Chapter two concludes with a summary, which ties examines where the two strands of literature intersect and what may tie the two strands together.

Multicultural Education

This first strand of the literature review will examine the body literature on learning in a multicultural environment. This strand is further broken down into the following sub-sections: historical context; challenges facing students; cultural identity; pluralistic skills, reflection, and cultural sensitivity; and emotions and emotional intelligence.
**Historical context.**

Globalization has been going on for many years, but has been accelerated rapidly in the past two decades with the rise of technology and the internet (Maringe & Foskett, 2010). As globalization has gained momentum, it has come to be known as the movement that defines our current era (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). Dieck-Assad (2013) warns that globalization results in winners and losers in the global marketplace, and that globalization has created disparities in who is able to be successful on the global marketplace and who is not. As globalization has progressed, higher education has become a commodity on the global marketplace, with American and European universities taking the lead as suppliers of higher education to the global community (Maringe & Foskett, 2010).

Internationalization of the student body is the method by which many universities have attempted to address the globalization movement (Maringe & Foskett, 2010). By increasing the number of international students in schools, universities have aimed to increase diversity for better appeal on the global market (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Internationalization of college campuses around the world does not occur in an even distribution. Eight countries account for accepting 72% of the world’s international students, which results in a skewed internationalization of student bodies across the universities of the world (Maringe & Foskett, 2010). The Western nations of the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, France, and Canada account for 54% of international students, whereas China, Australia, and Japan make up the other 18% (Maringe & Foskett, 2010). Carson (2009) points out the important influence that politics and immigration policy, have on education and are shaped by globalization.
Wagner (2004) argued that the increased influence of Western nations in the globalization movement has created a skewed environment of globalization in higher education. The globalization movement has led to more homogeny and more mass culture, with a strong Western influence (Wagner, 2004). The American influence in this mass culture is larger than other countries due to the flow of international students into the United States from other parts of the world (Wagner, 2004). Based on the above percentages, it is important to understand that the Western societies play a more influential role in globalization by utilizing internationalization to a greater extent. This internationalization of Western universities has created an increase in multicultural classroom settings at higher education institutions, and a greater responsibility of Western universities to ensure equity in higher education.

Internationalization of college campuses in response to the globalization movement have directly influenced the make-up of the classrooms to be examined in this study. Students in this study will be international students studying at an American university and their presence will be partially influenced by the broader movements of internationalization and globalization. In the next section, the key findings from the contemporary body of literature on multiculturalism, globalization, and internationalization in higher education will be analyzed. Despite the abundance of international students in the United States, there are a lack of studies from American higher education institutions on multiculturalism and multilingualism. In this literature review, several international studies are included, which are relevant and give insight into multicultural learning in countries that have experienced multiculturalism and multilingualism for longer periods of time than in the United States.
Challenges facing students.

Research has highlighted the unique challenges of international students, and to a lesser extent, domestic students, when studying in multicultural settings. International students face particular challenges: lack of English language skills, lack of understanding of American culture and the American college environment, loneliness, depression, homesickness, isolation, and uncertainty about career opportunities (Yan & Sendall, 2016; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Students with a multicultural and multilingual background often face barriers, fears, and challenges on college campuses, that domestic students do not endure in the same way (Martin, 2010). When students’ cultural and linguistic needs are not met on campus, there can be negative psychological and behavioral affects (Zhou et al., 2011). Difficulties that students with varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds face, act as a barrier to their psychological well-being and behavior (Zhou et al., 2011). Zhou et al. (2011) also find that international students are underrepresented in university acculturation issues and receive little support from their institutions.

Pluralistic skills, reflection, and cultural sensitivity.

College is the time when students are able to deepen their ability to reflect, think cognitively, and consider the perspectives of others. Alon and Higgins (2005) describe the importance of having a mentor to guide reflection in order to increase cultural and emotional intelligences. Patterson (2013) argued that reflection and awareness of self must occur at a personal level, as well as, at the institutional level, in order for cultural awareness to become an attainable goal. Individuals must reflect on potential biases, as institutions must reflect on ways in which the institution may be perpetuating institutionalized oppression (Patterson, 2013).
These studies suggest the important role a foreign language teacher may play in facilitating reflection.

King and Shuford (1996) described the stages of reflective thinking, based on the Reflective Judgement Model. King and Shuford (1996) found that the majority of undergraduate students were in the phases of Pre-Reflection or Quasi-Reflection. Pre-reflective students were unable to fully consider all the facts, and made decisions based on past knowledge, and did not attempt to supplement their knowledge with new information (King & Shuford, 1996). Students in the Quasi-Reflective stages were able to consider facts from multiple sources, but were unable to effectively weigh the pieces of information in order to reach an ultimate decision or opinion (King & Shuford, 1996).

As King and Shuford (1996) discussed, only graduate students were consistently able to demonstrate true Reflective thinking skills, which allowed them to consider and weigh information from multiple sources, and reach a conclusion. The lack of ability for many college students to truly think reflectively sheds light on areas for potential challenge to learning in multicultural and multilingual environments. However, it was also demonstrated that students tended to gain the ability to think more reflectively as they advanced in their schooling, and one may argue that learning in a diverse setting would create more impetus for change than learning in a largely heterogeneous environment. This study attempted to shed light on undergraduate students’ ability to reflect on their own cultural identity and how the multicultural and multilingual classroom setting may have influenced their learning experience through an in-depth interview process.

Reflective thinking is intertwined with the stages of intercultural sensitivity (Bloom, 2008). Bloom (2008) outlined the stages of intercultural sensitivity: 1) Denial, 2) Defense, 3)
Minimization, 4) Acceptance, 5) Adaptation, and 6) Integration. Bloom (2008) discovered that when students reflect without prompts specific towards culture, their reflections tended to be more superficial, and not evolve past the third stage. The author set the expectation that students who are just beginning to learn about other languages and cultures should not be expected, without knowledge of the target language and culture, structured reflection, and discussion, to achieve the higher level of intercultural sensitivity (Bloom, 2008). The highest level of intercultural sensitivity is defined as the ability to shift cultural frame of reference and cultural identity (Bloom, 2008). This study also explored the potential role of foreign language instructors as facilitators of reflection and discussion of culture for improved cultural sensitivity.

Dlaska (2012) discussed how the act of language learning can promote reflective thinking skills. Language learning is also linked with cultural competence, however, teachers must facilitate this in the classroom (Dlaska, 2012). Based on the evidence, it may be true that foreign language classrooms may present an additional opportunity for students to evolve in their reflective thinking, and for educators to guide students in this process. Both Bloom (2008) and King and Shuford (1996) also discussed the need for students to be guided through their multicultural interactions for the best, most evolved thinking to take place. Similar charges have been made by those researching emotions in the multicultural classroom and emotional intelligence: students are likely to improve over time and through diverse interactions, but having strong and diverse role models was vital to this process (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008; Washington, Okoro, & Okoro, 2013).

**Emotions and emotional intelligence**

Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) discussed the important role that emotions play in the learning process, and unpack the emotions unique to learning about race and social
justice. Negative emotions, especially, must be explored for deeper understanding of oneself, and of perspectives that may be contrary to one’s own (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Teachers must help to guide students to recognize their emotions and dissect the roots and potential future effects of emotions evoked from learning in a multicultural setting (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Similar to Bloom (2008) and King and Shuford’s (1996) findings, Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) also noted that students present to multicultural classrooms with varying levels of ability to face the potential challenges in an evolved way; it is up to the teachers and the school to ensure that a more reflective and informed way of thinking and processing emotions can occur. Taking the discussion of emotions one step further, Washington, Okoro, and Okoro (2013) examined emotional intelligence and cross-cultural communication competence.

Washington, Okoro, and Okoro (2013) explored the importance of emotional intelligence and cross-cultural communication competence on learning in a multicultural classroom setting. Emotional intelligence was a construct defined by four variables: the appraisal and expression of emotion in the self, appraisal and recognition of emotion in others, regulation of emotion in the self, and use of emotion to facilitate performance (Washington et al., 2013). Washington et al. (2013) found that providing students with tools to increase their emotional intelligence and cross-cultural communication results in wiser career choices, reduced behavioral barriers to academic achievement, increased standardized test scores, and improved problem solving skills (Washington et al., 2013). Fostering both teachers’ and students’ emotional intelligences and cross-cultural communication skills results in improved teaching by educators and improved learning by students in multicultural classrooms (Washington et al., 2013). Students can grow in the areas of emotional intelligence and cross-cultural
communication when given the right guidance, and cannot be expected to tackle these challenging issues alone.

**Cultural identity**

Martin (2010) describes students’ cultural identities as complex, and how students must fluidly shift their cultural identities and perspectives frequently given the context of their present situation. Martin (2010) also demonstrates that a student’s cultural identity is an important factor in their academic success and their ability to connect to the university culture. Halic, Greenburg, and Paulus (2009) discuss how language and cultural identity are central to the academic experience of international students. Popov, Brinkman, Biemans, Mulder, Kutznetsov, and Noroozi (2011) examined the different perceptions of students in multicultural classroom environments. Popov et al. (2011) described the wide range of students’ perceptions regarding challenges of working with a multicultural student group. Students’ backgrounds played important roles in their perceptions of working with diverse student groups (Popov et al., 2011). These studies emphasize the importance of understanding students cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and how these experiences influence their malleable cultural identities.

**Conclusion**

The studies outlined above describe the importance of considering cultural identity, self-awareness, motivation, self-efficacy, cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and cross-cultural communication and reflective thinking skills when studying learning in multicultural classrooms. The current breadth of literature, however, does not cover all areas of need. Dlaska (2012) presented a compelling argument for more studies to examine the intersection between language learning and learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom environment with international students. There is very little research that examines the unique perspectives of
students learning language and culture in a multicultural classroom. Despite the literature presented above, there are several areas where more research would help to better equip teachers, students, and university leaders with the tools to best address the effects of globalization on education. This study addressed the unique experience of students learning a foreign language in a multicultural and multilingual setting, as taught by a multicultural and multilingual teacher. This study bridges the gap in the literature that exists between the study of language acquisition and cultural fluency. The next section analyzes the breadth of literature on language acquisition.

**Language Acquisition**

The second strand of the literature review will explore the research on the process of learning language. This strand is broken down into the following sub-sections: historical context, linguistic factors, learning style factors, and psychological factors.

**Historical context**

Though the study of language acquisition for one’s first and second languages has been the interest of research for centuries, Rast (2010) points out that the realm of researching language acquisition beyond one’s first or second language is a relatively emerging field. Aronin and Hufeisen (2009), outline how the study of multilinguals has shifted over recent decades. Studies of multilinguals was largely from the perspective of the monolingual using paradigms that attempt to use native language as the standard by which to measure one’s acquired language(s) and an outsider’s view of the participants’ language(s) to examine various language and literacy skills (Aronin & Hufeisen, 2009). Aronin and Hufeisen (2009) caution against the attempts to categorize and group research participants by language standards set by
the researcher. This study will be qualitative in nature and encourage participants to define themselves based on their own views of their individual language backgrounds.

The current perspective of linguistic studies has evolved to a more holistic and inclusive one, from a more discriminatory perspective in the past. The current social justice influence in the study of language acquisition aligns with the previously discussed stance of the current leaders in multiculturalism literature. The next section will discuss the findings of contemporary research on language acquisition in various education settings.

**Learning style factors**

Tight (2010) investigates the influence of learning style and mode of language learning on one’s foreign language acquisition. Tight (2010) notes that foreign language acquisition is affected by learning style and instruction style. When learning style and instruction style are matched, foreign language acquisition is improved over a scenario where learning style and instruction style are mismatched (Tight, 2010). More importantly, however, Tight (2010) demonstrates that when instruction style is multi-modal, foreign language acquisition is maximized over a scenario when learning style is matched with instruction style. Based on the findings of this study, it is important to consider students’ learning styles, and structure teaching style to incorporate matched and mixed modes of instruction of foreign language. Tight’s (2010) study suggests that further studies, such as this one, are necessary to better understand students’ perspectives on learning style and teaching style in the multicultural and multilingual foreign language classroom.

**Linguistic factors**

There are several linguistic factors that the literature has validated as factors that influence language acquisition. Rast (2010) explains how higher proficiency in L1(s) and L2(s),
leads to improved L3 acquisition. Waheed (2009) discusses how knowledge of an L2, generally increases the ease of learning an L3. The increased level of similarity of L1(s) and L2(s) to the L3 also increase the ability for one to learn the L3 (Waheed, 2009). The presence of universal grammar rules, that apply across many languages, assist one in learning a language that follows universal grammar rules (Rast, 2010). One’s length of time exposed to L2(s) and the recent use of L2(s) also play a role in one’s ability to acquire an L3 (Rast, 2010). Vetter (2011) points out that if one’s L1 is a Romance language, it facilitates learning another Romance language for the first time. Based on this literature, the internationalization of foreign language classrooms may result in very different language acquisitions rates and processes for domestic and international students learning side-by-side.

Vetter (2011) also discussed the greater effect that psychological factors may play in language learning than linguistic factors. The psychological factors in language acquisition will be discussed in the next section. Language acquisition in the multicultural and multilingual classroom setting must be better understood, and both psychological and linguistic factors must be considered. This study sought to investigate the language learning experience as well as the language backgrounds from students’ perspectives.

**Psychological factors**

**Perceptions about languages.**

Students’ perceptions play a very influential role in learning. Vetter (2011) discussed how the perceived distance between one’s L1 and L2 has a greater effect on one’s ability to learn the L2, even if both the L1 and L2 are Romance languages with similar characteristics. Rast (2010) identified that both the perceived distance and the perceived similarity of the L1 and the target language play a negative and positive role, respectively, in learning the target
language. Based on these studies, it is important for students to reflect on the similarities of the target language with previous language knowledge in order to promote positive influence of perceptions (Rast, 2010; Vetter, 2011). Busse and Walter (2013) describe how students’ growing perceptions of language courses being too difficult have resulted in declining enrollment in foreign language courses. This study focused on students’ perceptions of learning the Italian language, as well as, their perceived difficulty of learning in a multicultural and multilingual setting.

Anxiety.

Ipek (2009) examines the role of anxiety in language acquisition. Ipek (2009) describes the uniqueness of the language learning process, and how it produces foreign language anxiety, which is a complex characteristic comprised of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. Anxiety, depending on the level, can be a positive or negative influence on language learning (Ipek, 2009). Too much foreign language anxiety can interfere with a language learner’s ability to comprehend the content of the language being learned due to their distraction by anxiety during the learning process (Ipek, 2009). Hsieh (2008) discusses how negative attitudes and high levels of anxiety for learning a language result in poorer language acquisition. The right amount of foreign language anxiety, however, has been shown to promote motivation to acquire language skills (Ipek, 2009). This study sought to gauge students’ anxiety level and how they perceive that this may have been influenced by learning a foreign language in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom setting.

Motivation.

