

CULTURE SHOCK: AN UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE FOR BRAZILIANS THAT LIVE OUT OF THE COUNTRY

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ABSTRACT: The present work analyzes the results of a study accomplished with 12 (twelve) Brazilian that suffered culture shock symptoms, experienced living out of Brazil, when they traveled to other countries, such like Spain, Japan, England and United States. The subjects of this study that lived in another culture, had to take different attitudes from the ones that would take usually at their own country. Like this, the objective of the research, contextualized in the area of the applied linguistic, consisted of investigating the importance of being bilingual and also, bicultural, as a form of minimizing problems lived by people that live out of Brazil. Culture shock, in this context, is a feeling that can be a frustration or confusion felt when they come across values and situations which they were not familiar with. This way, the first part of this study presents a theoretical approach including themes as culture, acculturation and culture shock (Oberg, 1960; Ulmann, 1980; Winthrop, 1991; Brown, 1994; Thompson, 1996). The second part is composed of interviews with the different point of view in what says respect to the lived culture shock. Like this, variables as: sex, age, reasons to live out, etc, they were analyzed.

KEY WORDS: culture – culture shock - acculturation

RESUMO: O presente trabalho analisa os resultados obtidos de um estudo realizado com 12 (doze) brasileiros que sofreram sintomas de choque cultural, experienciados ao viverem fora do Brasil, quando viajaram para outros países, tais como Espanha, Japão, Inglaterra e Estados Unidos. Os sujeitos deste estudo ao vivenciarem outra cultura, muitas vezes, tiveram de tomar atitudes diferentes das que normalmente tomariam no seu próprio país. Assim, o objetivo da pesquisa, contextualizada na área da lingüística aplicada, consistiu em investigar a importância de ser bilingue e também, bicultural, como forma de minimizar problemas vivenciados por pessoas que moram fora do Brasil. Choque cultural, neste contexto, é um sentimento que tanto pode ser de frustração ou confusão sentido quando eles se deparam com valores e situações com as quais não lhes eram familiares. Deste modo, a primeira parte deste estudo apresenta uma abordagem teórica abrangendo temas como cultura, aculturação e choque cultural (Oberg, 1960; Ulmann, 1980; Winthrop, 1991; Brown, 1994; Thompson, 1996). A segunda parte é composta de entrevistas com os diferentes pontos de vista no que diz respeito ao choque cultural vivenciado. Assim, variáveis como: sexo, idade, razões para morar no exterior, etc, foram analisadas.

INTRODUCTION

When you travel to another country, you are also entering another culture. This means that you are going to come across attitudes, values, and ways of doing things that are different from what you are used to. You might find yourself suffering from culture shock. This is the feeling of frustration or confusion that comes from facing unfamiliar values and situations.

Perhaps you have asked yourself the question: what are Americans really like? The answer is simple: it depends on the American. To know what Americans are really like, you have to

begin by dealing with Americans as individuals. Then, over a period of time, you will probably notice certain things that those Americans, or at least some of them, have in common. Your own individual experience is the best way to determine what Americans are really like.

In this specific research, I intend to present a study of different symptoms of culture shock and acculturation, experienced by people who have lived in and out of Brazil. The study shows how important it is to be bilingual and also bicultural.

This research will be divided into two parts: first the theoretical part concerning culture, culture shock, acculturation and the United States of America and terrorism versus culture shock as an up-to-date form of showing cultural shock and acculturation. The second part will be composed of interviews with some real examples, different points of view concerning culture shock and suggestions to overcome feelings of culture shock. Graphics will also be presented to highlight items such as gender, age, and reasons to visit abroad and so forth.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

CULTURE

Before writing about culture shock and acculturation, it is imperative to have a brief overview of culture. The following are definitions and viewpoints of some authors about the subject of culture:

Donne (1624)	No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent a part of the main.
Folliet (1968)	To prepare man for public activities, for functions which demand the art of verbal and written communication.
Larson and Smalley (1972)	Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group.
Condon (1973)	The fact that no society exists without a culture reflects the need for culture to fulfill certain biological and psychological needs in human beings.
Ulmann (1980)	Culture is a greeting addressed to someone... it is the way to bring up one's children... it is the society way of life... Culture is a term which enhances the customs of a nation.
Brown (1994)	Culture is the context within which we exist, think, feel, and relate to others. It is the "glue" that binds a group of people together.
Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary	Culture: the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depending upon and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. Learning a foreign language is learning a new culture.

CULTURE SHOCK

As cited in Lima (2000), the term "culture shock" was first used by the anthropologist Oberg (1960) to refer to the anxiety that comes from being exposed to a completely new environment.

Bock (1970) sees culture shock as an emotional reaction due to a lack of control, understanding, and predicting of other people's behavior.

