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A Narrative Inquiry on the Significance of
Intercultural Communication Experiences of
Kyrgyzstani Graduate Students in Korea

by

Bekboeva Aigul

A THESIS
Submitted to the faculty of

INHA UNIVERSITY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER of EDUCATION

Department of Multicultural Education

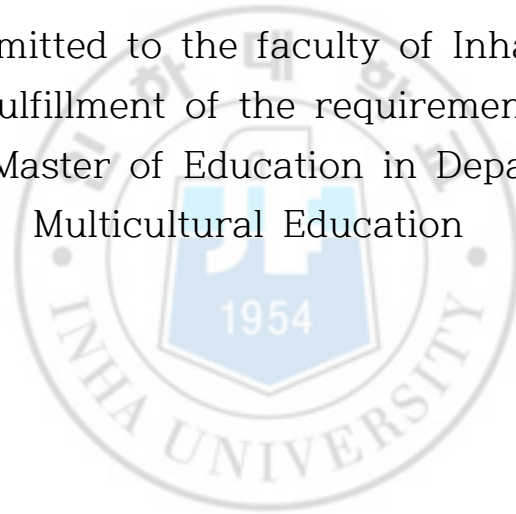
2017

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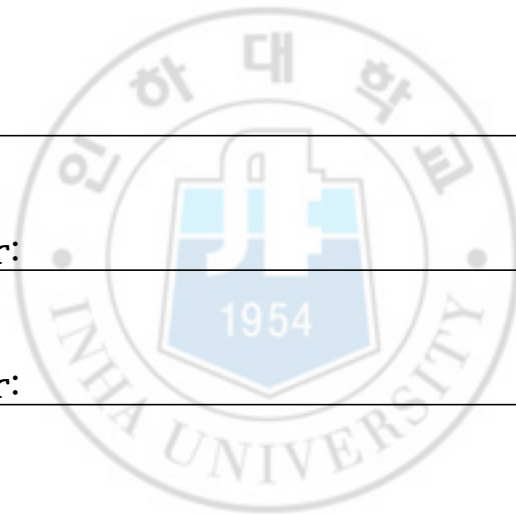
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students in Korea and determine its significance. To achieve this, 4 graduate students from Kyrgyzstan who have been sojourning in Korea for at least a year and a half were selected as research participants with whom in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder, transcribed, then analyzed. The analyzed data was then divided into personal, cultural, linguistic and nonverbal aspects of intercultural communication. Personal aspects were divided into relationships with Korean teachers, interaction with mentors and buddies, relationships with professors and sunbaes, and interaction with people in public places. Second, cultural aspects were also divided into initial ideas about Koreans, sunbae-hoobae relationship, classroom culture, 'palli palli' culture, the 'empty words' phenomenon, culture of alcohol consumption, and food culture. Third, linguistic aspect were divided into language skills of teachers, and use of language in graduate school. Fourth, nonverbal aspects were divided into gestures and facial expressions, voices and clothing style, image and representation, and dating phenomenon. After thoroughly examining the experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students in Korea, this study proposes the following ideas to help not only Kyrgyzstani students, but also other international students in their school life and cultural adaptation to Korea. The proposed ideas are as follows.

First, there is a need for personal training to help students with their personal relationships with professors, sunbaes, and other people within and outside of school premises. Second, there is a need for cultural training, where students can learn certain cultural norms of Korean people, including the expected roles and social conduct within the classroom, the peculiarities of cultural traits belonging to the Korean culture. Third, Korean courses focused on academic language specifically for graduate students are essential for a successful graduate study experiences. Lastly, this study proposes for abovementioned training to be conducted for not only Kyrgyzstani and other international students, but for Koreans as well. Since Korea is a multicultural community where Koreans and representatives of other ethnic groups have to coexist in harmony, certain understanding is needed for both parties. This study is expected to serve as material to further strengthen the relations between Kyrgyz and Korean people.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, international students, graduate students, intercultural communication narrative inquiry

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I. Introduction

1. Research purpose and necessity

Although many people find it difficult to accept it, but there is no denying that Korea is a multicultural country. Although in the world of academia it is quite heavily discussed and researched, the concept is still quite new and it is only natural that Koreans have a difficulty accepting it in their everyday lives. Therefore, various programs which target adaptation and the problems of different groups of foreigners in Korea, are currently in practice. However, these programs focus mostly on marriage women immigrants, and international students seem to be left to fend for themselves.

According to the Korea Immigration Service, as of May, 2016, the number of international students sojourning in Korea has surpassed 103000 people and keeps increasing¹⁾. Along with the general number of international students, the number of students with the desire to study in Korea is also increasing. Studying in a foreign country in an unfamiliar environment is not an easy task. The key differentiating factors which make international students stand out from local students are the language, uniqueness and novelty of the environment. When one goes abroad for their studies, merely focusing on their studies is never enough. In order to lead a successful life of an international student one has

1) Korea Immigration Service.

http://www.immigration.go.kr/doc_html/attach/imm/f2016//20160628258839_1_1.hwp.files/Sections1.html

to socialize with the people one encounters on a daily basis. If one can communicate with the people surrounding them, they are able to not only understand what they hear but also coherently articulate their opinion and position on any given idea or matter. Through communication people build relationships which is essential in one's social life.

Because information about Kyrgyzstan is not easily accessible in Korea, when Koreans encounter people from Kyrgyzstan, they might have difficulties in communication which in turn, can create an obstacle in building relationships. Human relations is essential in life abroad and is a big part of cultural adaptation.

In this study, the goal is to observe the life and cultural adaptation of graduate students from Kyrgyzstan in Korea focusing on the role of intercultural communication.

Being a foreigner in Korea, students are bound to experience hardships and communication difficulties. In this study I aim to look at the intercultural communication experiences international students from Kyrgyzstan have in Korea. Although Kyrgyzstan is one of the five countries that make up Central Asia, few studies have been done on students from Central Asia as a whole and none specifically about students from Kyrgyzstan.

In this study, I aim to explore the intercultural communication of international students from Kyrgyzstan who are currently enrolled in the graduate programs of different universities of Korea.

Due to the growing interest and desire in Kyrgyz students to further their education in Korea, it is expected that more and more students will find their way to Korea. it is important to

consider their time and experiences in Korea. For an international student to have a fruitful and successful time abroad, in this case in Korea, they need to be able to adjust to their life. An important part of adjustment and a way to accelerate the process is interaction and communication with surrounding people. Where representatives of two or more different cultures meet intercultural communication takes place. Intercultural communication taking place between Kyrgyz students and Koreans needs to be studied and used as baseline data in helping the improvement of relationships between the two cultural groups.

The question I posed for this study is:

What can be implied from the intercultural communication experiences of international students from Kyrgyzstan in Korea?

In this study, I will explore the Intercultural Communication of international students from Kyrgyzstan enrolled in graduate programs of several different universities in Korea. The content of this research is as follows.

2. Research content

This study consists of 6 chapters. A brief description of each chapter is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. The outline of the research

Chapter	Brief description
1. Introduction	Introduction, research purpose and necessity, research questions, contents of the research
2. Tendency and Issues	Tendency and issues in previous studies: international students, intercultural communication
3. Research method	Research design, brief information on the research participants, data collection and analysis, research ethics
4. Research Results	Description of interview analysis, process and the results of the analysis
5. Conclusion	Conclusion based on the results of the research
6. Proposal	Proposal of a method to improve and develop intercultural communication

Chapter one will include introduction with a brief background information and what led to the beginning of this research, research purpose and necessity, research questions and the content of the research.

Chapter two will consist of the tendencies and issues of studies conducted up to the present, covering international students, aspects of communication, intercultural communication, as well as nonverbal communication.

Chapter three will be comprised of the research methods, which includes research design, brief profile data about research participants, data collection, data analysis and research ethics.

Chapter four will include the interview analysis process and the results of the analysis, will then be included in the results of

the study.

Chapter five will consist of the conclusion of the study based on the research work I will have completed.

Chapter six will include a proposal for future improvement and development of intercultural communication between the representatives of the two countries.

3. Research motive

To give a brief background information about myself as the researcher, I was born and raised in a beautiful mountainous country called Kyrgyzstan located at the core of Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is a unique country, with a fascinating history, which seems to take one on an endless journey into the lives of a nomadic people and their lifestyle of making a home in any place they deem suitable for them and their livestock, numerous wars and struggles to keep the people and property safe and away from the hands of the enemy, and of course the life under the rule of the Soviet Union.

Thanks to the challenging history full of hardships and struggles, Kyrgyzstan is where it is now - open, welcoming and understanding to any and every visitor and newcomer. Being born into this cultural mindset, I never felt the need to think about problems and challenges of representatives of various cultures coexisting within a tightly interwoven community. From the early days of my childhood, the idea of accepting everyone equally was instilled in me due to encountering representatives of various

ethnic backgrounds. Everyone was considered equal.

As Peace Corps Volunteers from America started entering my life in 1998, it took a slightly different turn. I had the chance to experience a foreign culture, use a foreign language, experience a different type of communication, and learned a lifestyle that is different from my own. Because of these differences, there were moments filled with laughter and embarrassing moments, as well as disappointment and resentment. However, through experience, communication and learning each others way, we resolved the issues and moved on.

Peace Corps volunteers taught me not only English, but also American culture, and instilled in me a desire to complete a year in America as an exchange student, through the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program. Compared to when the program was first opened, more people desired to pass the program and seize the chance to study in America. Therefore, by the time I was old enough to apply for the program, the competition became much more fierce, that language skills did not guarantee a scholarship. Besides a high level of English, other factors such as interpersonal skills, flexibility, resourcefulness and courage played a great role in the selection process. Having a shy personality, the FLEX Program was quite challenging for me. Seeing my ardent desire to pass the program and study in America, my father told me to change my personality. He told me to become more open, stop being shy and learn to communicate. Although it was difficult, and the process took a long time, I made the necessary changes, worked hard and passed the FLEX Program.

A year in the States as an exchange student was a turning point in my life, as it opened my eyes to an array of things in life. First of all, at the young age of 15, I experienced a somewhat independent life away from the care and protection of my parents. I learned an entirely different lifestyle, experienced a cultural adaptation, got the taste of being a foreigner for the first time, learned to communicate with people with different cultural backgrounds, and became independent.

After successfully completing my year as an exchange student in the United States, I returned to Kyrgyzstan and attended the American University of Central Asia, as it was the only American university in all of Central Asia, and was considered the only university which adapted the American education system. At the university, I was surrounded by cultural diversity as students from all over the world came to Kyrgyzstan to study at AUCA. Needless to say, all students were treated equally, free use of any desired language was welcome outside of classes, and every year there were events where representatives of all ethnic groups could share their traditions and culture. While attending university, I had to work part time, so I taught English, and all my students were Korean kids, which is how I was introduced to the Korean culture. It seemed quite fascinating, so after graduating from college, I decided to study Korean as a hobby.

After a year of studying Korean, and hearing stories about how hard they study, as well as being exposed to the Hallyu wave, I decided to continue my studies in Korea. It was not as easy to accomplish as I thought, however. After 5 years of studying

Korean, I finally had the opportunity and came to Korea.

Since the day I came to Korea as an international graduate student, I have experienced a myriad of things, both positive and negative. There have been a countless amount of things to learn, adapt, and experience in order for me to come to where I am right now. From the first day, there were certain steps to take in order to get to where I am now. Starting from the public transportation, to the way classes are conducted, and communication with the local people, play a great role in one's successful experience of study abroad.

It is a part of human nature to generally compare and contrast. So I could not help but compare my experience in America with that in Korea. First of all, it is not correct to do so, as the two countries have different historical backgrounds and cultural components. It was a challenge to understand how I am treated differently here than I was back in America some 10 years ago. It was hard to understand what went wrong.

First of all, Korea has only in the beginning stages of becoming a multicultural nation, while America has been a melting pot for quite some time now. That was the key basic knowledge I needed in order to understand my situation. The next step was to study intercultural communication. Tracing my thoughts, feelings, and observations, based on personal experience, I wrote an autoethnographic article on intercultural communication in Korea. Then, the idea expanded, and in order to help future incoming students from Kyrgyzstan, the decision was made to focus my attention to the intercultural communication experiences of

graduate students from Kyrgyzstan. I hope that it will be of great assistance to not only Kyrgyz students but also Koreans in the field of intercultural communication.

4. Tendencies and Issues

4.1. International Students

Obtaining one's tertiary education in a country other than one's own is a common phenomenon in today's world. If some 50-60 years ago people could only dream of going abroad to study, today it is not only done often but also highly recommended. To many, the terms international student and foreign student may seem interchangeable. However, the 2013 Education Indicators in Focus report of the OECD clearly distinguishes the two terms from one another:

According to the definition provided by OECD (2013), International students are those who have crossed borders for the purpose of study. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the OECD and Eurostat define international students as those who are not residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country. When data on international students are not available, data on foreign students are used. Foreign students are defined according to their citizenship. International students are this a subset of foreign students.²⁾

Due to the popularity and frequent occurrence of study abroad,

2) www.oecd.org

it is of no surprise that many studies related to international students have been conducted up until today. When articles containing the keywords “international student” are searched online, 947,413 items can be found. Most of these articles concern international students enrolled in American universities (Ladd & Ruby Jr., 1999; Mori, 2000); acculturation process or stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Yeh & Inose, 2003) Over 460 articles concerning international students have been published in Korea. Among the studies on international students in Korea, some are concerning Central Asia are also focused on acculturation of international students in Korea. (Kang, et al., 2014; Lee, et al., 2015). Among the studies conducted up until now, there are several on acculturation of international students and some of them include the following: Na (2006), Seo & Keum (2012), Yu (2013), Lee & Nam (2003), Lee et al. (2015) and Kang et al. (2014). Some of many studies on Intercultural Communication of international students include Holmes (2004), Holmes (2006), Nakane (2006), as well as Sung (2007). The number of international students from Kyrgyzstan is small compared to other countries, which is the main reason why there have not been any studies on international students from Kyrgyzstan.

4.2. Intercultural Communication

In order to understand the meaning of Intercultural Communication we must first define the term Communication. What is Communication? Hartley (2002) describes communication as “Interaction by means of mutually recognized signals.” Rogers

& Steinfatt (1999) also made a contribution to the explanation of what communication is. When one hears the word 'communication', inevitably, the first thought that comes to mind is talking, putting thoughts into words and expressing oneself voicing these thoughts. That is verbal communication. Communication is a two-way process, for every person speaking there is usually someone who is listening. The receiving role in the communication process is just as important as the sending role, although it has received much less attention from communication scholars (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). In other words, communication is the process of exchanging messages between two or more people.