Other student factors that the literature review highlighted as influential to language learning, were the qualities of self-efficacy and motivation (Busse & Walter, 2013). Nicholson
(2013) discusses how motivation is a strong factor influencing one’s academic performance in language learning classrooms. Nicholson (2013) identifies several factors that influence motivation: one’s perception of the ideal L2 self, the enjoyment one receives from learning a language, and extrinsic factors. Hsieh (2008) points out that a positive attitude towards language learning leads to motivation and achievement in language learning. Students who are interested in learning about the culture associated with a language, particularly if that is a culture that is part of their family’s heritage, will have increased motivation to learn an L2 (Hsieh, 2008).

Busse and Walter (2013) pointed out that enjoyment of language learning was a greater factor in motivating students than was the desire to become proficient in a language. Motivation also relies on students’ perceptions that they are making progress with learning a foreign language (Busse & Walter, 2013). Based on this literature, it was important for this study to identify students’ reported motivations for learning the Italian language.

**Self-efficacy.**

Academic self-efficacy, one’s self-assessment of their capability to recognize and execute actions that are required to attain sufficient performance on a given task, is a strong psychological factor in language acquisition (Jabbarifar, 2011). Jabbarifar (2011) describes how one’s perception of their abilities is a strong predictor of academic success. Busse and Walter (2013) also discussed how past positive experiences with learning a language boost self-efficacy. Encouragement from others has a positive effect on self-efficacy, but less than the effect of enjoyment of learning and intrinsic motivation (Busse & Walter, 2013). When students are given an unfamiliar task, they have lowered levels of self-efficacy with language learning (Busse & Walter, 2013). Mastering tasks increased self-efficacy, but only if these tasks were perceived as not too simple or easy to complete (Busse & Walter, 2013).
It has also been found that positive vicarious experiences can positively influence self-efficacy, as well as the opposite being true for negative vicarious experiences negatively affecting self-efficacy (Jabbarifar, 2011). Busse and Walter (2013) also demonstrated a link between self-efficacy and self-perceived effort, showing that self-efficacy rises when students perceive that they are facing a challenge and are contributing effort to the language learning process. Along with this point, students put more effort into tasks when the tasks are perceived as achievable (Busse & Walter, 2013).

Hsieh (2008) also discusses the important role self-efficacy plays in language learning, and how it is a fluid and malleable trait. The four main factors that affect the learner’s self-efficacy are: past performance, observations of how well others are performing, verbal persuasion from others, and the presence of physiological signs of anxiety (Hsieh, 2008). Based on this literature, it was important for this study to address students’ perceptions of self-efficacy and whether learning in an internationalized classroom may have influenced their self-efficacy.

**Conclusion**

The language acquisition literature does not provide studies that examine the effect that multicultural learning environments bring to the language learning experience. Furthermore, the multicultural literature does not discuss in-depth the role of language differences in the classroom. The role of one’s culture and the perceptions and beliefs that one has about their culture and the target language’s culture are not investigated in the literature. The most meaningful gap that this study has bridged was how the two bodies of literature, language learning and multicultural education, are related. Both realms rely on similar psychological factors that can be investigated further to determine the link between language learning and cultural awareness.
Summary

The literature review has analyzed the bodies of research on multicultural education and language acquisition. The review of the literature revealed that there are many factors contributing to equitable and successful learning in multicultural environments. The literature review also demonstrated that there are several important factors in language learning, which are arguably becoming more important as globalization is linking more people who do not speak the same language. Despite the abundance of literature supporting the two stands of the literature review, multicultural education and language acquisition strands of research are lacking studies which tie the two strands together. Based on the literature review, there are, however, areas where the two strands intersect: psychological factors, personal backgrounds, and environmental conditions. These are the areas on which this study focused in order to draw the two realms of research together to examine the student experience of language learning in a multicultural setting. The need for a better understanding of the perceived effects of language learning in multilingual and multicultural classrooms is a theme that is supported separately by each strand of the literature review, and the current gap in literature that unites the two strands is an important area for future research as globalization continues to permeate higher education.
Chapter Three: Methods

Methodology

The main research question for this study was: What are the learning and cultural experiences of international undergraduate students in an American-based foreign language classroom?

Gathering data that sheds light on perceived factors outside the classroom, particularly involving multicultural and multilingual interactions, was a secondary goal of this study. Also, a secondary goal of this study was to illuminate the understanding of the current classroom make-up today, as described by students’ linguistic and cultural histories.

This study relied on a qualitative research approach to systematically analyze human nature. Qualitative research is the source of well-grounded, detailed analysis of human nature (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Qualitative research relies on the researcher’s ability to take a broad view of a phenomenon of interest, and at the same time, delve deeply into the minute details of a participant’s account (Miles et al., 2014). Strong qualitative data allows for examination of the chronology of events, causation of factors, and tells a story in a more compelling and intimate way than numbers alone (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative research is described as a craft, which often involves lengthy amounts of in-depth data collection, which inevitably must be boiled down based on the artistic and intuitions of the researcher (Miles et al., 2014). Despite the comparison of qualitative research as an art, there are standards which bolster the strength of this research approach: explicit, systematic, and replicable (Miles et al., 2014). Additionally, Creswell (2013) pointed out that reflexivity is an essential component of qualitative research that requires the researcher to consider their role in the research at all levels.
Within qualitative research exist interpretive frameworks, which allow the reader to assume certain philosophical assumptions associated with each framework (Creswell, 2013). This study relied on the interpretivist-constructivist approach. The interpretivist-constructivist framework involves how individuals view the world in which they live, and how one views one’s place in the world (Creswell, 2013). The focus of the interpretivist-constructivist approach is the analysis of an individual’s experiences through the lens of a guiding theory (Creswell, 2013). The focus of the researcher employing the interpretivist-constructivist framework is to understand the historical and cultural contexts in which the participants are making sense of their world (Creswell, 2013). This study examined the cultural and historical contexts of students’ experiences, and is rooted in culture theory.

**Research Design**

Creswell (2013) describes interpretivist-constructivist framework as relying on the notion that reality is co-constructed by the researcher and the researched, which is mirrored by this study’s utilization of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology. IPA is a qualitative research approach that is both phenomenological and interpretive, meaning it focuses on lived experiences as well as the researcher’s interpretation of these lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Research Tradition**

IPA officially started in 1996 with a call to integrate experience and a qualitative approach to psychology research by Jonathan Smith (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Phenomenology, which has a long and rich history, was the major influence for IPA (Smith et
Because IPA is still relatively young, it has not developed divergent thinkers within it. Phenomenology, however, began with Husserl in the early 1900’s and was influenced by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Satre over many years to become more interpretive and tangible and less strictly descriptive and transcendental (Smith et al., 2009). What IPA takes away from phenomenology is the interest in life experiences, which are embedded in a person’s culture, language, relationships, projects, objects, and concerns (Smith et al., 2009). Where IPA diverges from phenomenology is the extent to which it relies on interpretation of the sense-making of the individual (Smith et al., 2009). Dowling (2007) points out that phenomenology’s influence to modern qualitative research is the concept that all knowledge is human made, influenced by the times, and ever-changing.

IPA also draws from hermeneutics for its sense-making and interpretation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation, and was brought to intersect with phenomenology by Schleiermacher in the early 1800’s (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger, involved in both phenomenology and hermeneutics, argued that the researcher is implicated in facilitating the sense-making of the participant (Smith et al., 2009). IPA takes hermeneutics one step further than phenomenology, in that it relies on the double hermeneutic, which is a dynamic process in which the researcher actively makes sense of the participant’s sense-making (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The third major theoretical influence to IPA is idiography, which emphasizes the importance of studying phenomena in great detail (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Where IPA diverges from idiography is with the type of data analyzed; IPA leaves more room for interpretation and a focus on the themes gathered at the individual level as opposed to averages from the group (Smith et al., 2009). The strategy for using IPA for this study is to rely on a
methodology that emphasizes the role and influence of the researcher’s ability to make sense of the sense-making of the participants, largely because of the potential for biases to influence the data. The researcher in this study reflected on, examined, and described the researcher’s positionality, biases, and potential influences at all stages of this research.

IPA was selected for its focus on participant sense-making of a life event, and for its acknowledgement of the interpretive sense-making made by the researcher. Because IPA was enmeshed in culture and language from its theoretical beginnings (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), it served as an appropriate guide for a qualitative study examining the role of a multicultural and multilingual learning environment on the perceived language learning experience and one’s cultural identity. IPA provides a framework for analyzing one’s own positionality in the research process, which was essential in this case given the closely related position of the researcher to the prospective participants. The intended outcome of using IPA was for the readers of this study to be able to understand the researcher’s role in the interpretation of the participants’ sense-making of their life experiences. The IPA approach has shape this study’s questions to be about how participants view their worlds, the data collection to be in-depth interviews, and the steps of analysis to be thorough, systematic, and well-described to the reader.

Population and Sampling

IPA relies on purposeful sampling in which the researcher constructs a small sample size, of at least one to six participants, often with homogenous backgrounds, which allows for easier identification of convergent and divergent themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this study, purposeful sampling was utilized to recruit 5 participants. The researcher chose deliberately not
to recruit participants with homogenous backgrounds. Participants with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds were chosen to participate in this study to reflect the diversity of the classroom. Participants in this study were five university students who had concluded at least an introductory level Italian course. Participants were international students, male and female, and from various ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. The relatively small sample size of five participants decreases the study’s external validity, though this is a larger sample size recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008) for IPA studies.

Recruitment and Access

The researcher recruited participants from within the international business department and on campus on the target university on which the researcher had taught Italian language courses. Participants were offered a $10 gift card to the campus bookstore for their participation in this study, which may act as an incentive for some students. Prior to recruiting subjects, this study began formally with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university in which this study takes place. The emails and campus fliers utilized to recruit students to be participants were submitted to the IRB and are attached as appendix A.

Context

The site selected for this research is a private research university in the Northeast region of the United States. This university is highly selective, ranks in the top 50 universities in the United States (U.S. News and World Report, 2016a), and is ranked in the top ten for highest numbers of international students (U.S. News and World Report, 2016b). Particularly because
this site is a leader in international student enrollment, this study was able to capture data from students from different parts of the world, with varying cultural and language backgrounds.

Data Collection

Smith and Osborn (2008) argue that semi-structured interviews are the best methods to collect data for IPA studies, however, also note that personal accounts and diaries may be utilized. This study utilized only data gathered from in-depth interviews (one per participant), and did not include other written, audio, or visual data. The draw-back of only including data from interviews is that other valuable sources of information were not be accounted for. The strength of in-depth interviews is that a deep and richly detailed account can be obtained.

Participants were recruited with the following steps:

1. At the beginning of the semester, international students in the school of business who had completed at least an introductory Italian language courses will be emailed a recruitment letter

2. The students that responded with interest with the initial round of emailed recruitment letters, were emailed within 24 hours to set up a time for formal interview, once it was determined that students were of varying sexes, were from various countries, and were available for interview

3. A second recruitment attempt was made by posting IRB-approved recruitment fliers on campus at the campus-designated sites

4. The students that responded with interest to the recruitment fliers, were emailed within 24 hours to set up a time for formal interview, once it was determined that students were of varying sexes, were from various countries, and were available for interview
Next, semi-structured interviews took place to gather data. Smith and Osborn (2008) describe the importance of the interview schedule, which is the outline of open-ended questions that the researcher plans to ask, with prompts listed for extracting more information than what is first offered by the interviewee. Smith and Osborn (2008) also discuss the ability of the researcher to change the interview schedule for subsequent participants, and consider using the first interview as a pilot interview. Many suggestions are made by Smith and Osborn (2008) for developing strong interviews, including making interview questions vague and not too leading. Interviews must be recorded and transcribed in detail, including false starts, pauses, and expressions of emotion (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Data was collected using research questions that were open-ended and prompted participants to explain their sense-making of learning Italian language in a multilingual and multicultural classroom setting.

**Data Storage**

To ensure security of data, all recordings were immediately uploaded onto the researcher’s laptop and deleted from the two recording devices, immediately following the conclusion of each interview. Additionally, all data collected and analyzed was stored on an encrypted laptop of the researcher and was not shared with anyone. In this study, participants were given pseudonyms for the interviews and no one other than the researcher was given identifying information. As an added precaution to protect participants’ identity, the researcher reminded participants to use pseudonyms during the interview when talking about themselves or fellow students.
Data Analysis

IPA methodology emphasizes the researcher’s role in trying to understand the content of the interviews, instead of trying to determine solely the frequency with which certain themes are observed (Smith & Osborn, 2008). When utilizing more than one participant, Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest transcribing and analyzing the first case in full, before moving on to the analysis for the second case. This method was used in this study, and the first case was considered a pilot interview, from which data was collected, and the researcher implemented minor changes to improve the interview schedule for future cases. The interviews were conducted with two audio recording devices (one for back-up), and then transcribed manually by the researcher.

Coding

Based on the recommendations of Smith and Osborn (2008), each transcript was read several times and comments were made in the left column regarding interesting points and areas of emphasis. Smith and Osborn (2008) then recommend that in the right column, the researcher begins to generate the first round of themes based on what was commented on in the left hand column. This step was performed using the MAXQDA coding software and codes were given different colors. Emerging themes, which are often terms used in psychology, should also always connect back to what was said by the interviewee (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is suggested that themes are then analyzed in three ways, in the following order: chronological, analytical/theoretical, and clustering (Smith & Osborn, 2008). These three methods were utilized when analyzing the themes. Lastly, the researcher checks the clustered themes back to the primary quotes to make sure that they are in accordance with what was actually said in the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This final step in the coding process was completed by the researcher for each case.
Analysis

The researcher utilized each step above for each case, as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008). The researcher must then look for repeating themes and new themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Smith and Osborn (2008) recommend starting each case with a fresh start and not relying on past themes. The most relevant and meaningful themes are chosen by the researcher, and are not simply the most frequently expressed themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008). These themes were presented in a table format in Appendix D with selected quotes from the transcripts so that the reader may relate back to what was said by the participant, as well as written up in a discussion section.

