

# Understanding the Negotiation of Second Language Identities: Spanish-Speaking International Students in the US

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## Abstract

This paper situates itself within the discussion of intercultural communication, focusing on migrant-host relationships. It examines how Spanish-speaking international students in the United States negotiate their identities amidst the challenges of adapting to a new cultural and linguistic environment. This research combines an analytical understanding of the theory behind identity negotiation, with a conversational study. I analyze my own experience and the experiences of other Spanish-speaking international students. These conversations offer grounded and contextual insights into cross-cultural interactions and the process of identity negotiation and adaptation abroad. The discussion of these experiences provides a better understanding of how to become more interculturally competent, handle conflicts, maintain psychological well-being and identity abroad, and effectively assimilate into new cultures. In this course of intercultural communication, I also participated in reading articles and discussing them in class. My takeaways from these discussions are added at the end of the paper.

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## Introduction: The discussion of intercultural communication

In our modern, globalized world, the interaction of different cultures is not a rare occurrence but a daily reality. The rapid expansion of global connectivity, through travel and technology, has made intercultural communication an everyday experience for many. People from diverse cultural backgrounds are increasingly interacting, both in personal and professional contexts, or even through social media, making the study of intercultural communication more relevant than ever.

Intercultural communication is an interdisciplinary field, meaning that it involves disciplines like linguistics, anthropology, and psychology (Martin and Nakayama 47). In essence, intercultural communication examines how culture shapes the way we communicate, but also the other way around. This is because the relation between culture and communication is not a one-way street: the process of communication also reaffirms culture itself (Martin and Nakayama 96).

*Unconscious competence is the level at which communication goes smoothly but is not a conscious process ... This level of competence is not something we can acquire by consciously trying to. It occurs when the analytic and holistic parts are functioning together. When we concentrate too hard or get too analytic, things don't always go easier (Martin and Nakayama 473).*

In intercultural communication expertise, the concept of unconscious competence is the holy grail. Becoming interculturally competent is about internalizing cultural nuances to the extent that they become second nature. Individuals who are unconsciously competent communicate in a natural and almost instinctive way, reflecting an intuitive understanding of a different culture. They are unconsciously aware of the culture gap that exists between that culture and theirs. Achieving this level of competence often involves an extensive exposure and immersion in a particular culture, coupled with a mindset of openness and adaptability.

But why would we even want to achieve such expertise in the first place? Well, understanding intercultural communication is vital for navigating cross-cultural interactions successfully, bridging gaps and avoiding conflicts. In different contexts like business, diplomacy, immigration,

or study abroad, proficiency in intercultural communication can help us in many ways: assimilating into new cultures successfully, communicating effectively in business settings, and preventing diplomatic misunderstandings, among others. More broadly, it enables us to transcend surface-level stereotypes — those misleading generalizations that we use to understand entire groups but that often create unrealistic expectations (Martin and Nakayama 2005). Instead, cultural competence allows us to read the air — understand the nuanced situations, emotions, power dynamics, and expectations in a particular culture. This understanding is essential for engaging in a meaningful, respectful, and inclusive manner with the rich diversity of our global community.

*Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language (Raymond Williams 1983).*

However, intercultural communication is complex. It involves more than just overcoming physical language barriers. This complexity is often because nonverbal cues and contextual nuances often vary more significantly between cultures than language itself.

Consider the study “Hampering and facilitating factors in international business”, which analyzed the behavior of Germans and Irish speaking English for business. The fact that the Irish didn’t account for the difference between low context and high context languages, meant that the Irish did not correctly interpret the directness of the Dutch while doing business. As a result, the conversations often resulted in conflict and did not go as planned (Devjak et al). Another example is a study in the nonverbal rules and context that dictate communication in the Japanese culture. “Japanese Nonverbal Communication: A Reflection of Cultural Themes” highlighted the importance of certain rules in Japanese culture, such as bowing, respecting the elderly, and avoiding eye contact. It also explained how Japanese culture, as a collectivist society, was based in concepts like group harmony. That is why rules are especially relevant to the Japanese, and individuals might not want to stand out from their group (Edwin and McDaniel). In contrast, individualistic societies might view differences as unique and encourage showing strengths and weaknesses.