Now, there is a need to define culture. According to Samovar et al. (2006), culture is the rules for living and functioning in society. The rules will differ from society to society, and to function and be effective in a particular society, one must know how to apply the rules (Samovar et al, 2006). In today's society, there are many encounters between representatives of various ethnic groups of people, which in turn, refers to people with diverse cultural backgrounds. The communication between these people is the direct result of these encounters.

Cultural competence - the ability to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner with people from different cultural backgrounds than your own (Alexander et al, 2014). Intercultural communication in general is what happens when people from different cultural backgrounds interact—it includes the good, the bad, and the ugly (Alexander et al, 2014). However,

traditionally, the term “intercultural communication” has been more focused on interpersonal and face-to-face (one on one) notions of interculturalism (Alexander et al, 2014).

First, intercultural communication is frequently seen as a way to ‘meet’ existing cultures (e.g. Ting-Toomey 1999). However, cultural diversity may be observed only in the communication process; it is necessarily a communicative construction (e.g. Baraldi 2009; Verschueren 2008), which cannot be inferred from the observation of separate ‘cultures’ (e.g. the Italian culture vs. the Moroccan culture). Inevitably, this observation creates pre-communicative stereotypes. Cultural diversity is displayed through the emergence of different cultural identities, evoking different cultural presuppositions (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 2009).

Second, intercultural communication is frequently described as a positive relationship. However, at least when it arises, intercultural communication causes problems since it introduces different cultural presuppositions, therefore threatening cultural sharing. This problem needs solutions, of course, but solutions can only be found after intercultural communication is initiated. Once different cultural presuppositions have emerged in communication, it is possible to attribute to them a positive or a negative meaning, i.e. the emergence of ‘intercultural’ issues encourages participants to promote a new form of communication.

Third, problems in intercultural communication are frequently conceived of as misunderstandings. However, intercultural communication may be achieved only if different perspectives are understood. External observers sometimes see misunderstandings,

but participants in communication always see the difficulties in accepting different presuppositions, i.e. different expectations about values and beliefs, actions and results. (Baraldi, 2012)



II. Theoretical background

1. International students from Kyrgyzstan

There are various programs for students from Kyrgyzstan to further their education in various parts of the world. For a considerably long period of time, the United States, Germany and Turkey were some of the popular countries of destination for higher education. One of the most popular and widely mentioned programs to study in America is Fulbright, DAAD is for studies in Germany. With the entrance of Korea to the education market, the program with the most students compared to others is KGSP, which stands for Korean Government Scholarship Program.

1.1. Summary about Kyrgyzstan

Located in the heart of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan borders Kazakhstan on the north, Uzbekistan on the west, Tajikistan on the southwest as well as China on the east. The silk road passes through Kyrgyzstan, which was the main trade route as it was convenient with its location. This allowed many traders from other countries pass through the country which is one of the reasons there is diversity of cultures in the country. Kyrgyzstan is a multicultural nation. It is fundamentally different from its larger neighbors Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. It is much smaller, consists mostly of highlands with only limited agricultural land, and with the exception of a significant gold deposit lacks the

generous endowment of resources, especially oil and gas, which those Central Asian states enjoy. On the other hand, because of the relative lack of resources and industrialization, Kyrgyzstan suffered less ecological damage while under Soviet rule, and its mountain fastness gives one resource that is in increasingly short supply in the rest of the region - water. Add to these advantages spectacular alpine scenery, one of the most scenic mountain lake sin the world, Issyk Kul, and a relatively successful record of attracting foreign investment and assistance in the post-Soviet era, and Kyrgyzstan considerable potential to become the “Switzerland of the East” (Reuel, 2005).

Over 90% of Kyrgyzstan is dominated by massive, rugged mountain ranges, including the Alai, Kirghiz and Tien Shan, and their associated valleys and basins. Large areas of those mountain regions are covered by glaciers. A few flat areas (lower valleys) are found in the north and far southwest, but almost 35% of the land is higher than 9,842 ft. (3,000 m) above sea level. Kyrgyzstan's highest point is Jengish Chokusu which peaks at 24,406 ft. (7,439 m). Dozens and dozens of rivers flow from the upper reaches of the mountains; the most significant ones include the Al-Say, Chu, Kara Daryya and Naryn. Issyk-Kul is the world's second largest alpine lake.³⁾

The ethnic identity of the Kyrgyz has been strongly linked to their language and to ethnic traditions, both of which have been guarded with particular zeal once independence provided an opportunity to make national policy on these matters. Less

3) <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/kyrgyzstan/kgland.htm>

formally, the Kyrgyz people have maintained with unusual single-mindedness many elements of social structure and a sense of their common past. The name Kyrgyz derives from the Turkic kyrk plus yz , a combination meaning "forty clans."⁴⁾

An overview of Kyrgyzstan provided by the World Bank⁵⁾ in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The Overview of Kyrgyzstan provided by the World Bank

Kyrgyz Republic	2016
Population (mln)	6.0
GDP, current US\$ billion	6.6
GDP per capita, current US\$	1.073
School Enrollment, primary (% gross) (2015)	95.8
Life Expectancy at Birth, years (2015)	70.0

According to the World Bank, the Kyrgyz Republic has progressively increased economic output over the past two decades, but the growth has been volatile. The economy remains characterized by significant informality and relies heavily on a few sectors and worker remittances from abroad (World Bank, n.d.). The World Bank also states that The Kyrgyz economy is vulnerable to external shocks owing to its reliance on one gold mine, Kumtor, which accounts for about 10% of GDP, and on worker remittances, equivalent to about 30% of GDP in 2011-15. For the country to realize its growth potential—including to export hydroelectricity as a nexus for regional trade and transport and to promote tourism—

4) <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/9.htm>

5) <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kyrgyzrepublic/overview>

economic activities need to be diversified through increased private sector development and improved occupational skills and productivity among the youth (World Bank, n.d.).

General education traditionally has been accessible to nearly all children in Kyrgyzstan. In primary and secondary grades, about 51 percent of students are female; that number increases to 55 percent in higher education, with a converse majority of males in vocational programs. There is little difference in school attendance between urban and rural areas or among the provinces. Higher education, however, has been much more available to the urban and more wealthy segments of the population. Because of a shortage of schools, 37 percent of general education students attend schools operating in two or three shifts. Construction of new facilities has lagged behind enrollment growth, the rate of which has been nearly 3 percent per year. In line with the reform of 1992, children start school at age six and are required to complete grade nine. The general education program has three stages: grades one through four, grades five through nine, and grades ten and eleven. Students completing grade nine may continue into advanced or specialized (college preparatory) secondary curricula or into a technical and vocational program. The school year is thirty-four weeks long, extending from the beginning of September until the end of May. The instruction week is twenty-five hours long for grades one through four and thirty-two hours for grades five through eleven. In 1992 about 960,000 students were enrolled in general education courses, 42,000 in specialized secondary programs, 49,000 in

vocational programs, and 58,000 in institutions of higher education. About 1,800 schools were in operation in 1992. That year Kyrgyzstan's state system had about 65,000 teachers, but an estimated 8,000 teachers resigned in 1992 alone because of poor salaries and a heavy work load that included double shifts for many. Emigration also has depleted the teaching staff. In 1993 the national pupil-teacher ratio for grades one through eleven was 14.4 to 1, slightly higher in rural areas, and considerably higher in the primary grades. The city of Bishkek, however, had a ratio of almost 19 to 1.⁶⁾

Due to the lack of thorough research on Kyrgyzstan and the identity of its people, exploring the cultural identity will serve as an important assistance in understanding the people, in this case, the students from Kyrgyzstan.

1.2. Current situation of students from Kyrgyzstan

Comparatively, there are more Kyrgyzstani people who are in Korea with the purpose of labor. Although the number of students who wish to study in Korea rises, looking through the application documents of the National Institute for International Education (NIIED)⁷⁾ there is a decrease in the quota for scholarships for students from Kyrgyzstan, while the competition is as strong as ever. The most common way to come to Korea for further education is through NIIED, which is the program that supports the participants of this research. However, because

6) <http://countrystudies.us/kyrgyzstan/15.htm>

7) <http://www.niied.go.kr/eng/index.do>

Kyrgyzstan is relatively new and unknown to Korean people compared to such countries and China, Vietnam and Uzbekistan, studies are not conducted about Kyrgyzstan. In their articles, Kang et al., (2014) and Lee et al., (2015) focused their studies on the cultural adaptation to Korea by Central Asian students, one research participant in Lee et al., (2015) is a student from Kyrgyzstan, while there are none in the work of Kan et al., (2014). In their study about leisure in the lives of international students in Korea, Oh et al, (2015) were able to have the participation of one student from Kyrgyzstan. Also there is Bekboeva (2016), where the researcher recorded their personal experiences and wrote an autoethnography based on those records. Besides these studies, there are no other studies conducted on students from Kyrgyzstan.

2. Intercultural communication

Communication is an essential part of our lives. It is also a rather delicate aspect of all relationships. Due to the differences in each person, communication may either lead to close relations or it might go completely wrong. One of the branches of communication is intercultural communication. Lustig & Koester (2013) describe communication as “a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people create shared meanings”.

2.1. History

Rogers & Steinfatt (1999) mention the possibility that intercultural communication did not always exist due to the distance and isolation of people living in separate groups. “There may have been a time when there was no intercultural communication, when human groups roamed in limited geographical areas populated only by themselves. Thousands of years ago, large numbers of small cultural groups lived in relatively isolated seclusion over much of the earth's surface. Intercultural communication occurred when groups encountered each other - in the form of trade, war and conflicts, romantic and sexual relations, and other human forms of interaction (p. 4). (1999).

According to Samovar et al. (2006), the origins of intercultural communication are as old as humankind. The earliest historical records report periodic interactions between peoples from different tribes and varying geographical regions. All too frequently the encounters were hostile, with one group intent on subjugating or destroying the other. Fortunately, there were also meetings motivated by trade, which necessitated a more civil mode of interaction and required that both parties arrive at common agreements, always using the medium of communication. The passage of time brought increased contact between peoples from different cultures. Conflicts and disagreements continued to plague many of these meetings, just as they do today, and other encounters were dominated by economic interests. War and commerce, however, concurrently provided a forum for broad cultural exchange. Alliances and treaties provided yet another

form for cultural exchange and the practice of intercultural communication. The rise of nation states, coupled with technological advances, prompted developed countries to begin voyages of exploration in search of new lands for acquisition of natural resources, trade and religious conversion (Samovar, et al. 2006).

Scholars point to the post World War II period as the beginning of the study of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication as a field of study began in earnest after World War II. At that time, the United States was the leading world power, but its diplomats were ineffectual. They seldom knew the language of the nation to which they were assigned and had no understanding of its culture (Rogers, 1999).

The current study of intercultural communication is influenced in part by how it developed in the United States and in part by the worldviews (underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and human behavior), or research philosophies, of the scholars who pursue it. The roots of the study of intercultural communication can be traced to the post-World War II era, when the United States increasingly came to dominate the world stage. However, government and business personnel working overseas often found that they were ill equipped to work among people from different cultures. The language training they received, for example, did little to prepare them for the complex challenges of working abroad. In response, the US government in 1946 passed the Foreign Service Act and established the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). The FSI, in turn, hired Edward T. Hall and other prominent anthropologists and linguists (including Ray Birdwhistell

and George Trager) to develop "predeparture" courses for overseas workers. Because intercultural training materials were scarce, they developed their own. FSI theorists formed new ways of looking at culture and communication. Thus the field of intercultural communication was born. The FSI emphasized the importance of nonverbal communication and applied linguistic frameworks to investigate nonverbal aspects of communication. These researchers concluded that, just like language, nonverbal communication varies from culture to culture. E.T. Hall pioneered this systematic study of culture and communication with *The Silent Language* (1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), which influenced the new discipline (46). (Martin & Nakayama, 2010)

2.2. Definition

Samovar et al. (2006) stated that "Intercultural communication occurs whenever a message produced in one culture must be processed in another culture" (Samovar et al., 2006). A common definition of intercultural communication can also be found in Rogers & Steinfatt (1999) stating that it is "the exchange of information between individuals who are unlike culturally" (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which people from different cultures create shared meanings (Lustig & Koester, 2013). Intercultural communication is the symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation Ting-Toomey & Chung (2005). Intercultural

communication occurs when large and important cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently (Lustig & Koester, 2013).

2.3. Classification

The role of language in intercultural communication is self-evident in that all of the participants must, to some degree, share a language, be it their first or second (Samovar et al., 2006). The assignment of meaning to a message concerns human perceptions about the relationship between symbols and their referents. Language is used to think as well as to speak. Linguistic relativity is the degree to which language influences human thought and meanings. It proposes that in human thought language intervenes between the symbols and the ideas to which the symbols refer. Does the language in which we speak and think influence the very nature of our thoughts and the way we in which we think? Linguistic relativity proposes that language and thought are so tied together that a person's language determines the categories of thought open to the person. "We cut up and organize the spread and flow of events as we do largely because, through our mother tongue, we are parties to an agreement to do so, not because nature itself is segmented in exactly that way for all to see" (Whorf, 1940/1956, p. 239). Linguistic relativity is also called the Whorfian hypothesis, after its main creator, Benjamin Lee Whorf. Since linguistic relativity proposes that a language creates a worldview held in common by two speakers., linguistic relativity is also sometimes called the

linguistic Weltanschauung (worldview) hypothesis.

Language, which is a part of culture, affects human behavior through thought and perception, thus linking culture to human behavior. Language influences thought, and thus influences the meanings that are conveyed by words. Becoming fluent in a foreign language is a difficult and time-consuming task, but it is essential to gaining intercultural understanding of the society in which that language is spoken. Most individuals, even if they have not formally studied the field of nonverbal communication, know that it is very important in everyday conversation. Nonverbal communication is particularly important when one's language ability is limited, such as when one is sojourning in another culture. But most individuals, until they have studied the topic, think that nonverbal communication is just hand gestures (such as the thumb-and-forefinger circle signalling "okay" in the United States, but an obscenity overseas). There is much more to nonverbal communication, such as space, touching, time, odors, and even the manner in which one speaks (such as the loudness of one's voice). Much nonverbal communication is unintentional and unconscious-and therefore cannot be as easily controlled as verbal communication. It is difficult to lie nonverbally. Most people are not fully aware of nonverbal communication until they study it, which is why Edward Hall referred to it as a hidden dimension or a silent language. The top scholars in nonverbal communication do not feel that they understand even a small part of the nonverbal communication that occurs in everyday speech. At one time, some critics of research on nonverbal

communication opposed such study out of concern that once the silent language code was broken, we would all be completely transparent. That criticism demeans the significance of nonverbal communication. It implies that it is a simple code which can be broken and easily understood. In fact, it is a field of multiple nuances which we have only begun to explore. Types of Nonverbal Communication: Body movements - Emblems, Illustrators, Regulators; Space; Time; Touch; Voice; Artifacts; Physical Appearance (Rogers, 1999).