Smith and Osborn (2008) describe the distinction between the analysis phase and the write-up phase as a false one, because the write-up is virtually an extension of the analysis process in which the analysis is discussed and is more expansively written. The analysis of data continued as the themes are written up. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) describe the presentation of findings to be a creative process, in which the author’s voice will be expressed, and argue that there is no one right way to create the write-up. One suggestion presented by Smith and Osborn (2008) is to have a results section that outlines the major emergent themes, and a discussion section that links the analysis to literature. It is imperative, however, for the researcher to differentiate what was actually said by the participant from what the researcher interpreted (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This is an important point that was clearly delineated in this study. The examples presented in Smith and Osborn’s (2008) chapter demonstrate narrative discussion with a section dedicated to an excerpt from the interview interjected into body of the narrative discussion (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Based on the suggestions of Smith, Flowers, and
Larkin (2009) for writing theses, this study presented a substantial discussion section that includes examples of interview transcript with commentary and themes displayed, as well as, tables of themes used to organize information found in Appendix D.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher has take steps to ensure trustworthiness throughout this study. Member checking is an essential part of IPA studies (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and was utilized in this study to ensure that participants were in accordance with the themes generated from the interview transcripts. Additionally, whenever particularly sensitive information were discussed in this study, it was sent to the participant for review and clarification prior to being written up or shared with others, which is also a recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The researcher worked diligently to allow participants multiple opportunities prior to and after the actual interviews to provide feedback or concerns via email or in-person. The researcher also incorporated constant reflection and review into the data collection and data analysis phases to ensure trustworthiness. As encouraged by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), triangulation of data was also utilized in this multiple perspectives study to draw stronger connections between themes from different interviews.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) encourage approval by the ethics committee of the research institution and continual reflection and review throughout the research process. Reflection was a crucial piece of this study from planning stages, through completion. Reflection and review will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. It is recommended by Smith,
 Flowers, and Larkin (2009) that informed consent be gained in advance of beginning the interview, at the beginning of the interview, and during the interview should any particularly sensitive material emerge in the interview. These steps were taken for this study and participants were also provided with a sample interview schedule to better ensure the participant’s informed consent. The informed consent and sample interview schedule are listed in appendix B and appendix C. Lastly, as customary in IPA studies, this study granted participants the ability to withdraw at any time from the interview, or to withdraw their data from the study at any time prior to completion of the thesis. Anonymity is an essential part of IPA research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and pseudonyms were used as previously discussed to ensure confidentiality.

**Reciprocity**

Participants in this study gained the opportunity to share their experiences with the world, and have their story told. Participants also benefitted by being involved in a study which may bring about positive changes to universities and classrooms. Participants sharing their lived experiences may help to solve problems for future students and improve the foreign language learning experience in internationalized higher education classrooms.

**Limitations**

This study was conducted at a highly selective and highly internationalized university, which may cause this study’s results to be significantly different from the experiences at a university setting different from this site. It seemed as though some of the interview questions were ones on which students had not yet reflected in an in-depth way. Finally, this study did not
consider other important factors which influence a student’s experiences with language learning and cultural identity, such as gender and sexual orientation, which may be explored in future studies.
Chapter Four: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to better understand from international students’ perspectives, how learning language in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom shapes their learning experience and cultural identities. Through qualitative research and IPA design, I sought to understand the lived experiences of five international students who had taken Italian language courses in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom setting. Culture Theory was utilized in this study as a lens through which to examine the lived experiences and cultural identities of these five international students. The research question was: what are the learning and cultural experiences of international undergraduate students in an American-based foreign language classroom?

The participants in this study were five international students who had completed at least one Italian language course at a highly selective and internationalized private American university. The participants come from Europe and South America, and shared their lived experiences through semi-structured interviews. This chapter will present profiles of each student, as well as a definition and an analysis of the four major themes, and ten sub-themes. The four major themes were: “Because the Education System Is Best,” “Everything Is a Struggle,” “A New Way of Thinking,” and Propriospects: “It Has Made Me Who I Am Today.” Sub-themes were developed through the coding process to group information for clarity and organization.

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss reflexivity in relation to the interpretation of the meaning that was behind the actual spoken words of the participants. The participant profiles will be presented next, followed by the analysis of themes, and finally, a conclusion. Reflexivity will be used in the participant profiles to describe the atmosphere of the interview, the
relationship of the interviewer to the participants, and how this relationship may have shaped the interview, as well as, the interpretation of what was being discussed. Generally, I reflected on allowing the participant’s personality and mood during the interview to set the tone. I remember molding my demeanor to match that of the participant in the interview to allow for more open expression and a better understanding. For this reason, the personalities and interview environment will be discussed in detail.

**Participant Profiles**

**Maria.** Maria was an international student originally from Venezuela. She has lived in Venezuela, Malta, and the United States. She has been exposed to the following languages: Spanish, English (Malta), Maltese, English (American), and Italian. I first met Maria as a student in Italian language courses where I was teaching the Italian language at a private highly selective internationalized American university. In reflection I would use the following adjectives and phrases to describe Maria as a student: “good student,” “a little shy,” “studious,” “sat in the front of class,” “runner,” “studied abroad in Mantova, Italy.”

Due to my familiarity with this participant, overall feeling of the interview was relaxed. Maria was punctual and casual. She seemed to speak freely of her lived experiences and I recall feeling curious, open-minded, and relaxed. The interview was conducted in a quiet corner of the student center on campus, a location chosen by the student. I remember feeling empathetic for Maria during the interview because of her disappointment surrounding the economic crisis in her home country.

**Adriano.** Adriano was an international student from Brazil. Unlike the other participants, Adriano emigrated to the U.S. several years prior to studying at the university.
Adriano had only lived in Brazil and the U.S., though had exposure to the following languages: Portuguese (Brazilian), Spanish, German, English (American), French, Creole, and Italian. He reports having been exposed to Brazilian, American, Japanese, German, and Paraguayan cultures. I first met Adriano as a student in one of my Italian language courses. I recall Adriano as a student using the following adjectives or phrases: “joyful,” “outgoing,” “nice,” “humble,” “positive-thinker,” “down-to-Earth,” “youth-oriented,” “willing to help others,” “athletic,” “youth soccer coach,” “Catholic,” “A-student,” and “Italian family roots.”

Adriano’s gregarious personality set the tone for the interview. I remembered this interview, in particular, as feeling less impersonal than others, and more like “catching up” with someone that one has not seen after some time has passed. The student was happy, relaxed, open for discussion, enthusiastic about speaking about what his feelings and experiences were, and grateful to have a voice given to him. I reflected on how I felt following the interview, and I was happy, friendly, easy going, and more confident and less nervous than in other interviews.

Miguel. Miguel was an international student originally from Barcelona, Spain. Miguel described himself as a “Spaniard abroad,” not only for his status as an international student where I taught Italian language, but also because he had been an international student most of his life and “never really studied in Spain.” Miguel had lived in Spain, Argentina, Mexico, Italy, and the U.S. He was exposed to the following languages: Spanish, Catalan, English (American and British), and Italian. Miguel described having been exposed to Spanish, Catalanian, American, Mexican, Argentinian, and Italian cultures. Miguel was also first known to me as a student in Italian language courses at the same university as the other participants. I remembered Miguel with the following adjectives and phrases: “business student,” “high class,” “European,” “less connected to classmates,” “interacted more with professor than peers,” “joked loudly in
class,” “homesick,” “not the most studious,” “over-qualified for introductory Italian course,” and “well connected in business community.”

Miguel was relaxed during his interview, perhaps too relaxed at times for me. I recalled Miguel asking if I minded if he vaped during the interview, which was held in a tiny seating area in a quiet hallway in one of the buildings of the business school on campus. I did not feel comfortable saying “no,” though was not sure if it was allowed for Miguel to vape in a campus building. I recalled that the participant seemed to enjoy describing his perspectives and experiences. Despite feeling awkward for the beginning of this interview, I remembered feeling more confident in the general trend of the interviews once this interview was completed, because it was the third interview completed. I was starting to see preliminary trends and felt more confidence as more interviews were completed.

**Dario.** Dario was an international student who was also from Venezuela. Dario had lived in Venezuela, Greece, Belgium, and the U.S. He had exposure to the following languages: Spanish, English (American), French, Portuguese, and Italian. Dario reported exposure to Venezuelan, American, Dutch, Greek, Chinese, Italian, and Brazilian cultures. Dario was first known to me as a student in Italian language courses where I was teaching, and as a global ambassador on campus on the same university. The global ambassador position held by Dario involved travel abroad, campus events, meetings with the president of the university, presentations, media engagements, interviews, and several billboards on campus featuring Dario’s face. Upon reflection, I used the following adjectives or phrases to describe Dario: “good person,” “more professional than peers,” “more formal than peers,” “more closed off than peers,” “introduced himself and shook hands first day of class,” “hard-working,” “humble,” “very studious,” “punctual,” “seeks challenges,” “entrepreneur,” “tells-it-like-it-is,” “leader,”
“clear path,” “quick learner,” “mature for his age,” “global ambassador duties,” and “sad about situation in home country of Venezuela.”

Dario began the interview very formal and professional, and then seemed to relax as the interview progressed and he was able to discuss more about his personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. I recalled that Dario began to change in the interview when he started to talk about the economic crisis in his home country of Venezuela. This interview was conducted in a quiet public place close to campus that was convenient for the student. During this interview, I remembered feeling a sense of self-consciousness and even guilt as Dario described some of his criticisms of life as an international student. Upon reflecting, I felt this way because it was my natural instinct to feel that perhaps there was more that I could have done as one of the international students’ former professors. I also recalled feeling that there were many more questions that I would have liked to ask and understand that were outside the scope of this interview due to the critiques raised and how the challenging situation in the participant’s home country seemed to be affecting him. I recalled trying to keep a “neutral” affect throughout the interview with Dario to avoid showing feelings of guilt or insecurity.

**Gregor.** Gregor was an international student from Bulgaria. Gregor has lived in Bulgaria, Switzerland (German section), and in the U.S. The languages that Gregor has been exposed to are Bulgarian, German (Swiss), English, French, and Italian. He reports being exposed to the following cultures: Bulgarian, Balkan (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian), Swiss (German), American, Austrian, and Italian. I was first introduced to Gregor as a student in my Italian language course. Prior to the interview, I recalled thinking of Gregor with the following adjectives or phrases: “controversial in the classroom,” “felt that Bulgaria was overlooked,” “right-wing,” “pro-Trump debate with American student in class,” “more politically radical than
peers,” “high class,” “European,” “commented that most peers did not know anything about Bulgaria,” “proud of his country,” “family business,” “wanted to return home,” “immigration concerns in Bulgaria,” and “business student.”

Gregor was casual and relaxed during the interview. The interview was held in a public place close to campus as this was convenient for the participant. Upon reflection, I remembered that Gregor was willing to share during the interview and gave off a feeling that I would understand his views because Gregor knew that we were both European-born. I felt that Gregor was seeking affirmation and a European connection in his interview. Gregor seemed apathetic and critical, at times during the interview, in particular, in regards to the American education and business systems. I remember feeling that I found myself wishing that all of my students would have positive experiences, and that I would always want to be a part of the positive experiences of international students. I also remember thinking more critically of the American education system following this interview and that some of my personal critiques of the American education system were echoed in Gregor’s comments. Also, I felt the most relaxed and confident in conducting the interview with this student as it was the final interview.

Participant Summary

Each of the five participants in this IPA study were international students who shared their lived experiences. Though each interview and each student were unique, the common atmosphere of each interview was one of open conversation and an assumption of a baseline level of familiarity between the participants and me. This made for open and candid conversations regarding the international students’ experiences, feelings, and personal histories. Four major themes and ten sub-themes emerged as common threads throughout the analysis and coding process for the five interviews, and these themes and sub-themes will be defined next.
Definition of Major Themes and Sub-Themes

From the five semi-structured interviews, there were four major themes that each of the international students touched upon. There were also ten sub-themes that came to light in the analysis, which were also shared by all participants, though some of their perspectives were divergent in the sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes are defined below.

1. “Because the Education System Is Best” – the spectrum of reasons that the participants cite for leaving their home countries to study in the United States, at this particular university, and for choosing to study the Italian language. Sub-themes include: Motivation to Study in the U.S. and at this University, Motivation to Leave Home Country, Motivation to Learn Italian Language.

2. “Everything Is a Struggle” – the many challenges that the participants described as part of their lived experiences as international students. Sub-themes include: Struggle Learning a Foreign Language, Struggle Learning a Foreign Culture and Cultural Mismatches.

3. “A New Way of Thinking” – the unique perspective of learning a foreign language in a multilingual and multicultural classroom, as opposed to previous methods in which the participants had learned a foreign language. Sub-themes include: Reflection in the Classroom, Linguistic Factors, Student Perspectives of this Classroom Environment.

4. Propriospects: “It Has Made Me Who I Am Today” – the personal cultures and identities of the participants and how their learning experiences did or did not shape them. Sub-themes include: How Students Describe Their Personal Cultures, and How International Learning Experiences Shaped Personal Identities.
**Review of Data**

The following is a presentation of the data obtained from in-depth coding and analysis from semi-structured interviews with five international students who studied the Italian language at the same highly selective private university in the United States. Within each section, the major theme will be introduced, the development of the theme through analysis and coding will be described, the themes and sub-themes will be further explained in narrative form, and finally, a table will be presented to summarize the major quotes from the participants in Appendix D.

Direct quotes will be used throughout this presentation of themes, though minor omissions for clarity will be demonstrated using ellipses (…). Also, additions to the directly quoted content will be shown as words within parentheses in order to provide context and clarity to the quotes taken out of the full context of the interview. At times, participants used laughter or body language to express or emphasize a feeling to their point; this was also indicated where relevant. The following themes and quotes depict an insight into the common experiences of international students learning a foreign language and navigating life on an American university campus.

**Theme 1: “Because the Education System Is Best.”** The first theme is motivation, and each of the participants described their personal motivations for leading them to study the Italian language, at this particular university, in this particular country. Though their lived-experiences and backgrounds differ, common motivations came to light in the analysis of the data. Not all participants were equally introspective, reflective, and open in answering these personal questions, though each participant did share the factors that drove them all to a common
location. The sub-themes in this section are: motivation to study in the U.S. and at this particular university, motivation to leave home country, and motivation to learn the Italian language.

**Motivation to study in the U.S. and at this university.** Each of the five participants expressed positive feelings towards their motivations for pursuing education at this particular university and in the U.S. in general. Maria explained that she “loved the campus” and that she “especially liked the co-op program and the business school.” Miguel echoed the same sentiments as Maria, by explaining that co-op was a motivating factor, as well as, “Boston being a great city.” Adriano said that he also “liked the co-op program,” but laughed “that everyone gives that answer.” After this comment, he delved deeper and revealed that he was “able to visit multiple countries … (while) completing his degree,” and it was important that he would be able to study in a “multicultural environment … with people who come from different parts of the world, and you get to talk to them and learn more about their cultures.” Gregor recounted how the “co-op program (caught) his attention” and that he valued having the working experience of “two internships with a bachelor (degree).” Dario also noted that “the education system of the U.S. would (be a) benefit for a business background.”

The common thread of interacting fully in the internationalized culture and business forward culture of this particular university was woven throughout each of the participants’ accounts. Furthermore, each of the international students expressed feeling as though they were participants in the best system for them to be able to access the most opportunities. Experiential learning was also important for each of the participants. Collectively the international students, perhaps in the same ways as their American counterparts, were searching for the best education and experience that they could. Perhaps unlike their American counterparts, however, these participants expressed explicit interest in engaging in the international culture for which this
particular university has become known. It seems as though these participants were searching for a campus in which they would not be alone and would feel like valued members and part of the university’s identity as a global university.