Brown (1994, p. 170) states that:

“[Culture shock] refers to phenomena ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological panic and crisis. It is associated with frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness. We have a mind. We have feelings. To separate one from the other is to deny all that we are.”

In this passage Brown wrote about sensitivity, and in cultural awareness this is quite important. The impact that foreigners have on their own values, they are supposed to have in a new country.

In spite of the fact that culture shock is a common experience for a person learning a second language in a second culture (Brown, 1994), there are some foreigners that have never felt culture shock like the Austrian designer Hans Donner. He said in an interview, two years ago (Video Show - Globo TV, 2000), that when he came to Brazil for the first time, he felt as if he were in his own country, and he is still living here.

Culture shock is caused by some of the differences between life at home and life in a new place. For example differences in: Language, climate, religion; Food, and educational system; How people make decisions, spend their leisure time, resolve conflicts, and express their feelings and emotions; Body language such as the meanings of hand, face and body movements can create confusion and emotional stress; To varying degrees it happens to almost everyone. The extent to which you will be affected is dependent upon how much past experience you have had with the culture you are entering and the assistance that you will receive from your hosts. (Conox Valley International College, 2000)

According to Singleton (1983), we should not forget that age, in itself, is not particularly relevant for one to succeed in language learning, whereas motivation and opportunity are. In a recent interview, the famous Spanish actor, Antônio Banderas, said that, before being famous, he used to work in a telephone company, and at that time he had no idea he would ever have to talk or learn English or any other language some day. After that, owing to his carrier, the need to learn English arose, and the facility to acquire English came quickly because of his work interviews, commitments, and so forth. He had what we call a positive attitude towards the target language: he was aware of another culture, consequently, he had a good response. Therefore, his culture shock was minor.

ACCULTURATION

In a societal view, Winthrop (1991) stated that acculturation is the process of systematic cultural change of a particular society carried out by an alien, dominant society. This change is brought about under conditions of direct contact between individuals of each society. Individuals of a foreign or minority culture learn the language, habits, and values of a standard or dominant culture by the cultural process of acculturation.

Kroeber (1948) stated that acculturation comprises those changes in a culture brought about by another culture and will result in an increased similarity between the two cultures. This type of change may be reciprocal; however, very often the process is asymmetrical and the result is the (usually partial) absorption of one culture into the other. Kroeber believed that acculturation is gradual rather than abrupt. He connected the process of diffusion with the process of acculturation by considering that diffusion contributes to acculturation and that acculturation necessarily involves diffusion. He did attempt to separate the two processes by

stating that diffusion is a matter of what happens to the elements of a culture; whereas acculturation is a process of what happens to a whole culture.

Titiev (1959) sees acculturation as the most profound changes in a society. It results from direct, aggressive contact of one society with another. There is hardly any modern society which has not felt the impact of this contact with very different societies. The process of the intermingling of cultures is called acculturation. According to the author, because the influence of Euro-American culture on nonliterate, relatively isolated groups have been so widespread and profound, the term acculturation is most commonly applied to contact and intermingling between these two cultures.

According to Brown (1994), acculturation is the process of becoming adapted to a new culture. A reorientation of thinking and feeling, not to mention communication, is necessary.

The Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines acculturation as a cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture; a merging of cultures as a result of prolonged contact.

Acculturation studies evolved into assimilation studies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when great numbers of immigrants arrived in the United States. Studies on minority groups already living in the United States, as to their rate of assimilation, became another area of focus. Explanation to why groups assimilate at different rates has largely been the underlying reasons for acculturation and assimilation studies (Thompson, 1996).

Brown (1994, p.169) stated that:

“...the process of acculturation runs even deeper when language is brought into the picture, to be sure, culture is a deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language – the means for communication among members of a culture – is the most visible and available expression of that culture. And so a person’s world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling, and communicating can be disrupted by a change from one culture to another.”

METHODOLOGY / RESULTS

The second part of this paper was composed of questionnaires (see appendix 1) and interviews. It is important to point out that 80% of the questionnaires were answered by e-mail and were also taken into consideration in this research.

As it is being asked in Table 1, ‘What do understand by culture shock?’, it was the question that guided all questionnaire. Words like: difference, unnatural, uncomfortable, hard, confusion, disorientation, anxiety, antagonism and depression were used in the answers; this shows that culture shock is not a simple situation to deal with. As Brown (1994) stated, culture is a way of life. One hundred percent of the people who answered the questionnaire wrote that culture shock is a consequence of an unknown situation; living in a different culture, with a different language, food, and so forth, most of the time, people would be able to minimize the culture shock.

In Table 2, we can see that one of the respondents did not have cultural shock; however, it is important to point out that one had a different kind of culture shock; after four years living in another country the person still has culture shock and consequently problems with the

language, behavior, and many other items, which we might expect to see in the answers of people describing the beginning of their lives in another country, not four years later.