Language plays an important role in intercultural communication; it is closely tied with our and others' identities, and it is also related to the groups we belong to and our social place in society. In a world of multiple languages, we sometimes think that successful communication is just a matter of whether people speak the same language or not. However, communication is much more than language. As this book shows, intercultural communication involves far more than merely language, but language clearly cannot be overlooked as a central element in the process (Martin, 2010).

2.3.1. Verbal Communication

Communication is closely tied with language and speech. The first thing that people think of upon hearing the word “communication” is either speech or language. Rogers & Steinfatt (1999) explain verbal communication making it a point to emphasize language. Language, which is a part of culture, affects human behavior through thought and perception, thus linking

culture to human behavior. Language influences thought, and thus influences the meanings that are conveyed by words. Becoming fluent in a foreign language is a difficult and time-consuming task, but it is essential to gaining intercultural understanding of the society in which that language is spoken. Samovar et al. (2006) also emphasize the importance of language in intercultural communication. The role of language in intercultural communication is self-evident in that all of the participants must, to some degree, share a language, be it their first or second (Samovar et al., 2006). Verbal communication in one's own culture often leads to frustration, misunderstanding, and even laughter. But the problem of verbal communication becomes extremely tricky when one is from another culture (Cooper et al., 2007).

2.3.2. Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication is often subtle, ambiguous, or contradictory, even within a single culture (Nolan, 1999). Nonverbal communication is an extremely important variable in the intercultural communication process. Yet it is difficult to understand because it is usually performed spontaneously and often subconsciously. That is until people begin to communicate interculturally, they are unaware of their own nonverbal behaviors (Cooper et al., 2007). Nonverbal elements of cultural communication are highly dynamic and play an important role in understanding intercultural communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Both verbal and nonverbal communication are symbolic,

communicate meaning, and are patterned - that is, they are governed by contextually determined rules. Societies have different nonverbal languages, just as they have different spoken languages. However, some differences between nonverbal and verbal communication code have important implications for intercultural communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). As these examples also show, nonverbal behavior operates at a subconscious level. We rarely think about how we stand, what gestures we use, and so on. Occasionally, someone points out such behaviors, which brings them to the conscious level (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Nonverbal behaviors can reinforce, substitute for, or contradict verbal behaviors. For example, when we shake our heads “no,” we are reinforcing verbal behavior. When we point instead of saying “over there,” we are substituting nonverbal behavior for verbal communication (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

2.4. Functions

The study of intercultural communication can help us step back from our habitual ways of viewing the world and open our eyes to the influences that have constructed our ways of thinking (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). Perhaps one of the most illuminating aspects of intercultural communication is that it opens our minds to the interplay of varied influences (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999). In order to understand a culture, we need first to master its language and then to experience it in a communication sense. One must live in the society on a daily basis, and talk with

individuals who share that culture. Once you can speak their language, you can begin to put yourself inside their skin (this ability is called empathy) and to really understand their culture more fully. Communication with members of a culture is essential to gain cultural insight, and language fluency is a necessary prerequisite for effective communication. When you can tell jokes in another language or argue on the telephone, then you have indeed reached a high level of fluency in a second language (Rogers & Steinfatt, 1999).



III. Research method

Although a relatively small number of young individuals from Kyrgyzstan are receiving higher education in universities in Korea, that number is growing due to the increasing interest in education in Korea among students in Kyrgyzstan. Being an international student from Kyrgyzstan and having had constant exposure to the Korean culture and lifestyle as well as encounters with Koreans on a daily basis, the decision to conduct this research took much pondering and consideration. Despite being in Asia, Kyrgyzstan and Korea have many historical and cultural differences. Cultural differences can be a ground for misunderstandings in interaction and communication. For representatives of these two countries to coexist in harmony and have good relationships, there is a need for observations and studies based on experience to be conducted.

1. Research design

In order to explore the intercultural communication experiences of graduate students from Kyrgyzstan currently enrolled in universities in Korea, I have selected 4 research participants from the initial group, which consisted of 10 people. After collecting data from the research participants, I analyzed it using the narrative inquiry method from the pool of various qualitative research methods. Elliott (2005) states that a narrative organizes a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each

event can be understood through its relation (Elliott, 2005). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Some narrative inquirers see themselves and their participants as co-composing each aspect of the inquiry as well as their lives as they live out the inquiry. Other narrative inquirers see themselves and their participants at more of a distance, and acknowledge the relational aspects as less important (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Most narrative inquiries begin with asking participants to tell their stories, either in one-to-one situations or in groups. In one-to-one situations, participants are asked to tell their stories in a variety of ways: by responding to more or less structured interview questions; by engaging in conversation or dialogue; by telling stories triggered by various artifacts such as photographs or memory box items. In group situations, two or more participants meet together with the inquirer to tell stories of their experience when they have lived through similar situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) list three different ways to justify research in narrative inquiry. The first one is called Personal Justification, which stands for “justifying the inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions and personal inquiry puzzles. Personal justification is commonly only thinly described in published narrative inquiries. Narrative theses and dissertations

include more detailed personal justification for the inquiry.”

The second justification is Practical Justification which is used to justify narrative inquiry practically. “Researchers attend to the importance of considering the possibility of shifting or changing practice. For example, practical justifications are sometimes made in narrative inquiries around teacher education puzzles concerning the kinds of situations in which pre-service students might undertake practicum, deepening their understandings of who they are in relation with children and families or in medical education around puzzles concerning the conditions under which medical residents engage in reflecting on their clinical practice.”

The third, Social Justification, is used when justifying narrative inquiries socially justified in terms of addressing the so what and who cares questions important in all research undertakings. “We can think of social justification in two ways: theoretical justification as well as social action and policy justifications. Theoretical justification comes from justifying the work in terms of new methodological and disciplinary knowledge. Social action or policy justification comes in terms of social action such as making visible the intergenerational impact of residential schools on Aboriginal youth.”

Thinking narratively about a phenomenon challenges the dominant story of phenomenon as fixed and unchanging throughout an inquiry. Thinking narratively also influences the living of a narrative inquiry. Many narrative inquirers draw on ideas such as self-facing, liminality, relational knowing, world-travelling, truth as communal, and un-knowing and

not-knowing to describe their own and their participants' living throughout an inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Framing a research puzzle is part of the process of thinking narratively. Each narrative inquiry is composed around a particular wonder and, rather than thinking about framing a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer, narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that carries with it “a sense of a search, a ‘research,’ a searching again”, “a sense of continual reformulation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

Narrative inquiry is a process of entering into lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life. What this draws attention to is the importance of acknowledging the ongoing temporality of experience when it is understood narratively. Narrative inquiry always begins in the midst of ongoing experiences. In this process, inquirers continue to live their stories, even as they tell stories of their experiences over time.

The field can be the ongoing conversations with participants where they tell their stories or the living alongside participants in a particular place or places. Being in the field, then, involves settling into the temporal unfolding of lives.

There are multiple ways to gather, compose and create field texts (data) from studying the experiences of participants and inquirers in a narrative inquiry. Field texts can include transcripts of conversations, field notes, family stories, memory box artifacts, photographs and other texts that are composed by narrative inquirers and participants to represent aspects of lived experience. Whether narrative inquirers are listening to

participants' told stories or living alongside participants as their lives unfold in particular contexts, interpretation of the stories lived and told is an essential, ongoing aspect. Being attentive to the relational aspects of working with participants within the conceptual frame of the commonplaces requires that narrative inquirers and participants acknowledge that they are always interpreting their pasts from their present vantage points. In this way, narrative inquirers actively attend to and listen to participants' stories knowing that they "give shape to what they hear, making over participants' stories into something of their own (Coles, 1989, p. 19).

In composing interim research texts, narrative inquirers continue to think narratively, that is, positioning field texts within the commonplaces. Interim research texts are often partial texts that are not closed to allowing participants and researchers to further co-compose storied interpretations open to negotiation of a multiplicity of possible meanings.

Working with metaphors, creating visual and textual collages, found poetry, word images and photographs, narrative inquirers create research texts that show the complex and multi-layered storied nature of experience. In this way, they create research texts that represent the complexity of people's lives and experiences.

It is important that the voice of the inquirer does not write over the voices of participants in the final research texts by using an overly dominant researcher signature.

The relational aspects of narrative inquiries compel narrative

inquirers to pay attention to particular ethical matters as research texts are written. Narrative inquirers understand that a person's lived and told stories are who they are and who they are becoming and that these stories sustain them. This understanding shapes the necessity of negotiating research texts that respectfully represent participants' lived and told stories.

Negotiating research texts creates a space where participants' narrative authority is honored. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality take on added importance as the complexity of lives are made visible in research texts. Strategies such as fictionalizing and blurring identities and places are often used. Narrative inquiry research texts often call forward increased attentiveness to ethical matters.

2. Research participants

Using narrative inquiry for this study, I have conducted interviews with 4 research participants in total, 3 of which are graduate students from Kyrgyzstan currently enrolled in graduate programs in different universities and the remaining 1 is a recent graduate who is in search of a job in Korea. After a thorough process of searching for research participants from the pool of graduate students in Kyrgyzstan, 10 were selected as suitable candidates to take part in this research. After holding informal conversations with the 10 candidates, 4 were ultimately selected as suitable research participants needed for my study. The common features of these students include language, age group,

and cultural backgrounds. A brief information on the background of the research participants is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Basic information on the Research participants

Research Participants	University	TOPIK level	Language courses	Language of education	Experience abroad prior to Korea
Participant A	D University	5	1 year	English	None
Participant B	K University	5	1 year	Korean	None
Participant C	H University	4	1 year	English	1 year in the US
Participant D	K University	6	None	Korean	None

All 4 participants have been in Korea for more than 2 years. Research participants A, B and C studied the Korean language for one year before entering graduate school, while Research participant D entered graduate school immediately upon arrival in Korea. The common features of these students include language, age group, and cultural backgrounds. Somewhat detailed characteristics were drawn up on the research participants based on observing and communicating with them.

Participant A is a petite, youthful student, who can also be referred to as “dongan”, which means “baby face” in Korean. Her journey to Korea did not start with ambitions to further her higher education in Korea. She first encountered Korean culture in the year 2010 when she learned about Kpop from Korean high school students residing in Kyrgyzstan at the time. It led to more discoveries about the culture of Korean through the

entertainment culture. Eventually, she started learning the language attending Korean courses at the Korean Educational Center in Bishkek. Due to her studies and work, however, she did not attend Korean courses very often. Nonetheless, she had the desire to visit Korea one way or another. Thus, she decided to apply to the the Korean scholarship program. Due to her limited Korean skills, she was enrolled in the language program for a year in J city, prior to her studies in the graduate program.

Participant B is a fearless and ambitious young adult, who knows how to not only work hard, but also enjoy life and take it easy when needed. She explains her journey to Korea as something that started from a hobby and grew into a desire to study abroad, which is the topic of the article she was featured in a Bishkek newspaper Vecherniy Bishkek in September, 2016. She describes the beginning of her interest in Korea and Korean language as a hobby which takes its roots from watching Korean dramas. She also attended the Korean Educational Center in Bishkek as a hobby to learn an Asian language, and ended up studying all the way up to the Advanced level. Participant B explains her decision to come to Korea thanks to Korean dramas as well as full scholarship coverage on the part of the Korean scholarship program. Moreover, as Participant B majored in philosophy, she has interest in various religions of the world. The opportunity to see both Christianity and Buddhism in Korea was one of the factors which played a great role in her decision to come to Korea. Her initial idea of Korean people was “very ambitious, straightforward with quite a strong character.”

Together with Participant A, Participant B spent a year studying Korean in J city.

Participant C is the type of person who tackles any given task without hesitation. One of the features that sets her apart from the other 3 participants is her vast experiences of intercultural communication. After high school, she spent a year as an exchange student in one of the high schools in the United States, thus allowing her the chance to experience being a foreigner at a young age. She also came to Korea after she was introduced to the Hallyu phenomenon. However, she always knew she would further her studies in graduate school, however it was not necessarily Korea at the moment. Initially, she wanted to enroll in graduate school in the United States or Germany. However, she learned about the Korean scholarship program from a friend who was also a scholarship student of the same program. Thanks to the advice from her on how to apply and her interest in the Korean language, she went to the scholarship specialist at the Korean Educational Center in Bishkek and learned more about the program. Her first impression of Korean people was from Korean dramas, as she they “seemed to be very nice, very cute, friendly, romantic at the same time.” Before her journey to Korea, Participant C studied Korean for 4 months in the Korean Educational Center. She, too, was enrolled in Korean courses for a year, in D city.

Participant D is an ambitious individual, who does everything to achieve any goal she sets. Although learning Korean was a hobby for her, she soon realized her potential in the Korean language,

which played a great role in the workplace for she worked at a Korean company translating documents and interpreting between the Korean employers and the local employees. While working at the Korean company, she continued studying Korean and improved her language skills even more. When she applied to the scholarship program, she had already achieved 5th level of TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean), which allowed her to start her master's program as soon as she arrived in America, without having to study Korean. Although, some might see it as saving time, Participant D perceives it as a loss on her part, as she, too, would have liked to experience a year or 6 months of Korean courses, which would not only give a great opportunity improve her Korean language skills, but also help her to be exposed to the Korean culture in a different than graduate school setting.

3. Data collection and analysis

In order to study the intercultural communication of the research participants, data was collected from various sources which include social media, messages, interviews to newspapers in Kyrgyzstan. This data was collected from March, 2016 until the end of the research. Then interviews with research participants were conducted in a conversation style, recorded, then transcribed. The transcribed material was sent to the research participants for revision to ensure clarity and accuracy of the conversations.

After receiving confirmation on the transcript from the

research participants I analyzed it and depicted each research participant's story in a narrative form. This gave an opportunity to describe the participants' experiences in detail giving more insight into their lives as well as illustrate important moments from their experiences. It is believed that this method of research is relevant due to the lack of research on international students from Kyrgyzstan not only in Korea but also throughout the world, as it will explore the research participant's stories deeply concentrating on every detail approaching from all perspectives.