**Motivation to leave home country.** Adriano, Dario, and Maria all expressed the desire not to stay in their respective home countries for economic and education reasons. They all cited that the United States offered better economic situation or a better education system. Miguel expressed the desire to leave his home country because he did not want to study where his parents lived. His motivations seemed more about personal freedom and exploration than of necessity or a feeling of urgency that Maria, Adriano, and Dario expressed. Gregor was the only participant that did not give an answer when probed about why he did not want to stay in Bulgaria. Later in the interview, however he did allude to critical feelings towards the higher education system in Bulgaria, explaining that students “cheat their way through (college)” and “take after themselves (without the guidance of advisors).” Each of the participants had reasons for leaving their home countries to pursue opportunities abroad. Most mentioned considering studying in countries other than the United States: Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

I interpreted these responses to be different than the likely responses of American counterparts who may study for a semester abroad. These participants were motivated by necessity and a feeling that their futures depend on their choices to study abroad in the United States, whereas domestic students studying abroad may see that as more of a fun and interesting opportunity to see the world. I reflected on my own experience as an international student and can understand the feelings of seeking the perceived best education possible in the U.S., which is a reputation that the higher education in the U.S. has had for many years.
Motivation to learn the Italian language. The international students each explained different motivations for learning the Italian language at the university level. Adriano discussed his family heritage: “my father’s side is Italian originally. So I wanted to learn the language because it is a part of me and I feel like … it’s a duty almost to have to learn it.” Adriano also talked about how his passions for a career in the automotive industry drove his desire to learn Italian and German in college: “I am passionate about and plan on moving to (either) Italy or Germany, because I am really passionate about the automotive industry, and I would like to be in it one day.” Maria “wanted more” languages after learning Spanish and English. Adriano also “really wanted to explore languages.” Gregor “wanted diversity” of subject matter and was already familiar with four other languages. Miguel and Dario remarked on feeling that Italian language was the natural choice given its similarity with languages that they already spoke (English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish for Dario; Spanish and Portuguese for Miguel).

Because the Italian language courses were elective for each of these participants, it gave insight into their interests, passions, and linguistic perspectives. The sentiment that Italian would be a natural or easy choice is directly related to the next theme: the struggle to learn a foreign language and foreign culture. This was a feeling that multiple participants expressed and ties together with a sense of Italian language courses being a reprieve from other on-campus and academic challenges. Those important struggles will be explored next.

Theme 2: “Everything Is a Struggle.” The second theme was “Everything Is a Struggle.” The sub-themes are: struggle to learn a foreign language and struggles to learn a foreign culture, or cultural mismatch. This theme was identified from participants’ accounts of their lived experiences as international students on an American college campus. In this section, many struggles are identified and explored. Each of the participants discussed freely the
challenges that they had faced. Also to be discussed in this section are the challenges that were implied, or, at times during the interviews, presented in contradictory ways. I will also discuss how he interpreted these contradictions and sometimes uncomfortable topics for the international students.

**Struggles learning a foreign language.** Each of the five participants described challenges with learning foreign languages, but not all languages had the same struggles associated with them, and some struggles seemed to go beyond language itself. Maria’s struggles with English exposed her vulnerability and one of her views of American students: “(when) I’m … in a room with only Americans … I have to … speak perfectly, because you have to adapt (to them). Maria also described herself as “not the most open person” because “her freshman year it was very difficult because (she) used to speak more … with an accent.” Over time, she had “gotten used to how … Americans communicate.”

Maria’s lived experience demonstrates the difficulty in being an international student in majority-American settings. She expressed feelings of self-consciousness and being closed off. She also described her perception of American students, especially when in a group, as being less linguistically flexible than would have made her feel less self-conscious. Maria’s linguistic struggles with English revealed deeper struggles than her discussion of struggle with the Italian language. She described her greatest struggle with Italian language with “memorizing verbs … or the past participle.” She added that learning Italian “wasn’t a bad struggle … it is a challenge.” The struggles with Italian language were superficial in the sense that they surrounded linguistic factors that anyone learning a new language would face. The struggles with English spoke to Maria’s insecurities as an international student on an American campus.
Adriano described “hurdles, …roadblocks, … (and) speed bumps” when first learning a new language – in his case: English. He described his personal feelings as being “at first, … upset … and sometimes frustrating … when you are in a country and you cannot fully communicate,” because “everything is different … (and) things get lost in translation.” He also felt the “fear of messing up and that his self-confidence (went) down” when learning English as an international student.

Like Maria, however, Adriano also felt that he was able to improve over time, through exposure and enduring struggles. Adriano explained that “after you realize …you can speak more than one language and it is a good thing, then it makes you feel a lot better.” The struggle for Maria and Adriano was described as psychologically negative initially, though both were able to persevere and come to describe a lived experience that became positive following a period of struggle. Adriano, whose personality is joyful, also utilized laughter and a joke to lighten the description of his struggle with learning English. He described, laughingly, how his “his Brazilian accent would come out” when “he was mad watching soccer.” His ability to laugh about his struggles was shared with other participants, as well, and speaks to their resilience in the face of difficulty.

Gregor also used humor to balance his description of a struggle learning the German language as an international high school student, studying abroad for the first time in a German Swiss high school. He explained a seemingly painful experience of peer humiliation and followed it up with a joke:

For example, in my German school, most of the people were German. My friends were German-speakers in that class, so they drew me back from learning German because they were making fun of me. I would ask them for a word, and they would give me
another word, and I would make a fool of myself because I said it in front of the whole class.

Following his recount of this uncomfortable experience, Gregor made a joke and used sarcasm about how easy Italian language had been for him in comparison and how he did not need to be very studious for his Italian language course. Gregor also shared the more superficial struggles as Maria and Adriano, citing German grammar challenges and his accent. Pronunciation was a struggle that Miguel also shared.

Miguel explained that “with Italian, for example, … (he) always had a problem pronouncing ‘come’ like ‘como,’ because in Spanish it is ‘como.’” Miguel also reported that being on the spot in class, and learning certain grammar rules were a challenge. Miguel talked about his mixed feelings regarding the struggle to learn foreign languages. He recalled feeling a sense of “embarrassment” wondering “what if I say or do something wrong?” Despite his fear of “not knowing how to behave in certain situations,” Miguel also felt “kind of really excited, in a way, to see what (he) could learn” in these particular situations. Miguel’s account demonstrated that his struggle brought forth contradictory ideas simultaneously.

Dario, the global ambassador on campus, with the most numerous language exposure of all the participants was not unique in his reported struggles when learning a new language: grammar, memorizing vocabulary, pronunciation, and the similarities between Romance languages. Demonstrating his linguistic fluency and flexibility, he described being “close to the point most of the time, but sometimes (falling short) and (producing) a ‘mélange de palabras, understand?’” He used a mix of Spanish, English, and French to describe his linguistic struggle with language “mix and match.” One other struggle that Dario expressed was with intonation, which gave insight into his perspective on struggles with culture. Dario remembered that he
struggled with learning Chinese and Greek because of the pronunciation challenges of these languages: “it has been more difficult to adapt to (Chinese and Greek) … for example, ‘ma’ can mean five different things in Chinese depending on what intonation you give it.” The struggle of intonation links the linguistic struggle with the cultural struggle.

The struggles with language and culture are closely intertwined. Following his comments about struggling with Chinese language, Dario went on to discuss his struggles with Chinese culture. The linguistic struggles of these participants was often described as “what one says,” though the cultural struggles were more related to “how one says it.” All of the participants reported more cultural struggles than purely linguistic struggles. The cultural struggles will be presented next, and these struggles shine more light onto the participants’ perspectives of learning foreign languages side-by-side with other international students.

**Struggles learning a foreign culture; cultural mismatches.** When participants were asked about the mismatches between their personal cultures and the cultures of the university, and American culture more broadly, each student recalled cultural mismatches to share. Each international student described their struggles of learning and living within a foreign culture. Despite the mismatches and cultural struggles, each of the participants expressed some sense of accomplishment in being able to navigate the culture and succeed at their university.

Maria felt that “everything is a struggle.” She went on to say “the question is: how do you overcome this struggle?” Maria also reported feeling “frustrated” and encouraged herself by telling herself “ok relax, you can do this!” While reflecting on how much progress she had made since first coming to the U.S., Maria described feeling “ok being (in the U.S.),” and that she has “been adapted to (American) culture.” She described American culture as “harder (to learn),” and in order to succeed in learning it, one must:
Embrace the language and the university, and you would get it eventually, but American culture is harder to get in…It depends where you are… (and) it depends on where the people are from… I like Boston culture (because it makes me feel safer), but if you (were to) take me to Mississippi – laughter – I would …feel (less safe).

Maria recounted the cultural mismatch between America and Venezuela: “everything (in Venezuela) is more slow (and) everything here is more fast, and I got used to that.” Despite the struggles that Maria described, she felt that she had become successful in her ability to live within the university culture and the American culture.

Adriano described at length his cultural mismatches between Brazilian culture and American and the university cultures. “The main thing” that Adriano pointed out over and over was that in Brazil there was the “sense that … taking people in and welcoming people all the time, and being friendly and warm” was “very different from the culture (in the U.S.).” In Brazil, “people are always trying to help each other out …and you’re always looking out for your family and your friends, and sometimes even put them first in certain situations,” according to Adriano. At the university, Adriano found peers to be “a lot more competitive…and very individualistic.” Adriano recalled his classmates as “trying to seize opportunities for themselves, they (were) trying to help themselves, even if that means leaving someone behind.” He also felt that his American peers did not reciprocate the help that he offered to them: “like when someone asks for my help, I try to make time to help them, but when you go ask that same person for help they are too busy to help.” He also described being “misunderstood (by Americans) when (he was) warm:”

Americans are so independent and they look at themselves as though they – I’m not saying they are not nice people – but they are not used to being nice all the time, so
sometimes they look at you like you are crazy or like you are putting on a fake face or something. I don’t know how you say it in English. They think that you want something all the time if you are being nice, and I don’t. It’s just how I am raised in my culture. Some of Maria and Adriano’s struggles were also echoed by the lived experiences of Miguel, Dario, and Gregor.

Miguel described his Spanish culture to be “Mediterranean… and more laid back.” “We enjoy good food and good people… but at the same time we like to work hard – it is very different than in America,” Miguel explained. He went on to say that:

In America it has to be very “everything now,” and “everything by the rules and everything,” but in Spain there is room for moving around and doing things a different way, (and) there is no “just one way to do it,” (and) everything is less structured in Spain.

He described the culture of the university as “preparing you for co-op, for the future, and for work experience, but at the same time trying to integrate many different cultures.” This integration of other cultures, sometimes clashed with the work-focused university culture. In Miguel’s case, he explained that in Spain, “it is not mandatory to go to class.” Miguel found himself “trying to (adapt and struggle with) the new (American) culture, without fully embracing (it).”

Not only did Miguel struggle with the academic culture, but also with the social aspects. He said that “maybe some of the social stuff was different as well between… my culture, the university, and American culture.” He described how he “got into trouble … (with) some of the social stuff.” He recalled “when it comes to alcohol use and cigarettes” he faced some challenges, and that “(he) would have some wine, and (in the U.S.) it (was) not viewed
properly.” Miguel’s lived experiences highlighted the social and academic aspects of the cultural mismatches he faced as an international student. Like Miguel, Gregor was also an international student from Europe.

Gregor’s European background brought him to express similar cultural mismatches as Miguel. Gregor described the “university’s culture (as) a workaholic culture,” and “80-90% of the students (as) workaholics.” In Bulgaria, “most of the students try to cheat their way through (the university),” Gregor said in comparison to this university, where “(students) try to get the most out of (their time at the university).” He was grateful that at “this university, like most American corporations, views students as customers,” and that this university “tries to help out (students) in as many ways as it can.” This was in contrast to the Bulgaria education system that he was accustomed to. Of the Bulgarian higher education system, Gregor said that as a student “you are just there (looking) after yourself.” As with most of his personal struggles, Gregor, focused on the positives. Despite his struggle, he was able to find the benefits to the American university culture compared to the Bulgarian counterpart.

Dario was equally as focused as Gregor on the positives of his experience, despite the struggles that he described. Dario reflected on his struggles with studying abroad in China, citing that “introverted societies… frustrated (him).” He also explained that he saw mismatches between his Venezuelan culture and American culture:

My personal culture is very team oriented. So (as Venezuelans) we sort of strive to achieve goals in groups. And in addition to this we have a high degree of masculinity. So I think those are the two (un)common traits that my country has (with the U.S.). And with the United States being such an individualistic country with more of a sort of balance between female and masculine, these are the mismatches that I see.
He felt that he “hit some rocks here and there, because here in the States and on campus you are pretty much tailored to be on your own, especially if you are not from here.” This was similar to the lived experiences of Gregor, Miguel, and Dario. In contrast, Dario also explained that “vastly speaking (the cultures) are aligned,” and that his home culture in Venezuela was “very westernized (and) Americanized.” He described that the cultures were “pretty much aligned” except for the Venezuelan culture being “very much family-oriented” and the American culture being “self-starter.”

Dario, who was the university’s global ambassador and had the most varied global experiences seemed to be contradictory in his views, which will be explored later in this section. He described significant cultural differences, but at the same time concluded that the cultures were mostly aligned. Maria’s struggles focused more on her personal difficulties with language than the broader cultural points of divergence between her home country of Venezuela and the United States. Gregor and Miguel’s assessments utilized humor, possibly to diffuse their sense of discomfort or vulnerability with their cultural struggles. Adriano spent the most time of all the participants explaining the cultural mismatches between Brazil and the United States, despite his having lived in the United States the longest. Both Gregor and Dario described the need to take personal responsibility to overcome their cultural struggles. Gregor said that “when you first struggle, you have to first identify what it is inside yourself to change, because it is definitely within yourself, (and there is) no one else to blame.” Dario noted that “the key is to understand that every society is different and, if you can’t change them, which you won’t, you must adapt yourself to fit in and be a part of the community.”

Through their shared lived experiences, the participants have shed light on both linguistic and cultural struggles of being an international student, in the United States and in
other countries while studying abroad. Their struggles with English and American culture were more of a focus in their interviews than their challenges with other languages and other cultures. None of the participants reported struggles learning the Italian culture in class, despite citing some minor challenges with learning the Italian language. The next theme delves deeper, and beyond the struggles, into more of the lived experiences of the participants in their Italian language classrooms, and other multicultural and multilingual classrooms they had encountered.

**Theme 3: “A New Way of Thinking.”** This theme was generated from the rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants from studying in classrooms with other international students and American students by their sides (as opposed to more homogenous classrooms). This theme explores what kind of experiences came from studying in classrooms where the majority of students had diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The focus of the theme is on learning a foreign language and culture in this environment. Italian language class was the most discussed multilingual and multicultural classroom, however, participants also described their experiences when studying other subjects under similar classroom circumstances. The sub-themes were: reflection in the classroom, linguistic factors, and student perspectives.

**Reflection in the classroom.** Each of the participants reported that their Italian language classes sparked reflection. It was the unique circumstances of learning a foreign language in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom, that not only made language and cultural learning front and center, but also that this course routinely required students to describe their personal cultures in the Italian language. The international students commented on the fact that they were asked by their peers in this course to explain more about their home countries. Furthermore the participants recalled reflecting on their own L1, L2, and L3’s, examining the
similarities and differences with the Italian language, and even the native languages of their classmates.