The two discussed studies offered guidelines for understanding these cultures. We could think that following these guidelines we will automatically become interculturally competent. However, any guidelines fall short in understanding the infinite nuances which define each culture. What is more, the actual challenge lies in effectively applying them, especially considering that most cultural rules are unwritten or hard to explain without actual engagement with the culture. This is why social science scholars argue that conflicts are inevitable to some extent when we are not thoroughly familiar with a culture. Regardless, they emphasize the need to continually strive to improve our intercultural competence, because this can help us minimize conflict. (Martin and Nakayama 465). There lies the reason behind the study of intercultural communication.

### Migrant-host relationships: Identity negotiation abroad

Within the discussion of intercultural communication, an especially complex field is the study of migrant host-relationships, in which international students are involved. The immigrants in this case leave their home country to pursue higher education abroad. In these migrant-host relationships, it is usually claimed that there are multiple tensions. On the one hand, “the migrant wants to cherish and retain their own culture [and identity]”. On the other hand, “the migrant wants to value their host culture as well [and identity]” (Martin and Nakayama 314).

To better understand this tension, we first need to understand the concept of identity of the migrant. Goffman’s impression management theory describes identity in terms of how we perceive ourselves and how we are perceived by others (Goffman, 1959).

*Identity serves as a bridge between culture and communication. It is important because we communicate our identity to others, and we learn who we are through communication. It is through communication— with our family, friends, and others—that we come to understand ourselves and form our identity” (Martin and Nakayama 162).*

Theories like Young Yun Kim’s Integrative Theory, claim that in migrant-host tensions, individuals acculturate abroad by shedding aspects of their original identity, such as language,

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customs, preferences, behaviors, etc. What's more, Kim claims that they lose their origin identity to the same extent that they adapt in the new culture, in a zero-sum process.

Kim's theory also makes the major argument that humans have a natural drive to assimilate into the new culture by arguing that, although this adaptation involves an initial stress, this is outweighed by the adjustment, and growth derived from it. This idea is also supported by studies like "Social identity makes group-based social connection possible: Implications for loneliness and mental health", by S. Alexander Haslam. In such study, Haslam explains that immigrants need group-based social connections abroad because these connections provide a sense of shared meaning, purpose, support, and efficacy. Conversely, Haslam argues, the loss of meaningful social group memberships can cause loneliness and social disconnection or separation, adversely affecting health (162). The Social psychologist John Berry already, back in 1992, already developed a framework that considers the relationship of migrants and hosts and their attitude toward each other's cultures, resulting in four types of relationships.

|                                     | <i>Migrants value host culture</i> | <i>Migrants devalue host culture</i> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Migrants devalue own culture</i> | Assimilation                       | Marginalization                      |
| <i>Migrants value own culture</i>   | Integration                        | Separation                           |

(Martin and Nakayama 315)

*The fear of not belonging or separating from social group can deter individuals from adjusting values and experimenting with self-identity (Young et al.185)*

So, if one always benefits from adapting to a new culture, why wouldn't it want to assimilate? Well, while Kim's Integrative Theory primarily focuses on assimilation and deculturation, it may not fully account for the fact that, as individuals familiarize themselves with a new culture, they often retain remnants of their original cultural identity. As self-categorization theory explains, "a person's sense of self is defined in terms of a given group membership" (Haslam et al. 162). Thus,

the relation of an individual to its home culture largely defines its own personality, and individuals are often reluctant to give up their personality. Cultural Fusion theory completes Kim's ideas, by indicating that humans do also have "an innate self-organizing drive and desire to maintain their cultural identities" (Croucher and Kramer 100). This is the reason why they resist losing part of their original cultural identity during the adaptation process. Such interplay between assimilation into a new culture and the preservation of original identity is also often referred to as identity negotiation and is influenced by each individual's unique background, knowledge, and personal characteristics (Young et al.).