Due to the various directions of each interview, the questions were set generally, which let the interviews flow naturally with the help of follow-up questions. The general questions used for this research are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. General Questions for the Conversations

Aspects of IC	General Questions
Personal aspects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself? 2. Tell me about your first arrival in Korea. 3. Tell me about the first time you met Korean people? 4. Did you have any conflicts or misunderstandings with Korean people?
Cultural aspects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are your impressions of Koreans and their lifestyle? 2. What are the main differences between Koreans and Kyrgyz people? 3. Have you heard of the "empty words" concept? What is your experience of it?

Linguistic aspects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How long did you study Korean before arriving in Korea? 2. What language are your classes conducted in? 3. What language do you communicate with your friends in?
Verbal and Nonverbal aspects	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Were there any difficulties in communication with Koreans? 2. How do you solve the problem that language-barrier?

4. Research ethics

In order to conduct this research, the researcher attended courses on the ethics of conducting research, provided by the Institutions Review Board (IRB) of Inha University. Then, the researcher submitted a detailed research plan, letter of consent, IRB certificate, resume of the researcher, resumes and IRB certificates of co-advising professors and other necessary data and paperwork to the IRB. Then, the paperwork was reviewed and approved by the Institutions Review Board. IRB approval code is 160826-5A.

This research is done with voluntary agreement from research participants with hopes to contribute to the future of intercultural communication between representatives of the two different cultures. The research participants felt the necessity to share their experiences of their time in Korea as international students in hopes that their experiences in Korea, can serve any student who wants to come to Korea as guidance.

Consent forms have been signed with the research participants,

where it is indicated that their names will not be mentioned and the provided information will only be used for academic purposes, archived for 3 years starting from the conclusion day of the research, after which they will be destroyed. The transcription contents of the interview recordings have been sent to the research participants, been examined and approved by them.

To ensure trust and ethics, the investigator triangulation method was used with the academic adviser and fellow students in the Master's Program.



IV. Research Results

In this study, the aim is to explore the intercultural communication experiences of graduate students from Kyrgyzstan who are currently sojourning in Korea. The data collected from the personal social network accounts of the research participants, interviews which were recorded and transcribed, as well as their interviews to local newspapers in Kyrgyzstan, was analyzed and arranged in a narrative form as a story of each research participant separately. There are certain common features and overlapping content among each research participant, but at the same time, each participant's story is unique and will play a great role in the further development of intercultural communication of international students. The research results were separated into 4 different aspects of intercultural communication: personal aspects, cultural aspects, linguistic aspects, verbal and nonverbal aspects.

Although the four participants are different from one another and have had different experiences, certain parts of their life as an international student in Korea have common grounds.

1. Personal Aspects

As personal relationships generally play a big role in the life of any individual, in this study we looked at the personal aspects of intercultural communication in the experiences of each research

participant. There were various types of people who came into the lives of each research participant. However, those who left the most impression on the research participants were the first Korean people they encountered be it in Kyrgyzstan or Korea.

1.1. Relationships with Korean teachers

“Some of them were very friendly. And sometimes when we would have a problem with, for example, going to hospital or don’t understand some phone calls that we received, they were really kind to help us every time, yeah. And they would sometimes take us out, usually, after every semester. They would take us out somewhere.”
(Participant A, September 9, 2016)

“We had our own books and our own program, and everyday you have this homework and we know what we are going to study next. So, previewing and reviewing everything would help a lot. Any time we had questions in mind related to certain grammar or a phrase or a word that we couldn’t understand, we would ask them again and again during the classes, and they would repeatedly explain us until we got the right meaning of those things. The atmosphere was very friendly and very professional, so I didn’t feel any anger or any disappointment whenever there were difficult situations and understanding.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Participant A describes the Korean teachers at J university as the kind of people who helped them when they were most in need. Limited language skills in a foreign land can be quite challenging, if not confining in many ways. Thus, with the help and guidance of the teachers at the language program while in J

university, the cultural adaptation started smoothly and it was possible for them to ease into the life and culture in Korea. The help was tremendous as it concerned not only the language related concerns of the students, but even the trivial parts of everyday life as well. Participant C describes the positive attitudes of Korean teachers even in situations that can be potentially stressful.

1.2. Interaction with mentors and buddies

“...so on the first day we arrived to Korea, we were met by a group of Koreans from the language institution where I studied afterwards. They were very helpful, like carrying our stuff and luggage.”
(Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Participant C may have met Koreans back in Kyrgyzstan, however, she is the only research participant who did not have direct encounters and communication with Koreans very often while in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, when she recalls her first impression of Korean people, it is based on the interaction with Koreans upon her arrival in Korea. It left a positive effect on her as it was the first time she had the opportunity to have full-fledged conversations with them. The members and representatives of the language program, being experienced in working with foreign students, were successful in welcoming the students in a proper way. It is seen as an exemplary way to greet foreign individuals interested in the receiving country and its culture.

“Of course, they are different cause Korean teacher, she taught me only Korean, it was exciting time, because I like Korean. But in case of work, it was work, and I was a worker, and I had duties that I should do, obligations. Sometimes it was hard, because I worked as an interpreter and there was a lot of problems with other workers. And I interpreted everything that was said to other workers. So it was psychologically hard for me. Every emotion goes through me. Yeah, anger. It was mostly anger than positive things, from every morning, it started like that, and whole day, all workers were without any mood for working. I think it’s because of our manager. He was a bit strict? Not strict, a bit crazy? He thought highly of himself. Maybe because he never experience that kind of position before, so he acted very rude sometimes.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

Unlike the other research participants, Participant D had both amiable and professional relations with Koreans on a long term basis prior to her arrival in Korea. While she studied Korean at the Korean Educational Center in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, she also studied Korean additionally with the help of LYH sunsaengnim (“teacher” in Korean). The relationship between Participant D and LYH sunsaengnim was not ordinary, as LYH treated Participant D like a close relative. She invested her time and energy in the future of Participant D. It was an outstanding investment as Participant D was able to work with Koreans while in Kyrgyzstan. However, the atmosphere in the workplace was completely different from her interaction with Korean teachers. Since Participant D worked as an interpreter at the Korean company,

she struggled emotionally on the most part, as her role was between the Korean employers and local employees. Due to the fact that she was the only Korean speaker, she was the only employee who was on the receiving end of anger and disappointment expressed by the employers. When she looks back on that period of her life, Participant D recalls cutting her long hair short due to stress and emotional difficulties.

As a rule of thumb, when one is interested in a foreign country, its language and culture, certain high expectations as well as misconceptions are inevitable, notably so if the exposure to that culture comes from popular culture and entertainment industry. As all of the participants of this research found interest in Korea and its culture thanks to Korean dramas and songs, their general idea and expectations of Koreans were slightly distorted and far from reality. Although only 2 participants studied Korean prior to coming to Korea, all of them educated themselves enough to be familiar with the use of certain words such as “nuna” and “unni” when addressing an older female as well as “hyung” and “oppa” when addressing an older male respectively, as well as friendships in case two people are the same age. They also had a general understanding of the “sunbae” and “hoobae” concepts, which mean “senior” and “junior” in school as well as workplace in Korea..

“And then on the first day, we met, at our language institution they have this program, it’s called Buddy program. So everyone of us, like every foreigner had a buddy. A Korean friend who would show

us around, shop with us, explain things so we are not confused and lost during our first days. Yeah, it was really nice. They actually met us right inside of the bus, they entered and they were super excited to meet us. My buddy, she also greeted me and she was super nice. And on the first day she went with me to E-mart to buy blankets and everything, so it was really nice of her. It was really warm welcoming.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“It was all in Korean. And actually he kinda tried to speak with me in English, but that time I said ‘No, I am not going to talk with you in English, I am going to talk to you in Korean, because it is my goal.’ So yeah, it was only in Korean.”. (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

As there are many different host universities which provide language courses for international students throughout the country, the help they provide for the international students can vary, whether they are in the form of a buddy program or mentor program. These programs can be considered a great way to build friendships and learn the language as well as the everyday culture for international students, but also a valuable experience for the buddies or mentors who were Korean students assigned to each international student.

“Yeah, we had a big fight... it was in the end of the semester, and we were going to Seoul for trip, all GKS students, and the evening before, my mentor called me and said ‘you know what? Our program is going to be end, and you should write some report about me, and about your feelings about this program and during

the program', you know like this Korean style. And I said 'you know what? I cannot do it today because tomorrow I am going to the trip, so can I submit it on the next week?' He said 'Oh no, you know I am really sorry, but the deadline is tomorrow' and I was like 'What? You couldn't say me earlier? Really? How can I write it in Korean?' Ah! And he said that it should be 1 page of A4. And at that time for me it was super hard to write in Korean one page A4, really? And I said 'No, you know what? I am not going to do this. Really I am not going to do this, because actually it is your fault, because if you said me before at least 2 or 3 days, maybe I could make it, but now I can't, I am going to Seoul' it was for 3 days, 'maybe after that, I will, but before, no. I cannot. I am not going to make it'... it was on the phone, and he started to use impolite speech with me, like really rude form. Before, I was nuna, and he was kinda protect this all etiquette. Like the honorific form of language, nuna, verb+seyo, all these things... (omission)... so, this guy had called to international office and complained about me that me is rejected his request, and me broke the promise and yeah. Our international office teacher called me and we had this talk and I explained all this situation and solved this problem... I just explained and actually I think I am not alone. I wasn't the only one who had this kind of problem. Because I was asking other GKS students, and only couple of them really matched and did some interesting things, most of them, no. (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

However perfect the program may be, certain flaws and problems are inevitable along the way of its execution. While some students might have a great match with their assigned buddies or mentors and build amicable, long lasting relations with them, failures also happen between some of the other students

and their buddies or mentors. Unfortunately misconceptions and unrealistic expectations are destroyed and such encounters and negative communication experiences are bound to leave a negative impression about Korean people and their image.

1.3. Relationships with professors and sunbaes

Once enrolled in their respective universities for their selected graduate programs, each research participant had a unique experience in their own way. First of all, as it was mentioned before, 2 of the research participants studied in English, while the other 2 studied in Korean. Surely, their interactions with their professors, sunbaes as well as fellow students.

“Yeah, sometimes. But they helped more with our assignments. So that was a big point. One sunbae helped with translating stuff. We did our PPT in Korean, but our materials were in English, and we tried to translate from English into Korean. It was too hard, cause it was academic stuff. It was hard, because I am not an English speaker. So, he helped us with checking stuff. Another sunbae helped with my thesis. He helped with guiding stuff. ‘You should do this first, and then this second, and then this.’ It was a big support. Another sunbae, she just always treated us to coffee or some sweet stuff... With another sunbaes, good. I think our sunbaes, they cared about us a lot. About me and my roommate.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

“We do. But it is in the context of our classes. It is not personal. For example, we have a class. And after midterm exams or final exams we always have dinner and start of semester parties. But not

individual. Like, 'You know what? I think you are really interesting person, maybe we can eat somewhere' no, not like this..., I graduated from Slavic University, and we were like adults there. They always asked our opinion, and it wasn't like there is a right opinion, like right, or wrong. There is no such thing. And they considered our opinions and treated us really like adults. But here, no. I feel like my senior... Because my major is really for older men and women, and my classmates are 40 and above, like PhD, Master's Program. And, yeah, it is another thing that really frustrates me. That they treat me like a baby. They always want to give me some advice. I really know how to do it, even with registration for classes. I was doing it, and my Sunbae called me and said "Did you register for classes?" and I was like "Yes" "Which classes did you register to? You need to consult before registering" and I was like Really? Come on! In 3 years I am going to be 30, and really.. for me I know what I want to study. And I don't really feel like I need some advice in this point, but no. Ah! Another thing. When I was registering for comprehensive examination, he said 'Consult the professor and let me know' and I was like 'Why? Why should I consult with the professor. It's my comprehensive examination. Why should I, really?' I think they think that 'she is a foreigner and she is stupid.' Not stupid, but I really don't know. I feel like they don't recognize my intellectual." (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

In both cases, the relationships between the research participants and their sunbaes generally were revealed to be limited to the typical sunbae-hoobae relationships as expected in Korea, where a certain subordination is kept to an extent. However the research participants reacted to and felt about the

relationship differently. While Participant D appreciated the school-related help and advice she received from her sunbaes, Participant B felt as if she were receiving unsuitable treatment. Although not completely identical situations, the two cases are quiet similar, but the different reactions can be explained with the personal differences between the two research participants.

Based on personal experience and observation, the researcher found differences in the professor-student relationships between Kyrgyzstan and Korea. In this study, the professor-student relationship dynamics were not ignored, as they play a great role in the school experiences of students.

“During the studies, during the semester, actually, he was very helpful because he would draw something on the board, write in English, and I would get the context, at least. And he would provide me with good literature in English, so I would keep up with other students. At the end he was also helpful in guiding my final paper, so I didn’t have big problems with this.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“I like my professor, he is really nice. And I think I am lucky, because he cares and shows concern. He wants me to graduate faster. He helps me a lot. He guides me and gives me a lot of books and materials for my thesis. He also really helped me choose the topic, so I really appreciate it. I heard from my friends, that often professors don’t really care about their students. They just “Ah, just write” like this. But mine, no.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

“Our professor, I think, is kind enough, because we are foreigners, we can’t properly say something in Korean, or do PPT presentations, but most of the time he helped us with our research work a lot. With grammar and stuff. He would read every word, and check every sentence. I think I chose the right professor.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

“...our professor is the dean of the department, and she has a very international background. She studied in the UK, and many other places. She always participates in international conferences. Her English is very, very, very good. I was even surprised when I heard her first time speaking in Korean, because I couldn’t expect her even speaking Korean although she is Korean, cuz I got used to her English. She always uses this very eloquent, very nice English... in her classes it’s like as with our international professors. It’s different. I think because she has maybe more experience working with international students, or maybe because she has more international experience herself... So she is very open-minded, very nice. I know her since the first semester, because she was the one to teach us the basics of our major. And then the next semester, I took from her another class that also inspired me a lot about gender studies. This semester, we are taking this thesis seminar classes together. So yeah, we have a very good relationship. She is very nice.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Participants B, C and D recall their professors in a positive light. They use words such as “kind” and “helpful” to describe their respected professors. It was discovered that professors showed great interest in the education of the research participants and tried to invest their time and effort to make a

difference in their education. One professor stands out among the others and it is Participant C's professor. Owing to her exposure to life and culture abroad as well as vast experience with foreign students, said professor seems to know the proper way of communication and has the appropriate attitude towards foreigners. However, certain moments in the experiences of these students demonstrate other sides of professors and their style in the classroom as well as in communication with students.