Maria and Gregor acknowledged reflecting in Italian language classes, though did not delve deeply into what this meant for them at the time. Maria remembered reflecting “a lot,” and Gregor recalled “definitely (reflecting because) people (in class had been) asking (him) these questions about Bulgaria, and Bulgaria, because people have not heard of Bulgaria.” For Adriano, Miguel, and Dario, reflection was a deeper topic for explanation. For each of these three participants, reflection was associated with instinct and reflexive behavior.

Adriano said that “when you start learning about another culture, you just kind of always go back to your own culture, because you can just (think) ‘oh, we do things differently,’ (and) you are always comparing.” He felt that the fact that there were international students in his class from several different parts of the globe, it forced him to reflect more “just because everyone (in the class) did things differently.” He recalls being asked often to “turn to your partner and tell them where you are from.” Adriano found himself reflecting often on his Brazilian culture:

Because you have to have a point to base (comparison) off of, so you think about you own culture and think “ok, how does it compare to this, and what are the differences?”

And that kind of makes you think about (culture) even more, so you learn more. Adriano seemed to be expressing the point that the linguistically and culturally diverse classroom environment enhanced his ability to reflect on his own and his peer’s cultures and languages, as well as, the target language and culture of the class.

Miguel described reflecting on his own culture as compared to the Italian culture in class more than the cultures and languages of his international classmates. He said “most of the time
(I) was (reflecting) on the culture of the country of the language (course) I was taking,” but he did often think “oh this is very similar to what we do in Spain.” Miguel also recounted how his experiences with Italian culture when studying abroad prior to taking Italian language courses sparked deeper reflection on Italian culture:

Yeah, especially, …when I was in Italy, (and) I was living in Milan, and I could see the culture in Milan, and I saw that you (the researcher) were from a different region, and it is interesting to see how, that even in the same country there are cultural differences depending on the region. Yeah, you know, it made me think about how I am from Barcelona? And it made me think about how I interact with people from Madrid. Or … how different we were, but at the same time, had a lot of similarities. Miguel was the only participant to remark on the cultural differences within regions in his own country and in the target culture and language of the course, and how this made him reflect more. From this example, it was clear that this particular participant had taken reflection to a higher level than the other participants.

Dario, the global ambassador on campus, described how “navigating cultures has become a part of who (he is because) when learning languages and cultures, one always goes back and reflects on one’s traditions, festivities, slang use, et cetera.” He went on to say that “one always naturally drifts to reflect at some point during these classes.” Dario also made a point regarding reflection to specify that he did not feel that it had an affect on him:

More than an “effect,” I would call it “understanding yourself.” (Reflection) doesn’t create an “effect” on you necessarily, but you get to understand your own culture better. And as contrasting as this may appear, you can also become more appreciative or critical of ways of doing certain things.
Dario proposes the idea that this exposure to other cultures and languages, the target language and culture of the class, and the act of reflecting did not have an effect on his personal culture. The implications of this environment on each participants’ personal definition of culture, their propriospect, will be discussed in detail the next theme.

**Linguistic factors.** Each of the participants described what they felt was that best way to learn a foreign language and culture. With the exception of Maria, each of the international students expressed the opinion that learning while immersed in the target country would be best. Maria exclaimed “music, music, music, music, music!” when asked what the best way to learn Italian language was for her. She went on to describe how she “added to (her) Spotify playlist Andrea Bocelli, Tiziano Ferro, and the cool (singers), like Il Volo (and) Il Divo.” Listening to Italian music helped Maria learn the language by studying the lyrics, and “improve (her) pronunciation” by singing.

Adriano explained that he thought the best method for him to learn a foreign language was “just by going there… and immersing yourself in the culture, and … not trying to take short cuts, just … going there… (and diving) into the deep end and try your best to figure things out.” He also noted that “trying to speak the language is the main thing … because … you will not get the full experience unless you … speak the language.” In language classes Adriano also explained that “presentations (and) … projects … force you to think about (the language) for a much longer time.” He added that he did not think “tests were very effective… because what ends up happening a lot of the time is that you memorize … and you forget it.”

Miguel preferred to learn Italian language “to visit the place” and learn “in the streets” while “living in Italy.” He described the importance of the motivating factor of “necessity” when living in a country and he “needed to learn (Italian),” versus taking a class and “learning
(Italian) to learn it.” Gregor also reported that the best way for him to learn a language would “definitely (be) visiting the country,” and “interacting with people from that country would be the second viable experience.” Gregor also added “and third would be to take maybe a class with a teacher who is from the country, who can explain (to) you … what the country was about.” Dario shared the same perspective as Gregor and Miguel:

The best way, I would say, to learn about a foreign language and culture is to interact with the people of that culture. So, principally, I would say going to another country and sort of becoming embedded in the culture – go to school and work there, interact and spend your weekends there. And then secondary to that is being in your own country and surrounding yourself with people from another culture, (and) just learning from that (and) a great deal about that. I am just speaking from experience.

The majority of the participants shared similar views on the best ways to learn a new language and culture. All of the participants, except for Gregor, also shared similar views of learning Italian because of the language’s similarity to their native languages.

Dario, Miguel, Adriano, and Maria all reported a linguistic advantage in the Italian language classroom, due to the similarities between Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Maria said that “Italian was so much easier (than English),” hypothesizing that it was because “Spanish and Italian are both Latin cultures.” Adriano said that “for (him), it was a little easier (learning Italian) because (he) spoke Portuguese, which is similar to Italian for conjugations.” Miguel felt that “especially … in Italian class (he) was more advanced… (and he) had to ask less to be explained, because of (his) Spanish.” Dario explained that “Italian is very similar…to Spanish, … so someone who speaks Spanish … is going to have it better than someone who only speaks English.” This perceived Spanish/Portuguese advantage was reported by only one of the
participants as having been a motivating factor to take Italian language courses. Miguel said that “because I know Spanish, (Italian) would be an easy ‘A.’”

**Participant perspectives.** Each of the participants shared their perspectives on learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom setting. The participants described varied points of view, sometimes even contradicting themselves. This section of the interview rendered responses that leaned towards this environment having a strong effect on participants’ learning, then veered towards having no effect at all, then acknowledgements of collateral learning – learning about other cultures inadvertently. Maria was the most consistent in her responses.

Maria “actually (thought that the classroom) flows better with international people” and that “at least (this) multicultural class gave her a break” as an international student. She reiterated that she felt “pretty comfortable in this class with international students, because they were all learning the language for different reasons.” She felt that this type of classroom environment “definitely (boosted her) confidence.” Maria seemed to be saying that this classroom was a respite for her compared to her other courses, in which there were many fewer international students, and in which she was more linguistically self-conscious.

Like Maria, Adriano also felt positive towards learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom environment. He explained that “sometimes it is more helpful than one-on-one a lot of time, because you get to see what people are thinking (and) how they approach things.” He also appreciated the opportunity to “see how people who speak different languages … and have different cultures approach situations differently.” Adriano though that “it definitely (helped) to learn in the multicultural environment, because you are all in the same boat.” This idea was also discussed by Maria and Miguel, and was described by the three participants as leveling the playing field compared to some of their other classes where Americans were the
majority. Miguel described “when there is a difference in languages (in the classroom), you have to focus in on what you are learning, (and look for) the common words.”

Miguel’s experiences overall were varied and, at times, contradictory. Miguel initially reported “personally, it didn’t affect me (learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom).” Later he went on to say “(that he learned) from people from the Middle East or … Asia … (and) if they had different religions, or … rules for things … (that) it was nice to learn (about this) too.” Miguel reflected that when he was an international student in South America, prior to entering the university, he “would learn (from people in his class from Colombia) a language within Spanish,” and how “words … would have a completely different meaning (in Spain).” He did feel like learning about classmates’ languages and cultures “was … an extra.” Perhaps because he described himself as being an international student his whole life, he felt that he had not gained significantly from this particular learning environment.

Miguel and Dario were able to demonstrate the ability to take their reflections one step further than the other participants. Because Miguel was “always an international student,” his attention did not focus on what he had gained from learning in an international classroom at this point in his life. He had already become familiar with the collateral learning benefits, and instead was able to ponder the cultural experiences of others living abroad. Instead of focusing his reflections and comments on what he learned by being in this diverse learning environment, he pondered how others might be feeling in their experiences abroad. He considered how I, “an Italian, might act outside of Italy,” based on the observations that Miguel had learned when living in Italy. Because of Dario’s position as the global ambassador on campus, he also mentioned thinking beyond his own cultural experiences to those of his peers. He described “students react to what the professor says” depending on where each of the parties were from.
More broadly, Dario expressed very positive views of learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, as well as, on an internationalized campus. He said:

What is unique about this university, even being within campus, is that you will encounter different cultures in a very very big way. So you will interact with Chinese students, Italian students, Russian students, (and) definitely with Latino students. And this definitely became learning a great deal, especially if you are working in teams with them. You can ask them questions and learn language, and basically you are embedded in an entire culture within itself. Which I think is magnificent. Very, very positive.

He went on to describe how this learning environment “gave (him) more confidence. Like Maria, he explained that “when everyone is pretty much on the same level (linguistically), and everyone is from another culture, and you don’t know one’s dominant language, so you participate more and engage more with the class.” Though Dario felt that this learning environment for Italian language gave him “more security” and “more confidence,” he described how he “would have actually felt (even) more confident,” if the class were mostly American, because of the previously described Spanish language advantage to learning Italian. Overall, he felt that this environment made learning a foreign language “very positive,” “more comfortable,” “allows for more confidence,” and “very interesting.” Dario also felt that there were “no limitations” to this type of learning environment.

Gregor’s position on learning a foreign language and culture in a international classroom setting was one of indifference, and at times, negativity. His perspective was not generally shared by the other participants. Gregor explained his perspective:

I don’t think there is any correlation. I mean I was taking Italian with people from all sorts of places in that class. But it didn’t affect my studying in any way. I wouldn’t say
having international people in a class like that is a bad thing. I wouldn’t say it would affect – of course, now if you had ten Arabs speaking Arabic on the side, that would irritate me, but that was not the case, so – definitely you can diversify your perspectives in the class (and you) could learn something about other cultures as well… (but) personally I did not get anything out of any other culture, because I went to learn Italian, (and) … I just mostly came to learn about Italian culture.

He also noted that “if you are all on the same level (linguistically), you would all be more comfortable, (and) … (less likely to) feel embarrassed.” Gregor then went on to describe how his classmates in German class in high school embarrassed him, as previously discussed. Gregor’s perspective was different from the other participants, and was shaped by his previous lived experiences as an international student in a different country as a high school student.

Gregor’s main point, that he did not learn about other cultures or languages from his international peers, was not shared by the other participants. Each of the other participants noted examples of collateral learning of classmates’ cultures or languages, or both. Though it was difficult for the participants to describe an actual word or phrase that they had learned, they were all able to describe learning about other cultures or “ways of doing things.” Maria recalled learning that in French culture “(they do) two kisses.” Adriano remembered “that you inevitably learn about another culture,” even if it was “hard to think of a specific thing.” Miguel felt that collateral cultural and linguistic learning “was an extra.” Dario recalled a Russian classmate teaching him how to say certain Italian vocabulary words in Russian. For the majority of participants, the multicultural and multilingual classroom environment was a positive and enriching one to learn a foreign language, however, this was not the case for all participants. The
personal cultures of each of the participants and how these personal cultures may have been shaped by the international learning environment will be discussed next.

**Theme 4: Propriospects: “It Has Made Me Who I Am Today.”** The final theme, propriospect, meaning the individual cultures of the participants, was an area that participants were eager to discuss. This section first delves into the propriospects of the participants. The participants’ propriospects tie back to their responses related to the previous themes. The second part of this section will discuss how the participants feel that their international learning experiences have or have not shaped their personal identities.

**How participants describe their personal cultures.** Throughout each interview, the participants explicitly described their individual propriospects. Each participant also discussed aspects of their personal cultures during the interviews through comparisons with other cultures and through describing their struggles or learning styles. The participants personal cultures, or propriospects, will be shown in this section, as told by the participants.

Maria described her “personal culture (as): be kind to people and … be respectful.” She went on to say that she felt that her personal culture “(was) the same in Venezuela… very caring, and (for example, Venezuelans say), ‘oh how are you? Are you ok?’” She also described herself as “open-minded” and “very patriotic,” saying “I love my country.” She said that she was “not the most open person,” when talking about her past self-consciousness around speaking English in front of Americans. Later, she went on to say “I don’t have those fears of communication…they have disappeared over time, because you get to understand how the culture works, and that is very important.” She recalled how the crisis in her country caused her to have to leave, and this has strongly affected her personal culture:
I am going to talk about Venezuela, and what is going on there, because that is what really motivates me as a person, my career, everything… I think it is because of everything I have been through. Because I started there and then I had to leave my family. It has all affected me. I would be completely different (if I had stayed in Venezuela). I was thinking about that, you know? I am so proud of me (and) of what I have achieved … so far… I wouldn’t be the same (if I had not left). Yeah, I’m proud!

Maria was not the only participant to describe pride and patriotism.

Gregor also discussed how pride was part of his personal culture as a Bulgaria. He gave a detailed description of what it meant to him to be Bulgarian:

We’re very, very self-aware of ourselves. We’re proud to be from Bulgaria, because Bulgaria has been through a lot of struggles throughout its history, and we have resisted everything. We have been pushed around by the Turks a lot, we have been pushed by the Germans, (and we have been) under the communist regime. And to have survived it all, to have been through it all, those events can make us be drawn back a little bit in time and in our development, but it has built what we are right now. So we are …very very prideful.

He continued the sense of discord from his Bulgarian roots to his description of how he saw himself fitting in on campus. Gregor said:

It is a very big university… not everybody gets along, and that is normal. That is my situation as well. (Some) people I get along with, and some people I don’t. I get along with people of different cultures… but I also don’t get along with people from the same countries.
Gregor also described himself as “a pretty well traveled person” who “all (his) life has adapted.” Gregor was the only participant to highlight conflict with other students as part of his identity.

Contrasting the conflict that Gregor described to define his personal culture, Adriano and Dario explained their propiospects as collaborative and caring for others. Adriano also described his personal culture as “being friendly and warm.” Adriano went on to explain that in Brazil, “people are always trying to help each other out with what (they) have,” and he said “you’re always looking out for your family and friend, and sometimes even put them first in certain situations.” Dario described his personal culture as “very team oriented.” Of Venezuelans, himself included, he said “we sort of strive to achieve goals in groups.” Dario also said:

Though I identify as one hundred percent Venezuelan, I consider myself to be an enthusiast of foreign cultures, and have a great deal of appreciation towards them from my time living in different countries around the world and interacting with their people. Dario also explained that “navigating cultures (has become) a part of who (he is).”