To understand this negotiation at a more physical/concrete level, studies like "A Multimodal Approach to Identity: Theorizing the Self through Embodiment, Spatiality, and Temporality" suggest thinking of our identity as an interpretative role that we play in each conversation we have, and which is based upon context, culture, and power struggle (Sekimoto 239). This is also sometimes referred to as the hybridity of the identity, by which migrants may shift from one of the attitudes Berry described to another depending on the context (Martin and Nakayama 314). In this sense, we negotiate our identity in every social interaction, where we continuously interpret and re-interpret our identity because otherwise, we won't achieve successful cross-cultural communication. I argue that the effectiveness of this interpretative role mainly depends on factors like prior knowledge, cultural competence, and context awareness. On the other hand, I argue that the capacity for substantive change in self-identity (effective cultural assimilation) is mainly driven by motivation. This is supported by studies such as "Relations Among Cultural Identity, Motivation for Language Learning, and Perceived English Language Proficiency for International Students in the United States", which show that a strong ethnic identification often negatively correlates with self-perceived English proficiency, yet this effect can be lessened with high motivation for learning English (Peng and Patterson 75, 76).

Finally, it is also important to note that this realignment process is bidirectional. Since the extent to which individuals adapt also involves losing part of their original identity, many international students, upon returning to their home countries, experience what is referred to as reverse culture shock. As described in "Homesick or Sick of Home," this second culture shock can be more severe than the initial one because most returners do not anticipate it (refer to Figure 1). This occurs

because, as individuals try to maintain a connection to their home country culture, they often experience cultural, emotional, and moral distance from the moment they leave (Fanari et al. 274). Usually, when they return home, they may feel that things have either changed so quickly since they left that they no longer fit in, or that things have stayed the same while they have experienced growth or deculturation. To solve this situation, many students return to self-disclosure to translate experiences lived into a different cultural language. This same study also explains that the readaptation process takes time and depends on factors such as personality, preparedness, the perceived similarity between home and host countries, cultural intelligence, and the length of the travel (Fanari et al. 278). However, for some individuals, the readjustment process can be overwhelming, involving challenges such as regaining old relationships, maintaining host country relationships, and readjusting to the language. This difficulty can lead to feelings of anxiety or depression upon returning home. The inability to shift between these two identities can also lead to feelings of loneliness, which are more pronounced when moving to a neoliberal society that emphasizes individualism over community values, such as in the USA (Haslam et al. 163).