"We had, per semester, one dinner with our professor, and that's all I think, with our professor. Just dinner, per semester, just once. I expected more. I wanted to speak in informal situation with my professor, but we couldn't do that. We always had dinner with other PhD students, graduated PhD students. So it was more official dinner. And we just eat, say something to professor, that's all. "Kazakhstan, do that thing" or "Kyrgyzstan" (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

"On the very beginning, the first class, the professor started asking questions like "Who are the Kypchaks?" It's like a tribe that lived in Central Asia. Like "Who are Kypchaks? Where they came from? Where did they go? What happened to them?" But this was our first introductory class. Even me, coming from Central Asia, I heard about Kypchaks a lot, I studied about them in school, but I couldn't remember exactly on that time. And I was like 'Wait a second, should we really answer?' And then everyone was super stressed during that moment, because he was asking Korean students, everyone. And some of them would give not precise answers. And he would get a little disappointed or angry, in a sense. But later I realized it's just the way he conducts lectures. The way the

professor usually behaves. It's not because he is super angry at something. It was his methodology, his style of teaching. Like, rapidly asking questions that you don't know. Maybe that's how he stimulates the interest of students, like, why I don't know about Kypchaks, let's go and find it out. And that night I actually found out their history their traces and everything. And he was quite strict to everyone, not just Koreans. He could be also strict to me, but it was just his style of teaching, I think. I didn't actually see when a particular professor was mad or angry at someone, I didn't witness anything like that.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

While some professors showed interest in the education of the students and devoted their time to the students, there was still a distance and a certain level of subordination expected to be kept by the students. Participant D expressed regret for the lack of opportunity to communicate with a professor in a different setting. The professor calling the students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan by the name of their home countries instead of by name demonstrates a certain reluctance to build a friendly relationship with his students outside of class. In the second case being the first class, the strict atmosphere and attitude of the professor seemed to be overwhelming for Participant C, causing her to feel stressed and confused about whether the situation called for an answer. Without proper preparation such cases have a high chance of leaving a significant mark in the experiences of outsiders. However, Participant C found a way to analyze said professor's style and learned to accept it as it is.

1.4. Interaction with people in public places

The main goal of the participants of this study is higher education in Korea. Thus, most of their time is spent among the university walls. However, they also experience plenty of interactions with a variety of people outside of the school setting, such as public transportation, places of public catering etc. These people can be both Koreans as well as non-Koreans.

“Yeah, I look Korean for them, I guess (laughs) for other people, too, actually, all my international friends were like ‘Oh, are you Korean? Are you a Korean descendant?’ And I am like ‘no.’ There was one funny story, once in Seoul when I just arrived to Korea, I came to visit my friends in Seoul and we took a taxi. Two of them are completely foreign looking girls. One is Brazilian, one is Uruguayan. We were in taxi, the three of us, and ahjeosshi (older male) started talking to us in Korean, but in the beginning we didn’t know the language at all, like, we knew somehow, little bit. And then he was speaking to me in Korean, like, I don’t know... as if I was Korean, and then I said ‘No, I’m not Korean, I’m foreign’ and he was like ‘No, you are.’ I’m like ‘No.’ ‘Then you must be a Korean descendant’ I’m like ‘No, I’m not’ ‘No no, go check your DNA, I’m sure, 100% sure you have Korean blood in you’ I was like ‘No, all my ancestors, my parents and grandparents, they are all Kyrgyz, I am sure, like 100% sure of it.’ But then he was like ‘No, no, you have to check your DNA, you have to check. I bet, I’m sure, 100% sure you have Korean blood in you’ (laughs) That was so much fun.” (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

“Oh, in a subway, we had several situations, when a group of

foreigners, there were 5 or 6 of us. We were having this vibrant conversation about something. Very enthusiastically talking, discussing Korean lifestyle. And people in age, usually in their 60s-70s would shut us up. Back then our Korean was very bad, so we couldn't clearly understand, but we got the message. It was like 'You are too loud, be a little silent' or they would shout at us something, in a negative way. So that would mean something's wrong. One of my friends has a really nice laughter. Whenever she laughs, she makes everyone laugh around her. She has a really good laughter, but it's loud. So another day, we were discussing something and she laughed. Another man sitting near her, he was also commenting on that. I think these kind of cases are a bit disturbing, but at the same time we understand that being as a foreigner, I mean we are not on our own land, we have to also respect different culture, and different people. So that's why I try to research more, and ask more about Koreans. But I think, actually, I don't know much about Korean life in general, because my life here was all the time in the dormitory, surrounded by bunch of foreigners. But I think I would have a better understanding, better perspective about Korean life if I lived together with Koreans, let's say a host family. I think that would be a really really nice perspective, internal perspective, about their life, how do they behave in normal life. That's what I don't know and cannot tell precisely, so yeah." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Having been born into a multicultural society where representatives of over 80 different ethnic groups coexist, the tendency to generalize people into one ethnic group based on physical appearance took Participant A by surprise. However, owing it to her vast experience in communication with foreigners

as well as constant confusion with Koreans due to her Asian appearance, Participant A found the interaction amusing and took no offense. On the other hand, in the case of Participant C, negative remarks were comprehensible in spite of the lack of language skills of her and other international students. Offense by such remarks is inevitable whether it is an intercultural interaction or not, nonetheless Participant C demonstrates an open mind to accept changes and diversity. At the same time, she acknowledges her lack of knowledge and interrelational dynamics in Korea and explains it with the lack of firsthand observation and experience of such relationships in Korea.

1.5. Difficulties in making friends

“OK. Now I can think of only a few Korean friends, most of them are from my department. And their English is already good, and it’s not like we are hanging out because of the language practice or something like that, because we really like each other’s company. But they are different from majority population. Because they’ve traveled a lot, they know a lot, and I perceive them as other foreigners. They are not like very traditional, traditional Korean people.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“For 2 years, I just studied in university. I lived in a dorm. I had only foreign student friends. But they are too busy, as me. They were working on master’s degree. It’s too hard to make friends. Or you have friends because of language. Someone wants to practice. But I can’t say that it’s a friendly relationship... I always thought that Koreans are polite, and always kind people. But I started to go to tennis club in K university. And once I noticed that Koreans

discussing about some person when he is not near them. And I understand that they discuss about me, too. I just thought about that. Because they discussed about another person so badly.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

“I don’t know why. I think it’s a Korean culture that foreigners hangout with foreigners and Koreans hang out only with Koreans. I think it is like separatism. In my point of view, really, really friends? No, I didn’t. I mean, yeah I know some Koreans, and they can help me. They are nice.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Two different types of relationships can be observed from the experiences of Participant C and D. Although in both cases, the relationships built are with Koreans, the positions of the two research participants are opposite. Although according to Participant C, she does not have many Korean friends, the friendship she built with them is quite sincere. She explains this with the cultural backgrounds of said Korean friends. She believes travel experiences as well as interaction with representatives of other cultures change one’s point of view and behavior significantly. Participant D, on the other hand, expressed disappointment in the attitude of Koreans who saw friendship with foreigners as a tool to improve their foreign language skills which demonstrates insincerity and is short term. In the case of Participant B, on the other hand, due to the lack of experience interacting with representatives of other cultures and nationalities demonstrates a certain limitation when interacting with foreign students.

“Because, now, I am living alone. I don’t have friends. Some friends in Incheon and some is in Hongdae. So far. It is one hour (laughs sarcastically). Because I have a part time job now, I don’t really have time for me. I start work at 8:30 and it ends at about 7pm. So after that I come home at about 8:00-8:30. Make something to eat at 9:00-9:30. Wash, do things around the house, and it is 11. And I have 1 hour for reading or watching something. I can watch something, and just sleep. After that, I have to wake up at 6:30... and that’s life.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

Leading a life engrossed in work, which does not leave time for one’s personal life is something foreigners learn when they study the Korean language and learn about the Korean culture and lifestyle. Participant D implies that exactly this lifestyle as well as physical distance are what limit her personal life since it is a challenge for her to meet with fellow Kyrgyzstani students as well.

2. Cultural Aspects

Thanks to their immense interest in the Korean language as well as the culture, all four of the Research Participants gained a certain amount of knowledge about Korea from various sources. However, since they were physically far away from Korea, it is safe to say that their sources were limited, thus not all of the information was completely truthful. They gained subjective information from points of view of the informants, as well as certain generalizations and the inevitable stereotypes.

2.1. Initial ideas about Koreans

“As for Koreans, they are so ambitious, they are so straight, and they have really like strong character, yeah. That time I thought like this. Because when we saw Korean history, they had really bad times like Civil War, troubles with Japan and stuff. So, I thought that when people usually experience this kind of things, they become stronger, like morality, and umm yeah.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

“Well, let me think. I think the first thing that comes to my mind is this, you know, Korean words like unni, or like oppa. Because Koreans, I think, use a lot of these kind of words while referring to each other. I don’t know, they seem very nice and friendly to each other.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

History is an important part of humanity and every individual. Looking back at any nation’s history, one can learn much about that particular nation. It is not, however, the most common source for today’s youth to turn to for facts and information about Korea due to their exposure to Korea and its culture through the Hallyu wave. Participant B is a unique exception. As a holder of an academic degree in philosophy, she had the opportunity to study about various religions and history of certain countries which included Korea as well. From the obtained information, she had formed a certain picture of Koreans being strong and their culture of morality. Participant C, on the other hand, along with most of the youth in Kyrgyzstan, obtained information mostly from the media, which shows the lifestyle and culture currently prevailing in Korea, including the certain words

and phrases as well as the way of speech.

“Of course it was WOW! Yeah, I felt like I came to the future. Seriously. Incheon Airport, it was amazing, really. Because in our country we don’t have this high technology. In this point it was really amazing, and I was so inspired. I was like “Oh my God! Really? I finally came here! I did it!” And then we came and we didn’t stay in Seoul, just went straightly to J city. And we were so exhausted, and I couldn’t see at all, because we just fell asleep in the bus. And then we came to J city, and J University is really amazing, it’s new, with new buildings. And J city is actually really high tech city, buildings are totally new. So, everything is new, and there are many foreigners. And first impression was really WOW. But after we started our language courses. And before I thought that Koreans are ‘Asian Germans.’ Like they are so punctual, they do in order, and organized, productive, work 12 hours per day, concentrated, but no! Suddenly this image started to fall apart. Because our international office, they did many mistakes. They couldn’t even check schedules, really simple things, and yeah, suddenly they couldn’t really get things done.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

“Let me think. Ummm... Actually I had this stereotype before coming to Korea that Koreans work really hard, they work a lot overtime, the students literally sleep in the libraries, and they study a lot. Like those kind of things. And once I came here, yeah, I found that it is true, you know, seeing students not coming out from the library, studying for a lot of hours, it is true, but I kept questioning myself whether it is super-efficient. Because, you know, even in the library you see a lot of exhausted students who would nap a lot. Or like, you know, be in a coffee shop, but not really study, but sit with

their phone and do other random things. So, yeah, I questioned whether this kind of studying is efficient enough or not. I don't know. But this is the stereotype I had and actually was true while coming here." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

When juxtaposed, the impressions left by Koreans on Participant B and C, some elements matched well, while others did not necessarily pair up. Participant C describes her feelings and emotions about her first arrival in Korea when seeing much of the things she heard about Korea while she studied the language back in Kyrgyzstan including the popular idea of punctuality. The contrast of her general idea of Korea and the reality when observing the international office and their operation, she came to a realization that everything is what she expected. Participant C also made important points about the culture of education in Korea. She even expressed concern in the effectiveness of said education culture in contrast with the generally believed claims about these cultures.

2.2. Sunbae-hoobae relationship

"When I try to speak to my sunbae in Korean, they usually use jondaemal (formal speech) with me, but with other hoobae, Koreans, they would just use banmal (informal speech)." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"My sunbaes (laughs). Actually, I didn't experience the sunbae culture. I keep hearing from other people, especially who go to very Korean, Korean universities. Ours is very international, foreign

studies, we have a lot of foreigners. And I heard about sunbae culture, that they supervise you, they might tell you if you are doing something wrong. That's a normal thing. In my case, I am very independent. Our sunbaes... at the beginning, when we entered the first semester and started studying, they were also foreigners. And we didn't have the sunbae culture. We were just like friends. We were just talking. And until now, we have couple of people who are about to graduate this semester, and we never had this sunbae..”
(Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Among those who have interested in Korean language and culture, there are hardly any people who are not aware of the concept of sunbae-hoobae culture. It is demonstrated in the media as well as covered during Korean language courses, thus international students prepare themselves mentally for this dynamic. Since both participants A and C attend school in English, expectation of subordination was discovered to be low from international students in comparison with those who are Korean. Research participants as well as the researcher believe that language and exposure to diversity in culture play an important role in such differences in attitude, perception and expectations of foreigners.

2.3. Classroom culture

“Their attitude is quite good, actually, maybe because they are focused on international students, and they treat us nicely. I don't know...(omission) ...Even if we did do something in a way that it is not appropriate in Korean culture. Just like entering the class and saying 'Hi!' instead of bowing and saying 'Annyeonghaseyo?’ (formal

greeting in Korean) or something. Or when leaving, we don't say 'Annyeonghi gyeseyo' (formal form of farewell from the leaving speaker) or something, we just say 'OK, bye. Have a nice day' and leave like that... Probably because the classes are all foreigners, that's why... But to Korean students, I feel like, they are different to them, like they treat differently, to Korean students, sometimes it is hard for them to understand the assignment or something... (omission) ...So they try to explain them after class, they try to explain them in Korean. And Korean students themselves, they treat professors differently than international students, like, they would always go 'professor, professor' very politely, like honorific, and professors would look at them differently (laughs). There was one case that the professor was strict to Korean students. Yeah, but to us, he was softer. So, maybe because Korean students, they got used to this kind of load since high school, middle school, but for us it is something foreign and since we are in a foreign country, maybe he would be like little softer to us, but to Koreans he was little... yeah... (omission) ...They say like 'we understand that you guys are not in your comfort zone.' So they would say 'If you need anything besides classes, you are always welcome to my office, or send me an email, or call me' something like that. They try to help." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"My best example would be probably just.. whenever professor talks, you are not allowed to interrupt him. So it's not even a matter of questioning. You should save all of your questions till the end if you have. I mean it's not because I've tried to ask a question during the lecture, and then he said something like 'You will have to ask me later,' no no, nothing like that. It's just I'm a very observant person, so I observed how other Koreans behave in the classroom. So everyone is super quiet while professor is giving the lecture. I don't

know. Since the very first seconds in the class, there is a pressure in the class. There is a pressure to speak. That is what I noticed from my classmates, from my groupmates. No one feels very free to express their ideas, and it never gets noisy in the class, it's always quiet. Whenever I have a question, I usually ask in between, when the professor stops, or at the end. But I think classes with Korean professors in Korean environment is less interactive.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“It was kind of a misunderstanding. I don't know, maybe it is a misunderstanding, maybe it is a culture. For example, my professor always asks me: ‘What do you think of doing this?’ Like this. And, ‘Think about it, and what do you think of trying this?’ Like this. And actually I thought that he was asking my opinion and I am free to choose, like on my own. But, no, suddenly my senior invited me to talk for lunch and said: ‘You know, in Korea we have this culture, the professor is like God, and we should treat him like he is God. And when he is asking you What do you think of doing this? It means you have to do it, it doesn't mean that you are willing to do, what do you want.’ So, yeah, that was kind of a shock for me.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

In the three instances of participants A, C and B the difference in styles and attitudes of professors can be observed gradually when aligned in that particular order. While the Participant A whose education is conducted wholly in English, experienced a different type of treatment compared to Koreans, Participant C, who is also receiving her education in English experienced the subordination culture to some extent, while Participant B, who is receiving education on the same level with Korean students

experienced certain misunderstandings due to lack of certain cultural knowledge. In her case, separate explanation was required from her sunbae due to the caused misunderstanding.