Miguel defined himself as “a Spaniard abroad.” He recounted how “technically, (he) was always an international student” who “never actually studied in Spain.” Miguel was “either a Spaniard in Argentina, a Spaniard in Mexico, or a Spaniard in the United States.” Miguel saw his personal culture as both “Mediterranean” and “international.” He described how his international student identity shaped his personal connections and how he saw himself on campus:

I mainly feel like I interact with international people, because that is mainly the people we hang out with and where we go out…(and) outside of school (these) are mainly the things we do, because we are international students, and not … Americans. So I found
myself… not interacting with Americans as much, but way more with … international people. For myself … personally, I am willing to learn about other (cultures), but at the same time, trying to keep yourself in a group where you have your own culture (because) maybe … you are homesick. But at the same time, as an international student, you are open to learning about American cultures, because that is why we came here.

The participants provided in-depth descriptions of what they considered were important and influential factors in shaping their personal cultures. Their home countries’ cultures had a strong effect, as well as, their varied experiences abroad. The next sub-theme focuses in on how the participants’ personal identities were shaped by their experiences studying at this particular university, where there are many other international students on campus. The next sub-theme also delves into how participants felt that studying a foreign language in a multicultural and multilingual classroom environment shaped their personal cultures.

**How their international learning experiences shaped their personal identities.**

Each of the participants described being changed by their international learning experiences. The international students described the ways in which their personal cultures had been altered or augmented from studying with other international students by their sides in classrooms and on campus. Miguel said “you are able to see a new culture and a new way of thinking,” and “you get a new perspective on a problem that maybe you were not able to see before.” He went on to say that these kinds of international experiences “have shaped (him) to be able to see problems in a different way.”

Dario simply stated “it has made me who I am today, and I would never change a moment of all the exposure, (because) the world is global now.” Dario went into detail about how his personality was less open or more open, depending on the circumstances:
Interactions with other students depends on our level of openness and cultural background. On one hand, with Latin or European friends it will be very casual and often talk about subjects that may seem personal to an outsider, but we already have that level of confidence. On the other hand, with Asian friends, there may be more limitations in our topics. With classmates, no matter their origin, you always want to leave your mark when making contributions to the class, asking questions, and during the group projects. Little by little, you gauge how well you fit in with each other and then maybe start making jokes and anchoring it in to your “real” personality.

Dario explained the necessity to be able to change one’s propriospect given the situation and given the cultures of the others around him at a given time. He was able to become flexible with his personal identity to navigate the many other cultures he encountered.

Maria saw how her time as an international student had changed her perspective on her previous propriospect: “I think that I am becoming more like this (American and international) culture.” She had also become “more critical about (her) culture.” Maria felt “the more (she) was (in the U.S.), the more open-minded” she became. This experience made Maria “stronger…emotionally,” and “more confident to reach (her) goals.” She was not the only participant to feel that this international experience had a positive effect on their personal identity.

Gregor said “I definitely matured.” “Definitely in terms of working (Gregor) did change (himself) in the way that (he approached) … classes and co-ops.” Following struggle, he saw the need to make adjustments, personal growth, and improvements:

At first, I was not ready for (the challenge of university life). (On co-op and in class) they made me feel that I needed to change something so that (I would be) back on
track… So, once you find out, you can change the way you do things. You change the approach, and sooner or later … (the problems) would be worked out.

Gregor’s lived experiences with personal growth were echoed in Adriano’s account. Adriano said “I am a lot more sensitive to other cultures,” after his international experiences. He went into detail about his transformation:

Before when I left Brazil, I knew how we were. We were …very warm people. We would … give a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and it feels weird that some other cultures don’t do it… You are more sensitive towards people, and … you try to adapt.

He also explained in-depth how he developed more curiosity about others and a passion to understand more about other cultures:

I think (these international experiences have) shaped my identity, because it makes me curious about the rest of the world. And when I learn about language and culture, I just want to go to (the country) more, and experience it more, and learn it more… I think is fun when you are able to communicate with people in their own language (and) in their own culture, (and) to talk about things from their culture. It helps a lot to connect on a personal level (with others). So, I think it has added to me as a person in general… I don’t know how many nationalities (I have met). I have met people from all over the world… I have learned about the culture and I have more of an understanding of why a culture is the way it is, and you just get a better understanding of things in general (from international experiences).

According to Adriano, the interactions he had with other cultures created a strong positive influence on his personal identity.
Conclusion

The in-depth interpretive phenomenological analysis of semi-structured interviews from five international students provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences. The analysis rendered four major themes: “Because the Education System Is Best,” “Everything Is a Struggle,” “A New Way of Thinking,” and Prospects: “It Has Made Me Who I Am Today.” From these four major themes, ten sub-themes emerged. The collective narrative that emerged from the analysis of themes, was that of international students seeking the best opportunities for their futures in the American higher education system, and despite their struggles, demonstrating personal growth, cultural competency, and pride in their accomplishments.

The themes came together to show a snapshot in time of what life as an international student can be like in the era of globalization. The common themes told a story of students seeking the best opportunities that they could find. The sense of striving for the best and feeling proud despite their struggles was also common across each of the students’ experiences. Another common thread was a sense of linguistic vulnerability. Some of the participants felt that this linguistic vulnerability was something that they had mostly overcome in their past multilingual experiences, though each participant, especially Maria, noted varying degrees of how they still struggled with English language.

The other common theme was cultural challenges. Despite each of the participants having had multiple international experiences before coming to study in the U.S., each still expressed emotional and cultural challenges with American and university culture. Lastly, each of the students concluded their interviews with remarks of feeling successful or proud of their accomplishments. It is indeed a difficult task to graduate from an American university as an
international student, and this is something that I felt was easy for me to take for granted at times – despite having gone through the process myself.

Despite their challenges, all but one of the participants seemed overall very pleased with the internationalization of their learning experience. Each participant, except Gregor, cited the internationalization of the student body, study abroad opportunities, and multicultural and multilingual classrooms as positive. Maria, Dario, Adriano, and Miguel all reported that they had learned about themselves and learned about others unintentionally and intentionally from their multicultural experiences. They also described positive effects on their personal identities from their experiences. Perhaps, because I shared in some of the same feelings as an international student, I was not surprised by these particular findings. There were some findings did surprise me and outliers to the general themes that I was not expecting.

There were three distinct areas in which I was caught off guard from the findings. One area that I did not expect to hear commonalities was in the case of the two participants from Venezuela. This was one area where my blind spots and biases came into play. I was surprised to hear from Maria and Dario that the serious economic and political issues in their home countries had added stress to their lives and had acted as the main motivation factor that lead them to study in the U.S. Though I had known this fact about them prior to conducting interviews, my generalization of international students as seeking better opportunities because they can, not because they feel compelled to, was a blind spot that I had to confront.

Another example in which I was surprised by the findings was when Gregor expressed several instances of conflict due to the multicultural experiences he had had. He was the only participant to have apathetic and negative views of multicultural classrooms. I found this ironic as his presence as an international student contributed to the very nature of the multicultural and
multilingual classroom. This outlying idea helped me to consider the complex perceptions and feelings of international students, and how one should expect some irony and hypocrisy, just as there probably is when examining any large group of diverse individuals and their feelings. He was also the only participant that was sure that he wanted to return to his home country after graduation. After reflection, I realized that I may have been surprised by his experiences because they were not like those I had as an international student or what I found common among the majority of international students I taught over the years. I also came to understand that this interview setting afforded me a deeper look at conflicts and negative feelings that I may not have been exposed to as accurately as I had thought through classroom interactions over the years.

Lastly, I was surprised to see that some of the participants expressed contradictory views on multicultural learning and personal identity. Dario, for example, described how he did not feel that the multicultural learning environment had an effect on his ability to learn or on his identity. Later in the interview, he described how his international learning experiences had made him who he was. I was anticipating that I may not receive deeply reflective answers to some questions without the participants having time to fully reflect on the questions, but I did not anticipate that I would receive some conflicting responses. In retrospect, I can understand how these students define themselves in complex and sometimes contradictory ways – just as we all may, particularly when put on the spot. Reflecting on my own experiences as an international student and how I think I would have answered my own questions years ago, I can understand how I may have also been contradictory in my thinking. It is only after years of continued living in the U.S. and working with international students that I have been able to
think about my own experiences the way that I now think about them. These students are not yet in my shoes, which was something that I needed to reflect on to see with more perspective.

The implications of the data collected, and how it is situated within the current body of literature will be discussed next, in chapter five.
Chapter Five: Discussion of Research Findings and Implications for Practice

The rising number of international students on American college campuses has changed the dynamic of classrooms and the broader campus culture (Wagner, 2004). As internationalization of colleges has occurred, it has become increasingly important to understand the learning and cultural experiences of international students who are leaving their mark on the universities. To better understand the mark the university and the learning experiences leave on international students, this study asked the following research question: What are the learning and cultural experiences of international undergraduate students in an American-based foreign language classroom? This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis study sought to shed light on the international students’ perceptions of learning a foreign language in a multicultural and multilingual environment, as well as, more broadly their experiences learning at an American university.

In-depth analysis of five semi-structured interviews with international students from Europe and South America produced four major themes and ten sub-themes. The four major themes were: “Because the Education System Is Best,”, “Everything Is a Struggle,”, learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, and propriospect. Throughout the analysis (and continuing through the development of chapter five), I have been incorporating reflection and has attempted to determine the deeper meaning behind what the participants actually said (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

This chapter will discuss the implications of my interpretations and analysis of the data collected from semi-structured interviews with the five participants. First this chapter will discuss how the findings relate to Goodenough’s (1961) Culture theory, which served as the theoretical framework for this study. Next, this chapter will explore how the data from this study
relate to the literature review. Then, this chapter will describe the implications this study has on future research. Next, this chapter will discuss reflexivity and reciprocity. Finally, this chapter will delve into this study’s implications for practical applications in the realm of higher education.

**Discussion of the Findings and Culture Theory**

W. H. Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory was the theoretical framework utilized in this study. Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory emphasized the importance of examining culture from the participants’ perspectives. Discussing culture with participants was imperative according to culture theory (Goodenough, 1961). Culture was one of the main focuses of the semi-structured interviews with the international student participants. During the data collection, participants were asked open-ended questions to describe different aspects of their culture. By showcasing participants’ descriptions of their cultures, this study was in alignment with Goodenough’s (1961) definition of culture and view of researching culture. Goodenough (1961) argued that culture arises from learning and interaction, and this study’s findings center around participants’ interactions and personal cultures.

Goodenough’s (1961) also argued that the researcher must give the individual participants a direct voice when describing their cultures. Each participant in this study described aspects of their personal cultures. Also discussed in the findings, were how the participants’ personal cultures fit into the larger culture of the university. There were mismatches for each participant when reflecting on the intersection between their personal cultures and the university culture and, more broadly, American culture.
The cultural mismatches that participants discussed were different for each participant, based on their perceptions of other cultures, and based on their personal cultures. Though the cultural mismatches were varied, the overarching idea from this subtheme was that these participants faced struggles in adjusting to these cultural mismatches. Along with these struggles, participants also described several emotions that accompanied the struggles. The emotions ranged from anxiety to pride. Despite their cultural struggles, each of the participants also expressed positive feelings, such as, curiosity and a sense of accomplishment.

In Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory, operating culture was defined as one’s personal culture in use at a given time, depending on the situation. Culture theory’s definition of propriospect as the sum of the many personal cultures that an individual possesses, was reflected in the findings of this study (Goodenough, 1961). The findings from the participant interviews showed that the participants were capable of manipulating their cultures to match, not always successfully, the environment. The participants discussed time when they were successful, unsuccessful, and even at an advantage over American peers, when choosing a particular operating culture. The five international students interviewed for this study demonstrated varying abilities to morph their operating cultures to meet the subculture and group cultures in which they were living, working, and studying.

Goodenough (1961) defined culture as a living organism that changes, grows, and mutates, not only with the individual, but also within groups, and from one generation to the next. The findings showed that the majority of the participants found that their personal culture and identity was shaped by their international learning experiences. The participants, in each case, were the first or second generation in their respective families to have been international students. This study acted as an example of how globalization has touched and shaped this
generation’s cultural identities. Through the spoken words of the participants, this study had the finger on the pulse of students involved in a cultural mutation and has demonstrated the living, ever-changing nature of culture.

Though this study did not directly address culture at the societal level, inferences can be drawn from the findings to add detail to the picture of globalization and internationalization. The accounts from these participants describes a generation of students who, in large numbers, are leaving their home countries for better educational and career opportunities at universities in America. Culture theory’s societal Culture, was defined as the sum of all the propriospects of the society (Goodenough, 1961). A full examination of society’s culture was beyond the scope of this study, however, the findings of this study contribute to future studies which take a larger view of the cultural moment occurring as a result of globalization. Culture theory’s concepts of group culture and subcultures were not beyond the scope of this study (Goodenough, 1961).

Group culture was defined as the dynamic standards set by the sum of the subcultures and individual cultures in a group of people (Goodenough, 1961). Subcultures were likened to dialects, in Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory, and were clusters of propriospects that shared common traditions and similarities. Each of the participants commented on the subcultures in which they felt that they participated. Indirectly or directly, the findings demonstrated the following subcultures, for example: international student culture, Spanish-speaking culture, European culture, South-American culture, high class culture, and business school culture. In this study, the major group culture can be though of as the culture of the private internationalized American university culture, that was unanimously described as work-focused by all of the participants.
Though the findings of this study are in accordance with various aspects of W. H. Goodenough’s (1961) culture theory, there was one important point of divergence. Culture theory posited that objectivity could be maintained by the researcher (Goodenough, 1961). I did not follow this belief of culture theory as it was developed by W.H. Goodenough. I embraced the idea of subjectivity as defined by the quantitative IPA approach. This point of divergence between culture theory and this study is an important distinction. I employed constant reflection in this study at all phases of the research. I embraced subjectivity of this study, and discussed biases, positionality, and how these factors may have affected the findings. Next, the relationship between the findings and the current body of literature will be discussed.

Findings and the Literature Review

The literature review explored two strands of the literature that applied to this study: language acquisition and learning in a multicultural environment. There were a lack of studies that explored both the concepts of language acquisition and learning in a multicultural environment. The findings of this study related to each strand of the literature review. I was most interested in this study’s ability to address the intersection of the two strands of literature, because there were a lack of studies that focused on the intersection. How the findings of this study related to the literature review, and how this study addresses the intersection of the two strands of the literature will be discussed next.

Findings and multicultural literature. The literature review on learning in a multicultural environment produced several major points: challenges international students face; challenges of learning in multicultural environments; the development of reflective thinking, cross-cultural communication skills, pluralistic skills, and cultural sensitivity; and cultural
identity in multicultural settings. This section discusses how the findings of this study relate to the literature review of multicultural learning environments.

**Challenges.** The literature review demonstrated that there are several challenges that have been found to be common with international college students: loneliness, homesickness, depression, isolation, uncertainty about career options, lack of English language skills, and a lack of understanding of American culture (Yan & Sendall, 2016; Zhou, Frey, & Bang, 2011). Martin (2010) also discussed how the challenges facing international students are unique and are not faced in the same way with American students. Overall, the findings from this study support the literature. Each of the participants described their challenge with learning the English language, and with a cultural mismatch that they encountered both on campus and in America. The participants in this study also alluded to, if not explicitly stating, their homesickness and isolation. The findings of this study also support the literature review’s finding of uncertainty over career paths.