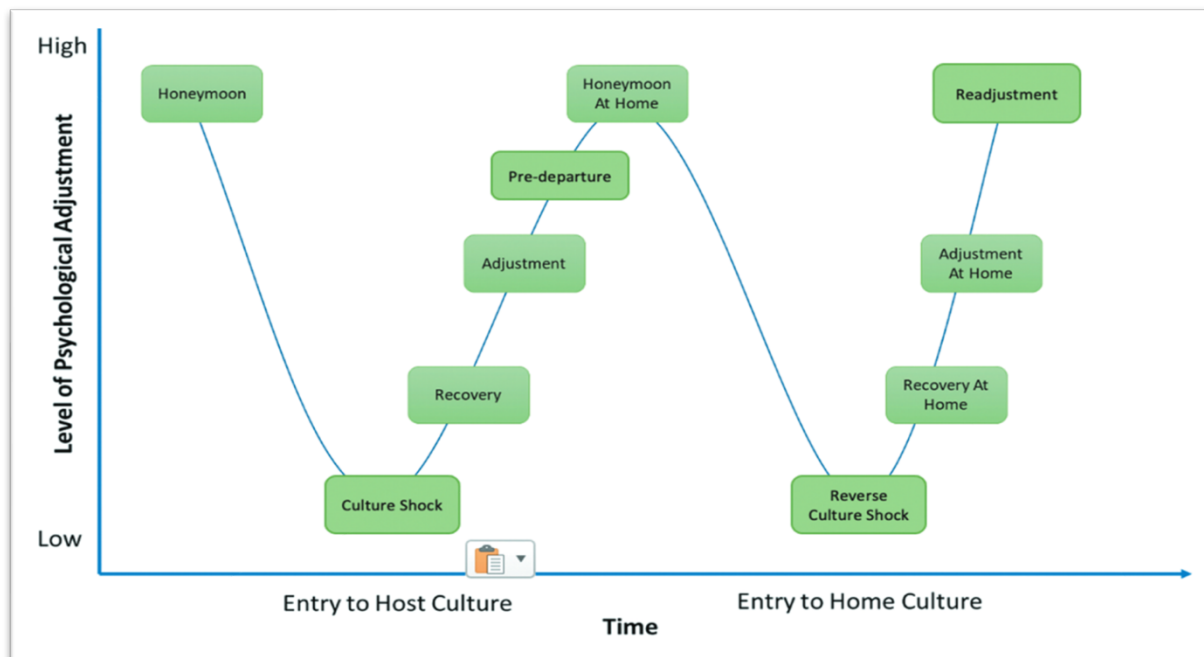


Figure 1: “A visualization of the W-curve model” (Fanari et al. 277).



## This research

The discussed process of identity negotiation becomes particularly challenging for international students who anticipate returning to their origin culture in the future. This anticipation can significantly influence their motivation for true assimilation. On one hand, the prospect of returning home may reduce the motivation to fully integrate their inner self with the new culture. On the other hand, these students usually decide to study abroad with the intent to learn and adapt to the new culture. The balance between the desire to adapt and learn from their host culture and the inclination to maintain a strong connection to their cultural roots make students constantly negotiate the extent to which they allow the new cultural influences to reshape their identity. To gain deeper insights into how individuals handle this situation, I have carried out interviews with 4 Spanish Speaking international students at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. These discussion aims to help understand how students handle the dual challenges of adaptation and preservation of their original cultural identity, as well as to understand what they consider to be their main challenges. Their responses are analyzed in terms of the students' perception, expression, and reflection.

### 1) Identity perception and cultural differences

In the conversation, most students reported that their identity had not undergone significant change since arriving in the United States. They attributed this stability to maintaining strong connections with family and friends in their home countries. For instance, a student from Ecuador shared: "My identity has remained connected to my roots, largely thanks to maintaining strong ties with family and friends back in Ecuador." This aligns with the Cultural Fusion theory argument that immigrants have "an innate self-organizing drive and desire to maintain their cultural identities." Furthermore, they all agreed that they were looking forward to returning to their home country at some point, after working and earning money in the States. This is another reason why they have kept connections back home.

However, all students agreed that their identity, in terms of how it was perceived by others, had indeed changed. For example, one student noted that upon moving to the US, he had become part

of a minority, while in his Spanish home country he was considered part of the main group. This feeling was unfamiliar to him. Another student mentioned encountering racism in the States, experiencing exclusion from a club due to racial biases.

In terms of personal growth, students acknowledged an increase in their independence. Absent from their families, they learned to manage daily tasks such as cooking, shopping, cleaning, and finding housing independently. The self-reliant nature of American students also prompted them to gain independence. To explain this, students mentioned notable differences from their home countries, such as the reliance on cars, fewer outdoor social activities, and different climatic conditions. As one student explained, America has a greater emphasis on independence, individualism, and competitiveness, particularly in academic environments where collaboration is less prevalent than back home. Despite these challenges, as one student explained, he had adopted an open-minded approach, recognizing the importance of not holding the same expectations as in his home country to avoid disappointment in social interactions.

## 2) Identity expression and language barriers

Students reported that they didn't have trouble communicating in English. This is largely because all students in the study, and arguably most international students who come to WPI, had a very good level of English before travelling to the States. However, even if they didn't have trouble speaking English, they reported that sharing their traditions was not always easy for them. For example, one of them explained that there was an instance where she wanted to share about a traditional festival from her home country, but had difficulty conveying the essence of this festival, which has no direct equivalent in the US. The student had to use other English synonyms and tools like pictures and videos to help American peers understand not just the event itself, but also the emotions and cultural significance attached to it.