In Table 2, the question ‘what did you do to overcome the cultural shock feelings ?’ , we point out words like: patient, naturally, positive, tradition, understand, study, references, adapt, accept, inevitable; these show us that, without analysing the reason why these people had to live abroad, 92% were aware of the new situation. It was clear that those who ‘suffered’ culture shock more intensely, were against the situation, exemplifying this, 83% of the interviewed people could speak the new language fluently, and 33% of these people had decided to live abroad forever, for them, it was not possible to go back to live in their own country anymore, they had brought up their family abroad.

Table 1

NAME	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	COUNTRY WHERE LIVED	COUNTRY WHERE YOU LIVE NOW	WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY CULTURE SHOCK?
➤ Al	Brazil	USA	Brazil	The differences between two countries, especially the language ;and the culture.
➤ Kl	Brazil	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	The differences of customs from a country to the other.
➤ Ru	Brazil	USA	Brazil	Any experience that will seem unnatural, awkward or farfetched if compared to one’s own culture.
➤ Ch	Brazil	USA	Brazil	Customs that we are not accustomed with.
➤ Ho	Brazil	England	Brazil	...when you find yourself face to face with people from different countries who you don’t feel comfortable with...
➤ Iv	Brazil	Spain	Spain	A hard situation to deal with, especially because we are away from our own country.
➤ Me	Brazil	Chile	Brazil	Culture shock makes us aware of different people, consequently more critical.
➤ Ne	Panama	Sweden	Brazil	Differences between people from different countries,as: clothes, way of life, habits, gestures, food, etc.

➤ Ol	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil	It is the worst thing a tourist can have out of his/her country.
➤ Ro	Brazil	Germany	Brazil	It is the difference between our life and another countries life: food, life, way of speaking.
➤ Sa	USA	Russia	USA	Feeling in the pit of the stomach that there is something very wrong, but what seems to be wrong on the surface is not really the problem.
➤ Ta	USA	Brazil	Brazil	Feeling of disorientation and confusion, sometimes leading to anxiety and light depression and even antagonism.

Table 2

NAME	WHAT DID YOU DO TO OVERCOME THE CULTURAL SHOCK FEELINGS?
➤ Al	Learn the new language
➤ Kl	Be patient, understand the new way of life and try to do the same.
➤ Ru	Try to behave as naturally as we can.
➤ Ch	I didn't have culture shock, everything was very positive for me, but we have to accept the cultural differences, tradition, etc.
➤ Ho	Try to understand their culture and not just think of ours. Talk to people, try to know about their countries, cultures, better.
➤ Iv	Learn the new language, study about the new culture before going to another place.
➤ Me	We have to live naturally, without losing our references.
➤ Ne	We have to understand other people's mind, and try to adapt to our own feelings. I love different experiences.
➤ Ol	Be natural and ask for help.
➤ Ro	Stay with natives, trying to understand and accept their life styles. Natives are not better or worse than us, just different.
➤ Sa	Not much. Anticipate so we're not surprised; learn as much as possible about what to expect but be prepared to experience shock anyway. Be ready to talk about it, analyze it, accept it as somewhat inevitable.
➤ Ta	I have not done much to overcome culture shock. I knew that would pass with time.....I am still experiencing culture shock after more than four years.

We must take tourism into consideration in this research; it is possible to have culture shock even if we are having pleasant experiences as a tourist, mainly when we do not speak the native language. Things like food, location, hotel, and weather can be strong barriers when we do not speak the native language. I have traveled abroad three times, and I can say I did not

have culture shock, first because I could speak the native language, second, because I studied about the culture of the countries I visited.

CONCLUSION

In this specific research, I presented results of a study of different symptoms of cultural shock and acculturation experienced by people who live in and out of Brazil. As was stated before in this paper, the intention of this paper was to show how important it is to be bilingual and also bicultural and how much we could minimize culture shock by studying another language and culture

This research was composed of two parts. The first was a review of some literature concerning culture, culture shock, and acculturation, and the United States of America and terrorism versus culture shock. The second part: was the interviews in which we could see real examples with different kinds of people giving their opinions about culture shock and acculturation.

During your stay in a different country, you will probably notice many other social habits or cultural codes. Being open to different ideas can only benefit you and add to your understanding of other cultures. And, being a student of a foreign culture can also help you realize the importance of recognizing and respecting diversity in such complex societies.

We might find ourselves suffering from culture shock - this is the feeling of frustration or confusion that comes from facing unfamiliar values and situations. But, as the paper shows, culture shock can be avoided and boundaries will be minor the if we are open minded, learn the target language before traveling abroad, behave naturally, study the target culture, and in

case of necessity ask for help. We should keep in mind that our inner values cannot be challenged and our individuality ought to be preserved.

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