One important finding that this study brought to light with the two participants from Venezuela was the idea that they had extra concerns about the current and future state of their home country. The two international students from Venezuela revealed in their interviews that the chaotic and dire state of Venezuela’s economic and political situation caused them worry, sadness, and a desire to remain in the U.S. following graduation to find work. The current turmoil in Venezuela had a strong effect on the participants feelings, thoughts, and academic and career choices. The concept of leaving a home country that is in distress for American universities is an important one, and must be considered for future studies.

Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) reported that international students whose needs were not met, developed negative psychological effects, which resulted in negative behaviors. This study
found that though each of the five participants described cultural struggles, two of the participants went further to describe how these struggles manifested into conflict. Gregor and Miguel both described scenarios in which they needed to adjust to cultural criticism to better perform on campus or on co-op. Given that these two particular participants explained negative feelings, negative behaviors (by American or campus cultural standards), and some form of clashing of cultures, it was evident that this study’s findings did support this aspect of the literature review.

One area that the findings from this study diverge from the findings of the literature review was in the realm of participants’ perceived support on campus. Zhou, Frey, and Bang (2011) reported that international students receive little support from their institutions, and that institutions do not incorporate international student voices into their decision-making regarding cultural issues. The participants in this study were overall impressed by the amount of support on campus. Gregor, Miguel, Dario, and Maria each expressed gratitude for the academic support and access to advisors on campus. Some participants also compared their position at this particular university as “customers,” praising the university for catering to their needs. Gregor, impressed with the support at this university, lamented that in Bulgaria students are on their own. Though each participant was able to identify many areas in which there were cultural struggles and language struggles, none seemed to explicitly place blame on the university’s support system. Instead, the participants in this study were complimentary toward the university, despite their personal struggles. These seemingly contradictory views in the findings of this study, and the contradiction between the participants’ perspectives in this study with the literature review findings warrants future study for more clarification and nuanced understandings.
**Pluralistic skills, reflection, and cultural sensitivity.** The literature review emphasized that students require strong guidance and role models when it comes to developing reflective thinking, cultural sensitivity, and pluralistic skills (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Patterson, 2013; King & Schuford, 1996; and Bloom, 2008). Authors also argued that foreign language teachers may be in unique positions to serve as role models and promoters of more evolved cultural thinking, cross-cultural communication, and deeper reflective thought (Alon & Higgins, 2005; Washington, Okoro, & Okoro, 2013; and Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2008). Washington et al. (2013) argued that teachers should be trained for better emotional intelligence and cross-cultural communication to better guide and model for students. Lastly, Bloom (2008) described how most undergraduate students were not able to think reflectively beyond the third of six stages of intercultural sensitivity.

The findings of this study supported the idea that the foreign language classroom was a place of reflection for these international students. These participants did not explicitly feel that this was due to the professor’s guidance, but more so due to the multicultural and multilingual nature of the class makeup. Each of the participants were aware of the presence of students from other countries in their Italian language classroom, and most expressed strongly positive views of this. Only one participant, Gregor, expressed some negative feelings towards this environment.

The participants demonstrated varied levels and abilities of reflective thought through their interviews. Applying Bloom’s (2008) stages of intercultural sensitivity, it was demonstrated that the findings of this study did not support the findings of Bloom’s study. The results of the interviews of this study showed that most of the time, participants were beyond the third stage of Bloom’s stages of intercultural sensitivity to Acceptance, Adaptation, and
Integration. The findings from this study suggested that participants were able to think more reflectively than participants in Bloom’s study. Future studies should examine if international students tend to be more culturally sensitive and evolved than their American peers.

**Cultural identity.** Martin (2010), Halic, Greenburg, and Paulus (2009), and Popov et al. (2011) described how language and cultural identity were central to international students’ identities and experiences. The literature review also argued that international students are able to shift their cultural identities fluidly to match the given situation (Martin, 2010). Due to cultural mismatches in identities, Popov et al. (2011) discussed varying perceptions and challenges international students face when working in multicultural groups. The findings from this study support the literature review concerning cultural identity.

All of the participants expressed how their language and cultural identities were central in defining who they were. Furthermore, the participants were able to describe different situations in the multicultural classroom or on campus in which their cultural identity was matched to their given situation. All of the international students in this study, with the exception of one participant, spoke positively of the various multicultural experiences at this particular university. Gregor was indifferent and at times during the interview expressing displeasure with interactions with students from other cultures. This range from positive to negative feelings supports the literature’s (Popov et al., 2011) argument that there may be a range of perceptions and views based on international students’ past experiences with students from other cultures.

For the most part, the findings from this study do support the literature on learning in a multicultural environment. There were instances, however, where the findings of this study rendered more complicated results, or diverged from the literature review. I suggest that future
studies investigate the following: comparison between cultural sensitivity and reflective thinking skills of international and domestic students, better understanding of students leaving home countries in crisis, international students’ perceptions of the university’s role in assisting them to overcome challenges, and investigations into how teachers of foreign language may play a unique role in modeling and guiding students to be more culturally aware. The next section will discuss the findings of this study in relation to the second strand of the literature review, language acquisition.

**Findings and language acquisition literature.** The second strand of the literature review centered on the body of literature on language acquisition. The major themes from the language acquisition literature focused on factors affecting the language learning process: learning style, linguistic factors, and various psychological factors. This section will discuss the relationship of the findings of this study to the major findings from the literature review.

**Learning style.** Tight (2010) discussed the important influence that learning style and teaching style has on language learning. Language learning was found to be most successful when learning style and teaching style were matched (Tight, 2010). More effective than matching learning style and teaching style, was when teaching style was multimodal (Tight, 2010). In this study, each of the participants were asked what the best way to learn a language was in their opinion. All of the participants, with the exception of Maria, explained how being immersed in the country of origin of the target language and culture was best. If that was not an option, the next-best method of learning was to learn from, and spend time with native speakers, according to most of the participants. Maria emphatically explained how music was her preferred method of learning the Italian language. She went into detail about how she uses music to learn Italian vocabulary, pronunciation, and understand culture. This finding, though
not in line with the majority learning style for the participants, supports the importance of a multimodal approach to teaching foreign language. The findings also suggest the importance of discussing with students their preferred learning methods for foreign language and culture.

Linguistic factors. Several linguistic factors were identified in the literature review that were shown to have an effect on language acquisition. The literature suggested that the increased number of L1(s) and L2(s), increased length of exposure to L1(s) and L2(s), and increased proficiency of one’s L1(s) and L2(s) results in ease of learning an L3 (Rast, 2010; Waheed, 2009). The range of languages spoken by the participants in this study were between four and six. The number of languages that these participants reported knowledge of was likely to have contributed to their reports that learning the Italian language was not a difficult challenge. Most of the participants did report struggles with learning their L2(s) or earlier L3s than the Italian language, however, which also supports the finding in the literature review that successive L3s tended to be easier to learn. The students’ length of exposure and proficiency with their L1(s), L2(s), and L3(s) (prior to Italian) were not investigated as part of this study, therefore it is difficult to know if this aspect of language acquisition was in accordance with Rast’s (2010) findings about L1(s) and L2(s) proficiency and length of exposure.

Rast (2010) and Vetter (2011) also noted that increased similarity between prior languages and the target language, as well as, languages that follow universal grammar rules allows for less challenge with language acquisition. All of the participants, except for Gregor, detailed how their L1s of Spanish and Portuguese gave them a perceived linguistic advantage of their American peers when learning Italian language and culture. Gregor, whose native language was Bulgarian, did not share this finding. Spanish and Portuguese are similar to Italian, and each of these languages follow universal grammar rules.
Because Maria, Miguel, Dario, and Adriano all felt that they had a language acquisition advantage, they each described, in different ways, how their foreign language courses were a respite from the academic rigors and struggles faced in other courses and aspects of campus life. Not only does this finding provide a case of strong support for the literature review findings, but it also ties into the next section of psychological factors, because participants described how they felt when they had a linguistic advantage. With student perceptions and language learning there are many psychological factors at play. How the psychological factors in the literature review related to the findings from this study will be presented next.

**Psychological factors.** The literature review has demonstrated that psychological factors can have a stronger influence on language acquisition than linguistic factors. Vetter (2011) and Rast (2010) described how the perceived similarities between the target language and one’s prior language history is a stronger influence to successful language acquisition than the actual linguistic similarities between the languages. Likewise, Rast (2010) found that the perceived distance between the target language and one’s language history can negatively affect language acquisition. All of the participants, except for Gregor, felt that their self-confidence was boosted above the level of their American peers in the Italian classroom, because of the perceived (and actual) closeness of the Italian language with Spanish and Portuguese.

Self-efficacy was found to increase with language learning in the literature review (Jabbarifar, 2011). The majority of the student experiences found in this study support the literature review’s relationship between self-efficacy and language learning. The literature review also yielded other factors that influence student academic self-efficacy in the language learning setting: past positive experience with language learning, encouragement from peers and teachers, seeing other students succeed, sense of appropriate challenge in language learning, and
enjoyment of the language learning experience (Busse & Walter, 2013; Jabbarifar, 2011). The international students in this study described both positive and negative past language learning experiences, which provides some support for the findings of the literature review, because their negative past learning experiences, with English or German, were not associated to their Italian language learning experience.

Most of the participants also recalled ways in which they felt more prepared to learn Italian than their American peers. Though this finding was not directly in accordance with Busse and Walter’s (2013) finding of vicarious learning – a sense of “if they can do it, so can I” – it does speak to the idea that perception of relative ease of learning in comparison to peers boosts self-efficacy. Participants in this study felt that they should have had an advantage linguistically over American peers, and may have also felt more confident to see their American peers succeeding. The literature review also showed that motivation had a large part in one’s language acquisition ability.

The literature review revealed several factors that increased academic motivation for students to learn foreign languages. Nicholson (2013) described that one’s perception of the ideal L2 self and the enjoyment one receives from learning a language were factors affecting motivation to learn a foreign language. Hsieh (2008) discussed how a family heritage connection to a foreign language and culture and a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language were factors that influenced student motivation to learn. Busse and Walter (2013) found that students who felt that they were making progress with language learning were more motivated to continue to pursue studies of the target language. Busse and Walter (2013) also described that finding pleasure in language learning was a much stronger motivating factor in language learning than was one’s desire to become proficient in a language.
The findings of this study explicitly examined participants reported motivations for learning the Italian language. One student, Adriano, detailed his passion for learning Italian language, partly due to a family heritage. Each of the participants expressed positive views and enjoyment of learning the Italian language. Because the majority of the participants expressed the relative ease of learning Italian language and culture, this may have motivated them to continue to learn Italian, study abroad in Italy, or work harder academically. Though participants may not have expressed verbally the connection between their motivation and their other perceptions of learning Italian language, this idea was expressed in the context of their interviews. Additionally, because Italian language was the fourth, fifth, or sixth language to which the participants had been exposed, the finding that a propensity toward language learning motivated participants to further learn language was supported both in this study and in the language acquisition literature.

Summary of the findings. Overall, the findings of this study supported the findings of the two strands of the literature review: multicultural education and language acquisition. Though there was a lack of literature that tied the two strands and examined language learning in multicultural and multilingual classroom settings, this study does fit into that precise gap. The areas where the two stands of literature review overlapped were regarding personal backgrounds, environmental conditions, and psychological factors. The findings of this study as described above related to each of the areas of intersection of the two strands of the literature review. The findings from this study equally related to the two strands of the literature review, proving to be a useful addition to both realms of research. Though this study has addressed the intersection of research in language learning and learning in multicultural settings, many future studies are suggested to better understand how education is changing in response to
globalization and internationalization. The implications of this study’s findings and specific recommendations for future studies is discussed next.

**Recommendations for Future Studies**

There are several areas that future studies should focus both to provide a better understanding of the multicultural and multilingual foreign language classroom, as well as, understanding the effects of globalization and internationalization on the learning and teaching experiences on college campuses. Future studies that have similar aims to this study would provide more breath to this realm of limited research. This study did not focus on the perspective of teachers, administrators, nor American students. Each of these parties’ perspectives would be important for future studies to address given the many that are affected by internationalization of college campuses. There were findings of the language acquisition and multicultural education strands of the literature review that were not as directly related to the findings of this study, though these literature review findings are still important and relevant areas for future studies to consider.

Vetter (2011), Rast (2010), Busse and Walter (2013), Ipek (2009), Hsieh (2008), King and Shuford (1996), and Bloom (2008) all detailed ways in which the role of the educator can be positively influential in both multicultural learning classrooms and in language acquisition classrooms. Future studies should focus on the teacher experience and how language teachers, in particular, may be uniquely positioned to enhance reflective thinking, cross-cultural communication skills, pluralistic skills, and language acquisition (Vetter, 2011; Rast, 2010; Busse & Walter, 2013; Ipek, 2009; Hsieh, 2008; King & Shuford, 1996; Bloom, 2008).
Perspectives from both American and teachers born abroad should be considered for future studies examining the effects of globalization on higher education.

The scope of this study did not include an examination of factors or persons at the administration and leadership level of the target university. The target university of this study was ranked as one of the most alluring for international students and one of the universities in the country with the highest percentage of international students. Future studies should target the leadership and administration’s very influential and important role in the internationalization of American college campuses. It would be important for future research to focus on universities that are leaders in globalization, such as the target university, as well as less-internationalized campuses for varied perspectives and a larger view of the effects of globalization.

Lastly, I suggest that future studies also consider the effects of globalization on other highly internationalized universities abroad. One critique in the literature review was that Western universities have had a disproportionate influence on international and multicultural education models due to the global market for higher education (Maringe & Foskett, 2010; Wagner, 2004). Several international studies were included in the literature review for this study purposefully to gain an international perspective. Future studies along the same vein as this study should be completed around the world. A view of multicultural education, language acquisition in multicultural environments, and internationalization of college campuses from all areas of the world can provide insight and relevance to higher education institutions around the globe.
Reflexivity

As a researcher, I was able to identify with the five participants in many ways because I was also an international student at an American university in the 1990’s. As a doctoral student, I have been able to apply theoretical and research lenses to the participants lived experiences to make more systematic sense of what they (and I) went through. As a researcher, I was able to open my eyes to the widely varied experiences, yet profoundly universal common ground between the participants’ experiences. As a practitioner, I am excited about being able to put this new found understanding into practice in the classroom. As a change agent, I am inspired and energized by the participants’ collective ability to persevere despite challenges and achieve their goals.