When students shared such experiences from their home country, they mentioned that they liked to explain differences in lifestyle and social habits between the US and their home countries. For example, one student frequently discussed how life in the US is more fast paced, with early dinners and less emphasis on post-meal socialization, contrasting with the more relaxed and communal

approach in their home country. These conversations caught the interest of the host culture and provided opportunities for hosts to reflect on their own cultural perspectives.

Although students were proficient in English, they did report some improvement in their English skills. They mentioned that they had become more fluent, for example, by adopting the slang and expressions used at the school, and they felt that they were now able to communicate without having to mentally translate from their native language. I would say that these changes may not be what we know as improvements in proficiency in English, but also an improvement in the knowledge, traditions, and ways of living of the host culture, which made conversations more fluent.

Finally, the students also discussed the creation of relationships abroad. All students argued that a large part of their friend group comprised other Spanish-speaking individuals, as they found it easier to communicate and express themselves better in this language. However, one student took the step to explain that while creating bonds with American individuals was more challenging due to different social approaches, compatible personalities led to meaningful connections.

### 3) Identity reflection and reconciliation with the home country

All students commented that they had not experienced a significant reverse culture shock, partly because they revisited their country at least twice a year. As one student explained, it was very important for them to keep in touch with their home country because they had their roots there, and they were planning either to visit often or return after spending some years in the States. To maintain these connections, one student explained that he resorted to pictures, videos, calls with relatives and friends, and music. The importance of these elements in keeping connections with home has been highlighted by other studies, such as "Study Abroad Soundtracks" (Fanari et al.). This study particularly explains that successful adaptation abroad requires maintaining good mental health, which involves connecting with one's original identity and reconciling it when expression becomes challenging. In this sense, music can serve as a ritual that reconnects individuals with their home culture and reduces reverse culture shock. Staying current with music

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from one's home culture is crucial for those planning to return, helping them stay connected with evolving trends and memorializing their study abroad experience.

To maintain these roots, students also explained how they used their native language whenever possible. One student was surprised to find so many Spanish-speaking students abroad. She believed that the Spanish-speaking group she created in college helped her advance, acting as an escape from the pressure of constantly trying to adapt to the new culture. She felt she was in an intermediate zone, a comfort zone.

Finally, students reportedly enjoyed sharing all the new things and experiences they encountered in the host country when returning home. They were enthusiastic about discussing these experiences with friends and relatives who were not present. Self-disclosure was their strategy to reconnect with their home country.

## Appendix: Conversation questions

- How has living in the US influenced your perception of identity. What are the major cultural differences with respect to your own country?
- Can you recall a specific instance where you struggled to express yourself in the new language? How did you feel during that situation?
- Have there been moments where you found it particularly challenging to explain aspects of your life or culture from your home country? Could you share an example?
- Do you feel that living in a different country has changed your sense of identity? In what ways?
- How do you navigate conversations about your home country or culture in situations where language is a barrier?
- What strategies or tools do you use when you find it difficult to express yourself in English?
- Are there specific approaches you've adopted to help others understand your background and experiences despite language differences?
- Looking back, how do you think your journey with the new language has influenced your personal growth or perspective on life?
- Are there any specific incidents that stand out as turning points in your ability to communicate and express yourself in English?

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## Class takeaways

Blair, Maya, and Meina Liu. "Ethnically Chinese and culturally American: Exploring bicultural identity negotiation and co-cultural communication of Chinese-American female adoptees." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2019, pp. 347–365, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2019.1649710>.