“But I realized in general, this is my 3rd semester, and every semester I have to take one Korean course, course in Korean language. The setting is very different. The classes where majority are Koreans, and professor is Korean, we have this silence most of the time. We don’t have this very eager debates with each other. We basically listen to the professor during the lectures. We do not participate that much, even don’t really ask questions. Unless the professor asks, or puts you on a spot. But of course, our turn comes when we have to give presentations and stuff. I am just comparing with my other classes where majority of students are international students, unless the professor is also a foreigner. We don’t have this barrier between professor and students. Basically, we have very eager conversations with each other. It might even go up to a debate or something. And that’s very encouraged, it’s not discouraged by the professor. So, I guess that’s the main difference in teaching, in educational teaching, that Korean style is more strict, and it puts a barrier between the professor and the students. But in international setting it’s the opposite.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Here, according to Participant C’s personal analysis comparing the classes conducted in Korean versus those in English, there are two completely different styles. Namely, the atmosphere and the way the classes are conducted are the main differences. On one hand, the classes conducted in English encourage debates and questions in any given time, while during the classes in

Korean, the students are expected to wait for the professor to complete his or her lecture to finish his thought before speaking.

As international students interact with various people outside the school premises, certain cultural factors caught their attention when coexisting with locals as well as foreigners out of school.

2.4. Palli palli culture

“Every time I would see Koreans, they would always rush somewhere. They are always palli palli (fast pace). Maybe Seoul is faster, but I kind of got used to this atmosphere and I didn’t notice that it is faster than the people and life in D city. But yeah, it is pretty similar. It is just Seoul is more beautiful, bigger, and a lot more things going on here. So maybe that’s the only big difference.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“Yeah, I think their palli palli culture. Do it faster, do everything quickly fast. I don’t know. I am quite slow person myself (laughs) although I became a lot faster in Korea, yeah, but still not as fast as them (laughs). For example, even in eating. Even eating, I’m very slow. I always finish the last. There were situations that I would arrive first, eat slowly, and then Koreans, at another table, they would come, order, eat, finish, and I am still not done with half of my food (laughs) something like that... At least I need like 40 minutes. I am quite slow, even now.” (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

One of the most common cultural traits of Koreans widely known among foreigners is the palli palli culture, which is the culture

where the actions are done and expected to be done in a fast pace. Participant C mentioned Koreans constantly in a rush, while Participant A emphasized eating palli palli comparing to her naturally slow pace. While some foreigners are gradually used to this culture and embrace this culture in their lifestyle, some people, like Participant A, struggle even after some times has passed. Lee et al. (2015) also revealed it as a part of acculturative stress among the Central Asian students in Korea.

2.5. The 'empty words' phenomenon

"Bin mal (empty words)? I know, I think, the most used one is Uri bab mokja (let's have a meal together). And then it never happens (laughs). Yeah, I had a few, actually. "uri mannaja (let's meet)". And then you get so excited like, "OK, let's meet. When?" And then, disappear. "One day, soon" and then no answer (laughs). In the beginning it was weird. But then, even teachers at language school, they would tell us that "yeah, we have this kind of Binmal in Korea, so if a person says this but never sets the date, then it's just being polite, so don't expect much" (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"Aaa, of course I have, come on! (laughs) Yeah, when I said that I was volunteering for Korean students, it was in our country in Korean Educational Center. It was 40 students. And they all promised me 'When you come to Korea, I will treat you to a meal. I will guide you around in Korea. We will go eat some delicious food. We will drink alcohol together.' All this. I came here, and none of them contacted me... I don't know. We added Facebook profiles and it was obvious. It was really obvious, because I was uploading every photo. Garbage, bench, tree and all this stuff. And it was obvious

that I am here and they didn't. So I was like OK, I am not going to do it either." (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Just as Bekboeva (2016) described in her autoethnography the concept of empty words was also detected in the lives of participants A and B. Due to the lack of knowledge of the existence of this concept, it is highly likely for not only international students from Kyrgyzstan, but also foreigners in general.

"Ummm, not really good. Seriously! This sentence makes you... like... you cannot say 'No' and you cannot say 'Yes.' So, you are in the middle, and you are trying to show that OK, you are not Korean, but at that point it means that you don't like Koreans. And I don't know. It's really, really, really fragile moment, delicate situation." (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

It is common for Koreans to turn to a foreigner and comment on how they have "become a Korean" based on not only their language skills, but also ways of speech as well as certain movements and actions. Participant B expressed unease towards such comments in fear of hurting them in case of denying it or sounding eager about an idea they do not entertain. The researcher classified this tendency as another form of "empty words" as it is a way of complimenting one on their grasp of the Korean language and culture, and not the actual process of naturalization.

2.6. Culture of alcohol consumption

“Another thing I realized later about Korea is that Korean drinking culture. I really didn’t have any idea that Koreans, I don’t want to say that it’s super bad, I mean I don’t want to judge anyone, but I think it is unhealthy, at least, to drink a lot. But you know, I don’t know, I was shocked when I saw people drinking a lot, and then I also heard from Korean students that if their seniors are inviting them, they have to drink and not drinking is not polite, so you have to do it. Personally, as a muslim, and non-drinker, I didn’t experience that at all, but from the side, as an observer, I thought that it was not a good culture. I remember we used to argue on this topic during our language courses, because, you know, Koreans think that Russians drink a lot, but Russian students in our class would think that Koreans drink as much as Russians, yeah, so I was... something that I noticed. Oh, another really, really nice thing about Korea is that Korea is a living fest to me. It has a lot of things, like festivals going on all the time. Like university festivals, for example, was really fascinating to me, because we don’t have something like that in my country, like you know, in a big scale, I mean. They really celebrate the beginning of semester, and then it goes for a couple of more days. You never get bored in Korea. Whenever you are bored, you just open up the internet and somewhere around the town, there is something going on, some fests or galleries, some installations, exhibitions. Something is there, so if you want to admit yourself culturally, you go do something.”

(Participant C, September 23, 2016)

“Because, first year it was in J city. Our university was a Christian university. So we didn’t have this university campus festival. Because it was prohibited to drink alcohol in the campus, so it was

kind of OK. I knew before that Koreans drink a lot, but I didn't think they could do it on campus. And last year in my university we had this campus festival. I think it was spring, and Oh my God! When I heard university campus festival, I was like: Oh, probably it's like in our culture, we have KVN (competition of jokes in teams), and concerts and clubs, dancing, singing, all this stuff. But here, no. They just sing and drink. A lot. And when I say a lot, it means a looooot. Like, really a lot. Copious amounts. And in our university, I do not know, maybe in another university it's.... I think it's the same thing. Some students drink until they pass out. And even emergency came, and bring some of them... (omission)... Yeah, in my university, K University. The whole campus. They are drinking with professors. Professors, students, workers. And university festival, it's not only in my university, right? In the same period, through all Korea, all campuses, it means that all Korea just drinks. And have this drunken stupor. So yeah, it was really shocked. Like a big shock (laughs).” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

“I drank before, only with our family. One glass of wine, or just 1 mojito. It was twice or 3 times a year. But after coming to Korea, it started 6 months ago. Before that, I tried not to drink. I just drank only in bar, one glass of mojito. Once or twice per semester... When I was about to graduate. I think I got a lot of stress, and they were a lot of foreigner students in K university. We had some festivals. And at that time, all of them drank beer. I never liked beer. But all of them drank beer. And they said ‘Oh, [Participant D], have some beer’ OK. I will try (laughs). I tried. And after that when we went to another place. After a week, I think. ‘Beer! Beer, beer, beer!’ (laughs) ‘OK, beer.’ I can't say that ‘I will not have beer, I want something else.’ I couldn't do that. So I started to drink beer. But I don't like beer. I can drink because of my friends. So I started to

drink beer." (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

The culture of alcohol consumption or drinking culture exists in almost every country. It is incorrect to label a nation as a whole to a drinking culture based on a small sample of people or a preconception of one or another country. Despite that, such misconceptions exist and there are countless amounts of jokes about drinking culture throughout the world. The most common jokes include those about Russia and the amounts of alcohol consumed there. As Participant C pointed her reaction and the reaction of students from Russia concerning the amount consumed by the people in Korea. As far as personal preferences, Participant C stated that she follows her religious teachings of refusing alcohol, while Participant D described her situation of consuming alcohol due to her surroundings. Participant B, on the other hand, neither admitted nor denied to consuming alcohol before or after her arrival in Korea, but expressed utmost surprise concerning this culture. The culture of festivals in Korea, demonstrate a different side of Koreans compared to the every day conduct at a school setting.

2.7. Cultural traits difficult to comprehend

"Yeah, I actually speculated a lot on this topic, because Korea is supposed to be very traditional culture, right? But at the same time it is very modern. Especially Seoul. Going back to your previous question, how different D city with Seoul. I think the major difference is in the internationality of Seoul. Seoul is very international compared to D city. Seoul is very international. A lot

of people from different places. For me it was shocking that in a train, younger generation wouldn't give a space to an older generation. In a subway, in a train. In Kyrgyzstan, where I come from, if you are younger, and somebody is 5-10 years older, not even old, old person, you still give up and offer your seat. That's what I thought was going to happen in Korea, too, but surprisingly, no, in a train everybody sits in their spots. And for pregnant or sick people there is another spot. Even if the train is crowded, no one sits there. But the other places, if you get a spot, then you can just sit and not worry about other people, their age or like that. So, it was a bit surprising... I didn't like that. At the beginning I was offering seats, all the time, to the people who were older, in their 60s or 70s all the time, but now, I don't know, maybe the culture is affecting me, I usually don't pay attention. It depends, of course, if I see a very sick person or something, I usually offer a seat, but if not, I usually keep riding (laughs)." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Coming from a culture, where respect for the elderly is an important part of one's life, into another culture where it is also essential, Participant C observed quite a difference in understanding said respect and what it entails. In comparison of the two instances, a change in the viewpoint and attitude of the research participant is demonstrated. If in the early parts of her journey in Korea, Participant C had a difficulty comprehending the actions or non-actions of fellow passengers in public transportation, later on she observed that she, too, learned to pay less attention to her surroundings. However, she emphasized her inclination to give up her seat to those who she sees fit.

“Yeah. Sneakers. Girls wear sneakers with everything. Like skirts, dress, formal clothes, and then sneakers. That was shocking for me in the beginning. The guys, the same actually. Sometimes they would wear smart suits, and then sneakers, New Balance or something like that (laughs) That’s quite shocking actually. Yeah, this was one big.... And then also large size clothes...” (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

“For me it was really shocking that people in the library or in the campus, even outside, they are wearing slippers. In our country it is not appropriate. In our country it is not appropriate to go to university in sport shoes. And not training clothes. And also I don’t like when they start to brush their teeth in public place. And they do it really openly. For us it is hygiene, and you have to do it closed, like yourself. Do it in the bathroom or something. Here they can go through the convenience store (and brush their teeth).” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Both Participants A and B experienced culture shock to some extent. The style of clothing, or rather the choice of certain clothing items brought culture shock to both research participants. Coming from a cultural background where it is instilled in one to dress, or make an effort to ‘dress to impress’ Participants A and B seem to be in the process of adjusting to the clothing style. What was even more shocking for her was the act of brushing one’s teeth not just outside of the comfort of one’s bathroom, but in a public establishment such as a convenience store. Participant B demonstrated inability to respond

to a cultural shock in this case, categorizing it as a cultural aspect of communication.

2.8. Food culture

“...and rice, yeah, a lot of rice. So it was very difficult at the beginning, and then majority of Korean food contains pork, so I’ve never tried them. So I can’t say how delicious they are. So I keep eating kalguksu. I ate fish, bibimpab, or kimchi-jjigae, or something like this. No offense to Koreans, but Korean food is not my favorite, favorite. I like [fried] chicken or something like that, but I still have to pick among food. Another thing, I have to make sure, even if doesn’t say it has pork, I still have to ask one more time, because some people say ‘it doesn’t have pork’ but they put ham in it, or they put bacon. And then you are like ‘There is bacon, it’s pork’ and they are like ‘Oh’, and then they are super surprised that it’s pork. Now I enumerate everything ‘is there pork in it? Is there ham in it? Is there bacon in it?’ I have to make sure all the time. And I have to do it even twice sometime, because if they are not attentive enough. It happened a lot to me. I ordered vegetable kimpab, and I said ‘please do not put ham in it’ they still put ham in it. So, I have to say twice in advance: Please do not. I have to always be cautious about what I am eating and it’s not comfortable. But other than that, it’s good. Of course I love bibimpab, it’s good. And the good thing in Seoul, there are a lot of different cuisines. You can go find an Italian restaurant, Vietnamese or other restaurant, so it’s not a problem.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

If one has dietary restrictions, namely inability to consume foods that contain pork, difficulties in Korean life are inevitable. Unfortunately this is the case for Participant C. The subtitle of

one of the newspaper articles where Participant B was featured is 'Muslims have a hard time here!' ⁸⁾ Although Participant B does not struggle with this problem, she elaborated on this topic based on indirect experience through her friends. Luckily for Participant C, she is a positive individual, who accepts this challenge as a part of the culture and enjoys are cuisine that do not clash with her dietary restrictions.