The desired outcome of this study was to give a voice to international students on American campuses, in the wake of major trends of globalization of education and internationalization of higher education. The data collected supports this goal due to the rich, thoughtful, and candid reflections that these five participants shared about their lived experiences as international students in the age of globalization. At each stage of this study I set out to reflect on the course of the study and on the findings. I journaled and thought about how I was feeling and how my interactions made me feel. I also thought about how the students were feeling and looked for ways that I might be projecting or missing something in a blindspot. I thought about what findings surprised me, and dug deeper to understand why that might have been. I also reflected on my interpretations and then considered and questioned myself to see how my biases may have been playing a role in my process of understanding. Where able I have noted how my personal thoughts, feelings, and preconceptions may have factored into my work throughout this study.
Reciprocity

Trainor and Bouchard (2013) argued that reciprocity should be considered at all phases of research. Reciprocity has the potential to ground my interpretations and hold myself accountable to properly contextualize the participants’ life experiences (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). I have felt entirely grateful for the participants in this study, not only for taking the time and volunteering to participate, but also for providing honest, candid, and sometimes vulnerable insights into their experiences as international students. Reflexivity has been an integral part of my process of digesting information and interpreting information, in part, because of the my deliberate actions and natural tendencies, and in part because of the research method chosen. Trainor and Bouchard (2013) also posited that “a stance of reciprocity further compels us to interrogate our biases and assumptions.”

Reciprocity should also be considered and pondered in the context of the theoretical framework and research methods employed by the researcher (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). This suggestion coincides with my goal to use IPA to give voice to the participants of this study, to inform the gap in the literature. There were many pieces of literature included in this study’s literature review which discussed the statistics behind the rise of international students, however, there were very few studies that gave thorough accounts of international students exact quotes, particularly in regards to learning a foreign language in a multicultural classroom setting.

Trainor and Bouchard (2013) also argued that because researchers are the powerful few whose work can influence education policy and the lives of many, it is imperative that researchers use reciprocity to afford deep connections between researcher and participants.
Without these deep connections and a consideration for reciprocity, there is a danger of promoting research agendas that do not support the true needs of the participants, and in this case, the larger international student body as a whole (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). By showcasing the complex, multifaceted, vulnerable, and sometimes contradictory lived-experiences of international students through this study, I have begun to provide reciprocity. Trainor and Bouchard (2013) push researchers to take reciprocity one step further: to action and activism. The next section will discuss the immediate practical applications that I believe this study affords to me as a scholar practitioner and others who may take an interest in the study’s findings.

Practical Applications

I have considered several practical applications for this study to inform students, educators, administrators and leaders. The results of this study could be submitted for publication to share the voices and lived experiences of the participants in this study and contribute to the gap in the intersection of the language learning and multicultural education strands of literature. Further, I could present the findings of this study to the faculty of the institution where this study took place, particularly to the education and world language departments. I could also develop educational materials for educators and administrators to serve as part of workshops on foreign language teaching, multicultural and multilingual classroom education, and teaching strategies or considerations for working with international students. I could actively search for and establish a relationship with institutions that share a common interest in serving the needs of international students and educators of international students. I will take the findings of the literature review and of this study to inform my own
teaching methods to improve the language learning experience in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have been motivated by the findings of this study to become an advocate in the education field for international students in higher education. Becoming an advocate for the unique needs of international students would be only one form of reciprocity that I owe to the participants of this study who shared their thoughts, feelings, struggles, and challenges.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of international students studying the Italian language in the presence of both American and a diverse array of other international students at a highly selective and private university. The theoretical framework and qualitative research method of IPA informed this study’s design to include reflexivity at all levels. The theoretical framework and IPA methodology also provided for rich stories and the presentation and analysis of participants lived experiences in their own words. The findings from this study point to the unique struggles, motivations, personal identities, and learning experiences of international students. This study adds to the literature on globalization and internationalization of higher education in the United States. This study addresses a gap in the literature head-on by investigating language learning in multicultural classroom settings. The findings suggest that international students face challenges that can be addressed with changes to the structure and resources of the current education system. Generally speaking, this study also showed that international students are polyglots who are resilient in the face of challenges, persistent, strong-willed, culturally aware and culturally challenged, and proud of their accomplishments. Though this study has immediate practical applications to contribute to language learning and
multicultural education realms of research, future studies are essential to further understanding of the complex implications that globalization has on higher education.
Dear students,

My name is Riccardo Binetti, and I am a student in the Doctorate of Education program here at Northeastern University. I am conducting a study as part of my doctoral thesis on the topics of language learning and culture. I am recruiting international students who have recently taken Introductory Italian 1 courses to participate in a single interview, lasting no more than two hours. Participants are offered a $10 gift card for the university bookstore for their participation in this study.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply no later than 1/31/18.

Thank you,

Riccardo Binetti
CALLING ALL INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHO HAVE STUDIED ITALIAN!

Contact Riccardo Binetti
At

Binetti.r@husky.neu.edu

Doctorate of Education Program, College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University

If you are interested in volunteering to participate in a research study.

Only one interview is required, lasting approximately 45 minutes.

IRB# CPS17-10-06
Approved: 12/7/17 Expiration Date: 12/6/18
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Template 3 NU HSRP Rev. 2/7/2017

45 CFR 46 117(c) In certain instances, an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects. In cases in which the documentation requirement is waived, the IRB may require the investigator to provide subjects with a written statement regarding the research.

Only the IRB can waive or modify the consent process. Researchers are not authorized to make this decision. When a signed informed consent is not required, this consent form may be given to participants to keep. Please modify the following information as necessary.

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies
Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator: Dr. M. Billye Sankofa Waters, Student Researcher: Riccardo Binetti

Title of Project: Language Learning in the Era of Globalization: The International Students’ Perspective

Request to Participate in Research
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of undergraduate international students.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place at Northeastern University and will take about 45 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to answer a series of questions about your experiences.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about the experiences of undergraduate international students.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will receive a $10 gift certificate to the Northeastern University Book Store at the end of the interview.
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Riccardo Binetti at 617-699-0460, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. M. Billye Sankofa Waters, the Principal Investigator at b.sankofawaters@northeastern.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 260 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@northeastern.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

Riccardo Binetti
Appendix C

Sample Interview Schedule

Institution: ______Northeastern University______________________________

Interviewee: __ (international student’s pseudonym)______________________

Interviewer: _____Riccardo Binetti_____________________________________

RESEARCH QUESTION: ______What are the learning and cultural experiences of international undergraduate students in an American-based foreign language classroom?______________________________

Part I: Introductory Session Objectives (5-7 minutes): Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions. Review and sign the informed consent.

Introductory Protocol

You have been selected to speak with us today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about learning the Italian language in a multilingual and multicultural classroom setting. My research project focuses on the experience of international students in this type of setting. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into language learning and culture in the multilingual and multicultural classroom setting. Hopefully this will allow us to identify ways in which we can improve the learning experience for international students.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank the participant, let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment]. I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the audio files which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the form I have with me [provide the form now]. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?
This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

**Part II:** Interviewee Background Objectives (5-10 minutes): To establish rapport and obtain the story of in the participants’ general with the research topic.

A. Interviewee Background - Motivation

1. You have identified yourself as an international student. Can you describe where you are from and how you came to be an international student in the United States?
   1. **Probe:** What motivated you to decide not to pursue education in your home country?
   2. **Probe:** Did you consider going to another foreign country, other than the United States, to study?
   3. **Probe:** Was this your first experience as an international student?

2. What was your motivation for choosing this university?

3. What was your motivation for taking a foreign language class?

4. What languages do you have exposure to prior to this foreign language (Italian)?

5. What cultures do you have exposure to prior to this culture (Italian)?

**Part III:** Interviewee’s Perspective on Foreign Language Learning and Cultural Mismatches, Reflection, and Personal Identity Objectives (20-30 minutes): To establish the participant’s point of view on cultural and linguistic mismatches, reflections as an international student, and identity shaping.

B. Mismatch Between Participant’s Learning and Culture with the University’s Teaching and Culture

One of the things I am interested in learning about is how the culture you have discovered here in the United States and at this university may be different from your own. I would like to hear about your perspective/experience about learning a foreign language and culture in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key
experiences you encountered. If you mention other people, please use do not mention names. You may say that you are giving the person a pseudonym.

6. How would you describe the best way for you to learn about a foreign language and culture?

7. What are the key characteristics of your personal culture?

8. What are the key characteristics of this university’s culture?

   1. Probe: Where are there mismatches between the culture you find here in the United States and on campus versus your personal culture?

9. Given that you were studying a foreign language alongside students who spoke many different languages, how did this affect your learning of a foreign language?

   1. Probe: Did you also learn something about another language (other than Italian or your native language(s)) inadvertently?

      1. If so, how did that affect your learning of the target foreign language?

10. Given that you were studying a foreign culture alongside students with various cultures, how did this affect your learning of the target culture?

    1. Probe: Did you also learn something about another culture inadvertently?

        1. If so, how did that affect your learning of the target culture?

11. How was this experience different from when you learned a foreign language in the past?

    1. Probe: Was there a mismatch between the learning style you are used to and the learning style in this foreign language classroom?

12. Did you see any advantages or limitations from learning a foreign language in this environment?

C. Reflection

Another area I am interested in is reflection. Studies have shown how important reflection is to student’s ability to understand their own culture as well as the cultures of others. Reflection has also been demonstrated to be important in learning a foreign language. I will ask you some questions about reflection now.

13. How do you see yourself within the university?

    1. Probe: How do you see yourself interacting with other students?
14. Have you found yourself reflecting on your own culture and native language(s) when in a foreign language classroom?

1. **Probe:** Did the presence of other international students spark reflection on your own language and culture, or learning style?

15. Were you encouraged to reflect upon your own culture and language in your foreign language class?

1. **Probe:** If so, how was this presented?

2. **Probe:** How did this effect you?

D. Shaping Identity

_Lastly, I am interested in understanding how your experiences have shaped your personal identity and your cultural identity. I will finish up this interview by asking you a few questions about your cultural identity and how it may or may not have been shaped by your experiences as an international student._

16. How would you describe personal identity as an international student?

17. What were some of the struggles that you faced when learning a foreign language?

1. **Probe:** How did this struggle make you feel?

2. **Probe:** Was this a similar experience to other classes you have taken at this university?

18. What were some of the struggles that you faced when learning the target culture?

1. **Probe:** How did this struggle make you feel?

2. **Probe:** Was this a similar struggle to learning the American culture and the culture of this university?

19. What would you change about your learning experience?

1. **Probe:** Is there anything that you would change about the university environment?

20. How do you think this experience of learning a foreign language has shaped your identity?

*Ask participant if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.*
Table 1: “Because the Education System Is Best”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Motivation to Study in the U.S. and at this University</th>
<th>Motivation to Leave Home Country</th>
<th>Motivation to Learn the Italian Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>(The programs) are amazing</td>
<td>Our economic situation got bad (in Venezuela) with the inflation</td>
<td>I have to (because) it is part of my core (to learn languages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriano</td>
<td>The level of education here is much better than my home country … but also the fact that they have so many international experiences</td>
<td>The level of education here is much better than in my home country</td>
<td>I wanted to learn the language because it is a part of me and I feel like it is almost a duty to learn (Italian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Mainly it is because the last three years of high school I went to an American school … so I felt that I did that to study in America</td>
<td>I didn’t want to study where my family was</td>
<td>Mainly because it was easy for me It was an easy ‘A’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario</td>
<td>The co-op program and the ability to interact with a lot of international cultures</td>
<td>The situation of my home country (of Venezuela) was not at its finest</td>
<td>I wanted to get involved in Italian because it was closest to the languages I already know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregor</td>
<td>Because the education system is best (in the U.S.) and this university was one of the highest ranked universities that I was accepted to</td>
<td></td>
<td>I wanted to diversify my subject choice through out my educational career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2: “Everything Is a Struggle”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Struggles Learning a Foreign Language</th>
<th>Struggles Learning a Foreign Culture; Cultural Mismatches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Maria**           | **Regarding English:** (When) I’m … in a room with only Americans… I have to … speak perfectly, because you have to adapt to them  
                      | **Regarding Italian:** Probably memorizing verbs. Or the past participle. I wasn’t like a bad struggle.  | Everything is a struggle…(the question) is: “how do you overcome your struggles?” |
| **Adriano**         | **Regarding Foreign Languages, Generally Speaking:**  
                      | When you are learning at first and you have a strong accent – *laughter*  
                      | When you are young, you almost have that fear of messing up and then your self-confidence goes down  | I think that here (in the U.S.), they are individualistic and … they really only care about their personal gains for the most part |
| **Miguel**          | **Regarding Italian:**  
                      | I wasn’t super-prepared to speak formally  
                      | With Italian, for example, I always had a problem pronouncing “come” like “como,” because in Spanish it is “como”  | In America it has to be very “everything now,” and “everything by the rules”  
                      | **I came here and I got into trouble with (alcohol and cigarettes)** |
| **Dario**           | **Regarding Romance Languages:**  
                      | Most of my issues within (the) Romance languages is that they are so similar that sometimes you mix and match what sounds good…Sometimes there is a “mélange de palabras, understand?”  | The key is to understand that every society is different and, if you can’t change them, which you won’t, you must adapt yourself to fit in and be a part of the community  |
| **Gregor**          | **Regarding German:** Grammar and word structure … is very hard  
                      | **Regarding Italian:** I struggled …with pronunciation because of my accent  | When you first struggle, you have to first identify what it is inside yourself to change, because it is definitely within yourself, no one else to blame |
Table 3: “A New Way of Thinking”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection in the Classroom</th>
<th>Linguistic Factors</th>
<th>Student Perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Yeah, a lot (of reflection)</td>
<td>Music, music, music, music, music!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriano</td>
<td>Yeah, all the time</td>
<td>The best way (to learn a language) …is just by going there and …immersing yourself in the culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel</td>
<td>Yes, but most of the time it was to reflect on the culture of the country of the language that I was taking, but I did think …“oh this is very similar …to what we do in Spain.”</td>
<td>Living in Italy (and) being exposed to (Italian) and having the necessity to learn it (was more effective than learning in a classroom setting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario</td>
<td>One always goes back and reflects on one’s traditions, festivities, slang use, etc.</td>
<td>The best way, I would say to learn a foreign language and culture, is to interact with the people of that culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregor</td>
<td>Oh definitely, definitely</td>
<td>Definitely visiting a country would be the best firsthand experience. That’s for sure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Propriospects: “It Has Made Me Who I Am Today”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Students Describe Their Personal Cultures</th>
<th>How International Learning Experiences Shaped Their Personal Identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria I think for my personal culture: to be kind to people and … respectful</td>
<td>I think I am becoming more like this culture, (and ) I am more critical about my culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriano Being friendly and warm</td>
<td>I would say I am a lot more sensitive to other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel I define myself as a “Spaniard abroad” … technically, I have always been an international student</td>
<td>(Learning in a multicultural and multilingual classroom) has shaped me to be able to see problems in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dario My personal culture is very team oriented</td>
<td>It has made me who I am today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregor I would say that I am a pretty well-traveled person… all my life I have adapted</td>
<td>I have definitely matured I would not say that that I would adopt American culture … but I would definitely make use of some of the things that I have seen here and learned here and try to use them when I go back home in terms of working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Martin, P. (2010). ‘They have lost their identity but not gained a British one’: non-traditional multilingual students in higher education in the United Kingdom. *Language and Education, 24*(1), 9-20.