This source provides some concepts that were useful for my own research:

- 1) Assimilation: the process by which individuals start to adopt the culture of the dominant group (language, values, norms, or behaviors), resulting in the disregard for aspects of their original cultural identity.
  - a) Nonassertive Assimilation: Individuals reject their own cultural identity and avoid conflict.
  - b) Assertive Assimilation: Individuals understand their cultural differences, but adopt behaviors to assimilate.
- 2) Accommodation: Individuals try to show part of their own culture identity to the dominant culture.
  - a) Nonassertive Accommodation: Individuals passively communicate their culture to the dominant group, looking for understanding without confrontation.
  - b) Assertive Accommodation: Individuals emphasize cultural diversity and promote their values and visibility within the dominant society.
  - c) Aggressive Accommodation: Individuals confront the dominant culture and try to gain recognition from the dominant culture, so that it adapts to their own culture needs.
- 3) Separation: Individuals refuse to adapt to the dominant culture, trying to maintain their unique cultural identity without any attempt to integrate or find common ground.

Another important idea from this research is that, sometimes people feel excluded from their ethnic origins because of their own perceptions, not because of the real circumstances. This means that the struggles they face in adjusting might be due to their own beliefs rather than the reality of their situation. What's more, even when individuals socially adjust well, a lack of connection to one's country or family of origin can lead them to experience discomfort with their appearance or a sense of shame about their ethnicity. In response, this research highlights the importance of maintaining



a connection with one's original culture when living abroad, because the origin identity is a big part of one's identity.

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*Sun, Juhyung, et al. "Understanding emojis: Cultural influences in interpretation and choice of emojis." Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, vol. 16, no. 3, 2022, pp. 242–261, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2022.2036790>.*

The research claims that emojis can add value to text communication, offering nuances that words alone can't express (like feelings). Furthermore, the same emojis can have different meanings across cultures (these differences are more pronounced between collectivist and individualistic societies). These ideas support an argument in my research that highlights the difficulty of adapting to a new culture due to language nuances, extending this hardship to modern non-verbal means of communication like emojis.

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*Zhou, Li-na. "Loan words in Modern English and their features." Sino-US English Teaching, vol. 13, no. 3, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.17265/1539-8072/2016.03.006>.*

Reading and listening to the discussion of this article, I learned about various types of loanwords, including substitution and partial substitution. I also could understand more about the flexibility of the English language in adopting words from other cultures, a process that I previously thought to be rare, since usually other languages take words from English. The article also talks about the attitudes of different cultures toward the introduction of loanwords and their impact on communication and cultural identity. While some countries readily accept English words, I believe my home country, Spain, is quite reluctant. When English words are adopted, they often take on Spanish pronunciations, reflecting the Spanish principle of reading words as they are written, in contrast to English, where you need to know words' pronunciation by heart. Finally, I think I could relate or include points of this article into my own research. I think that I good point that I could

touch on international students' attitudes toward language mixing and the creation of languages among intercultural individuals studying abroad.

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*Van Sterkenburg, Jacco, and Annelies Knoppers. "Sport as a contested racial/ethnic discourse: Processes of racialization in Dutch Sport Media and sport policy." Journal of Multicultural Discourses, vol. 7, no. 2, 2012, pp. 119–136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2012.687001>.*

This article discusses the impact of racial stereotypes on sports policies and commentary. It raises the question about how these stereotypes can lead to racism, which was evident in the example involving racial policymaking, which limits athletes' opportunities. For example, children might lean toward certain sports based on their preferences, so even if they are usually better on a different sport based on their race, they need to opt to choose whatever sport they prefer. Finally, I would like to highlight an important idea. While stereotypes can provide a basic understanding of individuals from one race, the problems come when people try to use this limited information in an overgeneralized way, applying that little knowledge to every individual.