"Actually, I thought that I am never going to drink non-alcoholic beer (laughs) because I try to avoid beer and other types of alcohol, but then I was convinced by my other muslim friends here, that non-alcoholic beer in Korea has no alcohol for real. So I got convinced. I thought that I would never do it, but I did. Another thing is that I thought that I will never be able to eat octopus, but I did. At the end, I got curious, and it was really delicious. There is this soup with octopus that comes with noodles as well. It was really nice. And the octopus with really huge. We cut it with scissors, that's actually very uncommon, unusual in my country, too, cause we never use scissors for food, but here it's ok. I mean it was another culture shock, in the US, that was the first time... in the US they also use scissors for cutting the food. In Korea, a lot, cutting noodles, or cutting octopus." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Having spent a year in the United States, Participant C has seen and experienced the life in the west along with its differences and unusual parts of culture. However, being an Asian in another Asian country does not give one a guarantee of the same lifestyle. In fact, in her case, Participant C found

8) <http://ru.sputnik.kg/opinion/20160205/1022143222.html>

similarities between her experience in the United States with that of Korea. While cutting food items with scissors might confuse a surprise one if they are not accustomed to it, Participant C stated that she had experienced it in the United States, thus making her more susceptible to this practice. She also expressed surprise in herself for trying food and beverages she never saw herself trying. When one accepts the culture of others, they communicate through such changes.

3. Linguistic Aspects

Language is crucial in the life of any individual whether they are in their home country or in a foreign land. After all, they say it is what differentiates us from animals. Although, most students spend much time learning and perfecting their Korean skills as much as they can before entering Korea, lack of Korean skills, does not stop a student from being a worthy candidate if they have above average proficiency of the English language, which is demonstrated in the participants of this research.

3.1. Language skills of teachers

“YWY sunsaengnim. Yeah, he was the best. He was so nice and he was talking about Korea in interesting way, about the society. And also he was a painter... when he had difficulties explaining in Korean, he would do it in Kyrgyz.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Participant recalled her experience studying Korean at the

Korean Educational Center in Bishkek and expressed admiration towards her teacher, who although Korean, spoke and explained the class in Kyrgyzstan. Learning the language and culture of another people can be one of the best ways to communicate one's respect for that nation.

"Yeah, we spoke English in the beginning, but then, after few months, we started learning Korean, we needed to practice, so we would speak to them in Korean. Yep. And they were really kind, patient. And they would explain us some rules as well, like, rules that are used in conversational Korean, those rules that you will not learn in language school, like, how people would just communicate in every day life... (omission)... the beginning was quite hard, difficult, cause I started from level 2, but still my level of Korean was so poor, that I would just understand few words and few sentences. But teachers were quite patient. And they would try to explain... if they cannot explain with words, they would always use gestures, if no gestures then they would draw something. I felt like I am back to [elementary] school again (laughs)... I think in Seoul people got used to foreigners so much that they don't really care. They will just speak to you in Korean and then when you are confused or don't understand, they try to explain you in English, yeah." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"My Korean was really bad in the beginning (laughs), I mean I basically knew the alphabet and somehow read. But you know, what was the most difficult was that my brain wouldn't accept the Korean writings. It was... you for example, reading Cyrillic or reading in Romanized I mean reading English or other things is very easy, my brain accepts it very easily, but whenever it comes to this Korean

writing, it was something to me more like Japanese writings or Korean writings. So my brain with struggle, trying to join these letters together to make syllables and then words. To be honest, I have reading difficulties until now. It is not fluent. So I still have to pay attention how... yeah. So, it was very difficult.. And yeah, in the beginning I just knew how to introduce myself and smile a lot. But the thing is, our teachers, they were very good in their job, in teaching. So I started from the first level, and they wouldn't use a lot of English with us. They would keep speaking in Korean all the time, but they used to use very basic Korean, and also apply gestures and mimics, so we would understand what's going on. Basically after a couple of months I started feeling myself comfortable around Korean.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

It was kind of awkward, and actually they were more apologetic for it because if I didn't know something, I was asking in English, and they couldn't at all, so yeah, I think they were more frustrated than me. They couldn't explain in English or in Korean. Actually, before I thought that they are good in English, better than in our country, so no, it wasn't the case...” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Participants A, B and C received Korean courses before starting graduate school. They spent one year studying Korean in universities and cities where they were assigned by NIIED. Because of the long experiences of educating foreign students, these language courses have proven to do their job as expected. All three participants were quite satisfied with the way the teachers conducted classes and explained the material. One of the expectations and assumptions by Participant B of Koreans' above average English skills were not met, much to her surprise.

However, they continued to use English as the main language of communication with fellow students from other countries, as well as with their Korean teachers in certain situations.

3.2. Use of language in graduate school

“OK, in D city, in our Korean courses, everything was very nice. We had all Korean teachers, but they were professionals in their field of course. They had a certain good experience before us with foreigners. So they would understand us from half a word. If we are having troubles, if we don’t understand, explain again. Our cultural differences was not a matter of questioning or having misunderstandings or something, because they were already prepared in terms of teachers, Everything was very smooth and very nice. In D city, we had this feeling as if we are little kids. They have to take care of us. Age didn’t matter. Although we were over 20, some people were over 30. They still approached by teachers as if they are little kids, like they have to learn this, and they have to know this. Actually in that educational setting you feel yourself like still a student in high school or something. Yeah, that’s the thing. Umm, but in Seoul, since my faculty basically is in English, most of the teachers and my classes. Most of them are in English, so I don’t have any problems with my classes now. Except, 1 Korean class per semester. Although it should be in English, it should be provided, at least a couple of courses, from regional department, I mean, in English, but they keep conducting it in Korean. The reason for that is that usually I am the only foreigner in the class. Let’s say, there are 15 people, and 14 of them are Koreans, and I am the only foreigner. And I remember in my first class, the professor was quite strict. And he told me ‘Well, you should know what class are you taking, majority of the students here are Koreans, so don’t expect

me to speak in English because of only you, so you should know that' Well, of course he asked if my Korean was good or not. I told them that my academic Korean is not good enough, I prefer English." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

We have around 5 Korean students, but all of them, they speak English, so the main language, again, to communicate is English. But sometimes I speak to them in Korean, cause some of them prefer to speak in Korean rather than English. Most of my professors are Korean, but all my classes are required to be in English, so we speak to them, all the lectures and everything are in English. And outside of class, we also speak in English." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"First semester was like hell for me. I didn't understand what they want me to do and what is going on and I was just really frustrated, and it was, even with Advanced level, it is really hard. But I think it depends on master's courses. For example, some master's, they have this mixed classes like English, Korean, all materials in English, like Participant A. But in my case, it's all in Korean. 100%. And the materials, lectures, even this communication between me and my professor. Even he graduated from USA..." (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Participants A, B, and C compared the linguistic aspects of their time during the Korean courses and graduate school. The two are not comparable, because the former is designed for learning the language, while for the latter one is expected to know a certain amount depending on the language their classes are conducted in. Participant A did not face any challenges

because all of her classes were in English, Participant C mainly had classes conducted in English with some exceptions, so she states it was a bit of a challenge. Participant B, however, was enrolled in a program completely in Korean, which is the reason for her struggles despite a year of studying Korean prior.

“I think so. First, he judged because of our Korean pronunciation and English pronunciation. We can tell that when we have to do PPT presentations. And when we are doing our PPT, he can stop us and say ‘My head hurts. Just skip that, and tell us the main thing, conclusion.’ But it happened case-by-case. If your pronunciation in Korean is OK, you can just read your PPT. You can do your PPT. But if your pronunciation is bad, you can just talk. In relation to Chinese students, he would say ‘just say the main point’... First time when that happened with another student, I was scared cause after that my presentation was next. But, fortunately I did my full presentation.” (Participant D, October 1, 2016)

The only research participant who was a holder of the Advanced level of Korean, who did not have the opportunity to study Korean separately had other struggles. They were related directly to the preferences of her professor. It was shown that for some people, the language skills and pronunciation pay an important role in communication. However, in this case, some students were judged based on their disadvantages in the English language, which is not correct in relation to foreigners.

4. Nonverbal Aspects

They say, silence can express much of what words cannot. Along with silence, certain gestures and facial expressions can also transmit your message or feelings.

4.1. Gestures and facial expressions

“Well, actually, in general, Korean people are quite rich to those kind of gestures, I guess. I mean they would express, they would show a lot of emotions on their face. And sometimes, some of them were like too... you know they would try to be friendly, and sometimes they would be like, too friendly that we would be a little, not scared, but feeling awkward, weird. But then they would laugh at it again, so that the awkwardness would go away.... They would be sometimes, frustrated. But then they wouldn't give up. They would keep on trying and trying. But then when there was no hope, they would just ask us to look for the word in the dictionary, so that we would understand. Sometimes they would just make fun of the situation like when they are frustrated but they cannot do anything, they would just do the 'facepalm' and just do like 'Ah' and laugh at it, so that we will not feel awkward.” (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

“Yes, and they were so upset about this, so I saw this kind of disappointment in their face. So yeah, I don't know, maybe it's a mistake of our international office, when they did this advertisement of mentoring program. Because my mentor said that OK, first time they didn't say that it's not allowed to speak English, so there were a lot of applicants, it seems... (omission)... they did this orientation party, and they said 'OK, it's a program for foreigners, and you

have to talk with them in Korean, because they have to improve their Korean skills' and I saw disappointment in their face, and lots of them, they just dropped this program after that. And my Korean mentor wasn't adequate. He wasn't, because, we should apply every week or every two weeks, our activities with photos, and what we did." (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

"Basically, Koreans are not interested in other people so they do not really observe, or they do not interfere, they do not disturb, and I feel very safe myself here in Korea, basically, in public. But there are some cases, especially when you are crossing the road, and behind you there is an ajumma, or an older woman. She might easily push you on the side and walk ahead, and do not say sorry or something. I've experienced that couple of times, and it was not in a way as if she was irritated by me, but I was just walking, I didn't do anything. Maybe I was walking a bit slower than she did, but they do it a lot. It's not just a single experience. All my friends had that experience, when people push you and do not apologize. In the subway when everyone enters in and goes out there are a lot of situations when people push each other again. Oh, and another thing, maybe I am going back again to your question, sorry. Another thing that disturbs me in Korean culture, is whenever they cough or sneeze, they do not cover up, that's the first thing... And they do not cover when they cough, and they might just cough right in front of your face and feel OK about it. Another thing is spitting on the ground. That also disturbs me a lot." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

During her Korean courses, Participant A could read the facial expressions of her teachers, but there was nothing negative about it, as they had a positive attitude while conducting their classes.

Participant B, however recalled the time Korean students showed discontent when their expectations were not met regarding language practice. Negative expressions and gestures are easier to catch and remember than positive ones because humans tend to take the positivity for granted. Participant C was concerned about people pushing and not apologizing, coughing without covering and spitting, as these can be quite offensive in Kyrgyzstan or other countries, and need to be considered.

4.2. Voices and clothing style

“Movements and gestures are OK, but I don’t like Korean voices. Especially female voices. They are really annoying (imitating high-pitched voice) Like this. I really hate it. And I don’t like it when... for example, my Korean classmates are old, and they try to suck up to the professor They are trying to do this 90 degree bow, and, I don’t know, I don’t like it.” (Participant B, September 9, 2016)

“Oh yeah. Clothing style, like wearing super short skirts was very shocking, of course. And you know, freaking out about open neck, open V-style clothes. It’s like super, super shameful, super bad here in Korea. I can’t understand because that is kind of opposite in Kyrgyzstan. You can wear a bit open on the top and then you have to wear something long on the bottom. Yeah, clothing style is of course different. But I like it, I like the way that Koreans mostly wear very comfortable stuff.” (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Although one’s voice does not mean harm when communicating, it can cause negative reactions from people if it is not pleasant. Participant B expressed struggles with this

phenomenon. Just as dressing a certain way can express a person's mood, position or thoughts, for Participant C, it was difficult to comprehend the opposite style of clothing between Korean and Kyrgyz girls. Voices and clothing style are just a few factors that can contribute to communication of one's ideas and thoughts, which can be used to either benefit or hurt the messenger depending on the usage.

4.3. Image and representation

"Yeah, I actually speculated a lot on this topic, because Korea is supposed to be very traditional culture, right? But at the same time it is very modern. Especially Seoul. Going back to your previous question, how different D city with Seoul. I think the major difference is in the internationality of Seoul. Seoul is very international compared to D city. Seoul is very international. A lot of people from different places. For me it was shocking that in a train, younger generation wouldn't give a space to an older generation. In a subway, in a train. In Kyrgyzstan, where I come from, if you are younger, and somebody is 5-10 years older, not even old, old person, you still give up and offer your seat. That's what I thought was going to happen in Korea, too, but surprisingly, no, in a train everybody sits in their spots. And for pregnant or sick people there is another spot. Even if the train is crowded, no one sits there. But the other places, if you get a spot, then you can just sit and not worry about other people, their age or like that. So, it was a bit surprising... I didn't like that. At the beginning I was offering seats, all the time, to the people who were older, in their 60s or 70s all the time, but now, I don't know, maybe the culture is affecting me, I usually don't pay attention. It depends, of course, if I

see a very sick person or something, I usually offer a seat, but if not, I usually keep riding (laughs)." (Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Coming from a culture, where respect for the elderly is an important part of one's life, into another culture where it is also essential, Participant C observed quite a difference in understanding said respect and what it entails. In comparison of the two instances, a change in the viewpoint and attitude of the research participant is demonstrated. If in the early parts of her journey in Korea, Participant C had a difficulty comprehending the actions or non-actions of fellow passengers in public transportation, later on she observed that she, too, learned to pay less attention to her surroundings. However, she emphasized her inclination to give up her seat to those who she sees fit.