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*Fanari, Alice, Heather Gahler, et al. "Study abroad soundtracks: Exploring the role of music in cross-cultural (re)adaptation among U.S. and international students." Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, vol. 51, no. 5, 2022, pp. 510–527, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2022.2028657>.*

This article was the most relatable for me. It reflects on how music can help in adjusting to different cultures, like American culture in my case. It highlights different roles of music:

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- Establishing routines and rituals, managing moods, and emotions: Successful adaptation requires maintaining good mental health, which involves connecting with one's original identity and reconciling it when expression becomes challenging. In this sense, music can serve as a ritual that reconnects individuals with their home culture. In class, we also talked about other rituals like viewing family photos or cooking traditional dishes.
- Exploring new genres, understanding local culture, and connecting: Music can help overcoming biases and appreciating new cultural aspects. For instance, going to a basketball game might wake up your interest for that sport, which you might not have before, and thus facilitating better cultural adaptation to America. By the same token, music also helps connect with locals, understand their slang, and how they use music in various contexts.

On the other hand, the article also addresses music's role in reintegrating into the home culture after experiencing reverse culture shock:

- Reintegrating into the home culture: Staying current with music from one's home culture is crucial for those planning to return, helping them stay connected with evolving trends.
- Memorializing the study abroad experience: In my research, I will discuss the importance of self-disclosure in overcoming reverse culture shock. In this process, music can help in maintaining connections by sharing experiences and meanings. This idea is like sharing photos of your study abroad experience when returning home. It is a process that can help you understand and share better your own identity.

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*Muziol, Marta. "The Linguistic Space of Cemeteries as a Reflection of Culture – Research Suggestion – Doaj." Styles of Communication, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 1 Dec. 2018, [doaj.org/article/5b72d1a2cc6942fda76734b92ad60091](https://doaj.org/article/5b72d1a2cc6942fda76734b92ad60091).*

This article is an anthropological and communication research piece focusing on graveyards. According to the article, the information on gravestones provides insights into cultural values. This includes writings, dates, comments, the priority of information, the inclusion of poetry, religion,

etc. The article argues that all this information reflects the societal norms of the age when these individuals were buried. The field studying this phenomenon is called Ethnolinguistics, which explores the relationship between culture and language. Ethnolinguistics shows that gravestones are, in themselves, a means of communicating the cultural values of different cultures. Finally, the article also discusses the various traditions of burial. Two concepts I found very interesting are:

- The priority of information in grave inscriptions (e.g., religious statements, family or self-identification) varies across cultures, reflecting societal values. For instance, some cultures do not include the age of the deceased but only the date of death, while others include both. Additionally, some cultures differentiate individuals not by their full names but by the place of death or an important title the person held. In some cultures, there is even a priority in the placements of graves within a cemetery, with older graves typically placed higher, indicating a cultural hierarchy.
- Different cultures have different attitudes toward death, which are reflected in graveyard writings and burials. For example, some cultures adopt a positive attitude, focusing on the good moments of a person's life, while others, like Italians, experience profound grief and may avoid visiting the graves of deceased relatives for months or years. The absence of information can also be significant. For example, when children were killed, their names might not be included, possibly indicating that they were not able to develop and lead a normal life.

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Way, Lyndon C. "YouTube as a site of debate through populist politics: The case of a Turkish protest pop video." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2015, pp. 180–196, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2015.1041965>.

This analysis discusses the new role of social media in intercultural communication, with a particular focus on the use of social media, especially YouTube, in providing an alternative

discussion to state-controlled mass media during Turkish protests, which covered scenes and perspectives that were not covered by traditional means of communication. Most of these YouTube videos did not include commentary, and the use of music served as a non-political means of communication, conveying intense emotions and the gravity of the situation (This use of music highlights the how cultural expressions can transcend verbal messages). The comments on the YouTube videos were analyzed by communication experts using a critical discourse framework. The comments on these videos were categorized into supportive, repetitive of protest slogans, and abusive. This study wanted to show the two faces of social media, one promoting constructive communication versus another hate speech, since includes the inhibited responses in social media that individuals might only use in social media and not in real life. Two additional topics we discussed in class that I found interesting are:

- The power dynamics in social media: There exists a contrast between perceived personal power and actual control in multicultural conversations. For example, one's opinion might be unintentionally biased by the discourse of politicians, or the information received through social media, which may not always be entirely truthful or comprehensive.
- The echo chamber effect: Due to social media algorithms, there is a tendency to recommend discussions that align with one's point of view. This phenomenon often reinforces existing opinions and biases, limiting exposure to other viewpoints and potentially limiting true intercultural understanding.

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Yu, Jing. "Understanding Chinese international students in the U.S. in times of the COVID-19 crisis: From a chinese discourse studies perspective." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2023, pp. 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2214538>.

In this research article, the author analyzes the different experiences of Chinese international students in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article discusses the prevalent stereotypes and increased instances of cyberbullying that Chinese students have faced, particularly post-COVID-19. These stereotypes often describe Asian students as academically inclined yet socially introverted and struggling with the English language. The rise in cyberbullying during the pandemic has increased these stereotypes, adding to the challenges these students face when studying abroad. To challenge these dominant narratives and stereotypes about Chinese students the article advocates for a decolonial approach. It highlights the need for a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of their experiences and contributions. For instance, international Asian students play a very important role in the U.S. economy, not just as learners but also as economic contributors. In this sense, popular media, including films or social media, significantly contribute to both shaping and sometimes altering these stereotypes.

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*McDaniel, Edwin R. "Japanese nonverbal communication: A reflection of cultural themes." Intercultural communication: A reader (2003): 253-261,*  
<https://doaj.org/article/5b72d1a2cc6942fda76734b92ad60091>

This article discusses the nuanced nature of nonverbal communication in Japan, emphasizing the influence of social aspects of Japanese society such as collectivism, harmony, emotional dependence, sacrifice, and hierarchy in defining these nonverbal rules. Particularly, the article discusses 10 codes that define non-verbal communication in Japan. Cultural practices such as avoiding direct eye contact, specific uses of smiles, the significance of physical space and touch, the formalities surrounding business cards, and the role of time in reflecting hierarchy offer a rich insight into Japanese social dynamics. In general, these norms demonstrate how Japanese people prefer to maintain social balance, group harmony, avoid conflict, and express respect, especially from younger individuals to their elders.

Arising from the discussion of this article, some concepts become clearer. In individualistic societies, individuals might think of differences as special to us. Thus, we should show our strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, collectivistic societies are ruled by group harmony, where individuals might not want to stand out from their group. From the discussion, it also became evident that it is not always easy to know these non-verbal norms, especially when some of them are not spoken of because they are very nuanced, or we have not heard of them before. This can certainly lead to intercultural conflict. The ability to "read the air" is understanding the situation and the communication (verbal or non-verbal) in an intercultural setting. Although we can study a culture, completely understanding it also requires time within the culture to fully grasp the cultural nuances.

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*Moody, Stephen J., and Cade Bushnell. "Navigating friendships in interaction." Navigating Friendships in Interaction, 2023, pp. 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003381426-1>.*

This autoethnographic and conversational study explores the nature of cross-cultural friendships as performative spaces where individuals share and learn more about their own and others' identities. This performance is of special importance when individuals come from different cultural backgrounds and need to bridge the cultural gap. Particularly, the article analyzes the relationship of two migrants in a foreign country, finding common ground in their shared experiences of displacement and adaptation. This story is not only a personal journey of cross-cultural friendship but can also serve as a lens to understand broader intercultural dynamics: while being deeply personal experiences, the story reveals larger truths about the nature of friendship, identity, and cultural intersection.

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*Kita, Sotaro. "Cross-cultural variation of speech-accompanying gesture: A Review." Language and Cognitive Processes, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 145–167, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01690960802586188>.*

This article highlights the importance of non-verbal communication in intercultural interactions. It explores how gestures accompanying speech differ across cultures. For example, the "okay" sign is positive in Western cultures, but in France, it means 'zero', and in Greece and Turkey, it is considered offensive. Another example is the variation in indicating direction, with countries like Nepal and Italy using six unique gestures. The article also discusses cultural differences in expressing politeness, like the impoliteness of pointing in conversations in some cultures, and the significance of bowing or nodding in others.