"Yeah. Sneakers. Girls wear sneakers with everything. Like skirts, dress, formal clothes, and then sneakers. That was shocking for me in the beginning. The guys, the same actually. Sometimes they would wear smart suits, and then sneakers, New Balance or something like that (laughs) That's quite shocking actually. Yeah, this was one big.... And then also large size clothes..." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"For me it was really shocking that people in the library or in the campus, even outside, they are wearing slippers. In our country it is not appropriate. In our country it is not appropriate to go to university in sport shoes. And not training clothes. And also I don't like when they start to brush their teeth in public place. And they

do it really openly. For us it is hygiene, and you have to do it closed, like yourself. Do it in the bathroom or something. Here they can go through the convenience store (and brush their teeth)."
(Participant B, September 9, 2016)

Both Participant A and B experienced culture shock to some extent. The style of clothing, or rather the choice of certain clothing items brought culture shock to both research participants. Coming from a cultural background where it is instilled in one to dress, or make an effort to 'dress to impress' Participants A and B seem to be in the process of adjusting to the clothing style. What was even more shocking for her was the act of brushing one's teeth not just outside of the comfort of one's bathroom, but in a public establishment such as a convenience store. Participant B demonstrated inability to respond to a cultural shock in this case, categorizing it as a cultural aspect of communication.

4.4. Dating phenomenon

"Yeah, this thing like, if you are in university, you should date someone, like having a boyfriend and girlfriend. I don't know, that's what I heard actually. All these big dates, like Christmas, New Years, or these kind of things, usually in Korea, are for couples. You, all the time, see people outside... Yeah, and the funny thing is, like, they wear similar clothes, they wear similar shoes, they wear similar bags, even the jacket, cap, everything. So it's quite shocking... (omission)... yeah, I would watch some programs, like kpop programs. I would know that they have that kind of couple culture, but I don't know, I didn't expect that it would be this strong

(laughs). I got used to it, although." (Participant A, September 9, 2016)

"Another thing is probably dating culture, among young generation, coming from traditional society, in our country it is not OK, in front of people, to hug each other... that's not very encouraged, because you have this sense of shame, and then you are like 'no, there are a lot of people around,' I mean not everyone, but for majority it affects... (omission)... for example, hugging each other... coming down the escalator kissing and hugging. That's something that people in my country wouldn't do. That's why I was a bit shocked, and taking into consideration that Korea has very strict traditions, that's something that I can't understand. Just doesn't match, there is a very big generation gap, I think... (omission)... but in Seoul, no one gives attention to anyone, and although I was expecting it to be very traditional, that's where I find this modernity, globalized culture, they are living their life, and no one says [anything]."
(Participant C, September 23, 2016)

Both Participants A and C mentioned the dating culture in Korea as unusual, but both in a slightly different light. In Participant A's experience, the emphasis was put more on the social aspect of it with certain holidays being centered around couples, as well as appearance and style with the concept of 'couple items' where a couple wear similar pieces of clothing, shoes, accessories etc. Seeing something on TV is different from seeing it directly with one's own eyes as it is more tangible and realistic, which proved to be true in Participant A's case. Participant B, on the other hand was more concerned with the physical aspect of relationships, namely public display of

affection, even in front of the elderly, without consideration of possible uncomfortable feelings they might endure. Again, this demonstrates the culture and consideration of opinions of others.

5. Summary

The intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students are divided into four aspects as follows.

First, in relationships and interactions with Korean teachers, professors, sunbaes, partners for language exchange as well as strangers outside of school and in public transportation, Kyrgyzstani graduate students have had not only positive and negative, but also unique and surprising experiences.

Second, the students have struggled due to certain culturally accepted ways of communicating with their professors, experienced the palli palli culture of doing things on quickly, and other types of communication involving drinking culture and food culture.

Third, language skills, not only among the Kyrgyzstani students, but also Korean teachers, played a great role in communication both while in Kyrgyzstan and in Korea.

Fourth, students observed nonverbal communication through gestures and facial expressions, clothing style, voices and other contributing factors.

V. Conclusion

With the rapid growth in the number of foreigners as well as representatives of various other ethnic groups, Korea is not exempt from becoming a full-fledged multicultural society, not unlike many other nations around the world. Up until today, the scholars in Korea who studied multiculturalism based their research on the multicultural societies who also went through the change, and studied multiculturalism as a discipline, such as the United States and Germany. However, one of the reasons for this study to stand out among a number of other studies, is the fact that the research participants come from a country where multiculturalism is deeply instilled in the mindset and culture of the people.

After analyzing the experiences of each graduate student from Kyrgyzstan, similarities as well as differences were discovered among the research participants. Before discussing these differences, three points are worth mentioning.

First, it is important to keep in mind that although all 4 students had encountered communication with foreigners before, only one of them had the opportunity to live abroad before coming to Korea. Second, 3 of the research participants had the opportunity to complete a year of Korean courses before entering graduate school, while the remaining research participant started graduate school immediately after arriving in Korea. Finally, 2 of the participants' classes are conducted in English, while the remaining 2 chose to study in Korean.

Due to these differences in each participant, it is difficult to pinpoint only the common experiences, but it is also compelling to look at how different they can be.

All in all, there are certain factors which play a great role in making the life of an international student life successful in Korea. The first one is previous experience in a foreign country, coexisting with the local population, as in the case of Participant D. Second, interaction with Koreans who have lived abroad, are used to interacting with foreigners on a daily basis, and English is the main language of communication. Third, the Korean courses play a great role, as they not only prepare the students to upcoming life culturally, but also gives an opportunity to build relationships with foreigners for further support.

In this study, the intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students currently residing in Korea were studied using the narrative inquiry method, with the process of interviews conducted initially with general questions and follow-up questions based on each answer. The results are four aspects of intercultural communication as follows.

The first part is the personal aspects of the intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani students, where intercultural communication was observed in their personal relations and interactions with various individuals in various settings. The personal aspects were divided into relationships with Korean teachers, interaction with mentors and buddies, relationships with professors and sunbaes, and interaction with people in public places. In their relationships with Korean

teachers, the students express gratitude to them for their constant help and guidance in and outside of classes. When interacting with their mentors or buddies, some students gain friends, while others find themselves in absurd situations. Generally, professors are helpful and understanding, more so if they are experienced with foreign students, some sunbaes try to teach and guide students regarding classes. Also, students find themselves in certain situations based on their appearance as well as their behavior.

Second, cultural aspects were also divided into initial ideas about Koreans, sunbae-hoobae relationship, classroom culture, 'palli palli' culture, the 'empty words' phenomenon, culture of alcohol consumption, and food culture. While in schools where classes are conducted in Korean, sunbaes try to guide students regarding school and professors treating them as more incompetent at times, those who study in English have no definite concept of subordination, rather treating each other as equals. In the classroom setting, some students find themselves unsure of how to act, react or behave to the atmosphere in the class, while those who study in English and have professors with vast experiences abroad study in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. 'Palli palli' culture and the 'empty words' phenomenon are quite notorious among foreigners in Korea and students are constantly facing challenges with these cultures. It was also revealed that Kyrgyzstani students, namely those who practice Islam also struggle due to their dietary restrictions issues related to alcohol.

Third, linguistic aspects are the use and importance of

language in a classroom setting as well as outside the school premises, communication in English as well as Korean, the proficiency of the Korean language, based on which, communication varied. The linguistic aspect were divided into language skills of teachers, and use of language in graduate school. When interacting with Koreans who can speak either English or Kyrgyz, Kyrgyzstani students have pleasant experiences, while in graduate school, some Kyrgyzstani students are relieved at the positive reaction of professors based on their Korean skills, in contrast to those foreign students who face disregard to an extent due to their poor language skills.

Fourth, nonverbal aspects include reactions to situations of complete lack of understanding in and outside of school, and communication without words. Nonverbal aspects were divided into gestures and facial expressions, voices and clothing style, image and representation, and dating phenomenon. Kyrgyzstani students observe friendly and unfriendly attitudes based on the facial expressions as well as gestures of Koreans. They also struggle with image and representation of Koreans based on their social conduct in public places, namely the way Koreans do not give up their seats for the elderly, as public display of affection between couples, as well as certain activities done in public,. Clothing and voices of people also play a great role in their acculturation to life in Korea.

Examining the interviews and newspaper articles, it was possible to understand the intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students in Korea as shown above.

VI. Proposal

This study examined the intercultural communication experiences of Kyrgyzstani graduate students in Korea, based on their direct and indirect interactions with Koreans within and outside of school premises. The results were divided into personal aspects, cultural aspects, linguistic aspects and nonverbal aspects of intercultural communication as follows.

First, personal aspects were divided into relationships with Korean teachers, interaction with mentors and buddies, relationships with professors and sunbaes, and interaction with people in public places.

Second, cultural aspects are related to the students' initial ideas about Koreans and how they changed in Korea, sunbae-hoobae relationship, classroom culture, 'palli palli' culture, the 'empty words' phenomenon, culture of alcohol consumption, and food culture.

Third, linguistic aspects are the use and importance of language in a classroom setting as well as outside the school premises, communication in English as well as Korean, the proficiency of the Korean language, based on which, communication varied.

Fourth, nonverbal aspects include reactions to social manners and attitudes of people and total lack of understanding of certain behavior in and outside of school, as well as experiences of communication without words.

After thoroughly examining the experiences of Kyrgyzstani

graduate students in Korea, this study proposes the following ideas to help not only Kyrgyzstani students, but also other international students in their school life and cultural adaptation to Korea. The proposed ideas are as follows.

First, in order to help students with their personal relationships with professors, sunbaes, and other people within and outside of school premises, there is a need for personal training, in which students will gain an idea of how to address professors, what words and actions to avoid and the attitudes and mannerism necessary to demonstrate respect and proper regard to the professors. A brief guideline on social conduct norms of etiquette in public transportations as well as building friendly relations with people.

Second, there is a need for cultural training, where students can learn certain cultural norms of Korean people, including the expected roles and social conduct within the classroom, the peculiarities of cultural traits belonging to the Korean culture, such as 'palli palli' culture and the 'empty words' phenomenon.

Third, as language is one of the main parts of communication, linguistic training is a necessity in the opinion of the researcher. The scholarship program offers this opportunity for all of its students except those who possess the Advanced level of Korean proficiency based on the TOPIK test. However, specifically for graduate students, Korean courses focused on academic language is essential for a successful graduate study experiences.

Fourth, this study proposes for abovementioned training to be conducted for not only Kyrgyzstani and other international

students, but for Koreans as well. Since Korea is a multicultural community where Koreans and representatives of other ethnic groups have to coexist in harmony, certain understanding is needed for both parties.



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국문초록

재한 키르기스스탄 대학원생의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험의 중요성에 관한 내러티브 탐구

본 연구의 목적은 현재 한국에 거주하는 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험을 탐색하고 그 중요성을 밝히는 데 있다. 이를 위해 한국에 거주한 지 최소 1년 반 된 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생 4명을 연구참여자로 선정하여 심층 면담을 실시하였다. 인터뷰는 음성 녹음기에 녹음되어 녹음 된 내용은 전사한 후 분석하였다. 분석 된 데이터는 상호문화 커뮤니케이션의 개인적, 문화적, 언어적 및 비언어적 측면으로 구분하였다. 첫째, 개인적인 측면은 한국인 교사와의 관계, 멘토와 친구들과의 상호 작용, 교수와 선배와의 관계, 공공 장소에서의 사람들과의 상호 작용으로 나누었다. 둘째, 문화적 측면은 한국인, 선배·후배 관계, 교실 문화, 빨리빨리 문화, 빈 말 현상, 알코올 소비 문화, 식량 문화 등으로 구분하였다. 셋째, 언어적 측면은 교사의 언어 능력과 대학원에서의 언어 사용으로 구분하였다. 넷째, 비언어적 측면은 몸짓과 표정, 목소리와 옷 스타일, 이미지와 표현, 데이트 현상으로 구분되었다.

본 연구는 키르기스스탄 학생들의 경험을 철저히 조사한 후 키르기스스탄 출신 학생들뿐만 아니라 다른 유학생들에게 학교생활과 문화 적응에 도움이 되게끔 다음과 같은 제언을 제시하고자 한다. 첫째, 교수, 선배 및 학교 내외의 다른 사람들과의 개인적인 관계를 도와주는 개인적 훈련의 필요성이 있다. 둘째, 교실 내에서의 기대되는 역할과 사회적 행위, 한국 문화에 속한 문화적 특성의 특성 등 한국인의 특정 문화적 규범을 배울 수 있는 문화적 훈련이 필요합니다. 셋째, 대학원생을 대상으로 한 학문적 언어에 중점을 둔 한국어 강좌는 성공적인 대학원 학습 경험을 위해 필수적으

로 본다. 마지막으로, 연구는 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들과 다른 유학생들뿐만 아니라 한국인들에게도 위와 같은 훈련을 실시 할 것을 제안한다. 한국은 다문화 사회이므로 한국인과 다른 민족 속한 사람들이 조화롭게 공존해야하며 양측 모두의 문화적 이해가 필요하다. 이 연구는 키르기스스탄인들과 한국인들의 관계를 더욱 강화시키기 위한 자료로 사용될 것으로 기대된다.

[주제어] 키르기스스탄, 외국인 유학생, 대학원생, 상호문화 커뮤니케이션, 내러티브탐구



구 설명문 및 참여 동의서

1. 연구제목: 재한 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험 의미 해석

2. 연구 기관/부서 : 인하대학교 일반대학원 다문화교육과

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3. 연구자 성명: Bekboeva Aigul

연구자 소속: 인하대학교 다문화교육과

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연구참여권유

본 연구자는 귀하에게 [재한 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험 의미 해석]에 관한 연구에 참여하시길 요청합니다. 귀하가 연구에 참여할 지, 않을 지 결정하는 데 도움이 되도록 본 설명문은 연구의 목적, 내용, 위험(불편감)이나 이익, 귀하의 정보를 포함한 자료관리 등에 대해 알려 드리고자 합니다. 본 양식을 주의 깊게 읽어보시고 궁금한 점이나 분명치 않은 점이 있으면 질문하여 주십시오.

4. 연구의 배경 및 목적

본 연구는 현재 한국에 거주하는 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험의 의미를 해석하고 앞으로 키르기스스탄 사람들과 한국 사람들 간의 의사소통 증진을 위한 상호문화교육 방안을 제시하는 것을 목적으로 합니다.

5. 연구참여대상: 본 연구의 연구참여자와 참여 인원은 다음과 같습니다.

- 연구참여자: 현재 한국에 거주하는 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생입니다.
- 예상참여인원: 최소 4명

6. 연구방법:

- 현재 한국에 거주하는 키르기스스탄 출신 대학원생들의 상호문화 커뮤니케이션 경험을 살펴보고, 그 경험은 그들에게 어떠한 의미를 가지고 있는지를 해석하고자 한다.

-자료 수집은 소셜 네트워크 서비스에 올린 글, 메시지, 신문 기사, 면담 인터뷰, 그리고 이메일 인터뷰 방식으로 실시합니다. 인터뷰는 약 1시간 -2시간이 소요됩니다.

2) 연구참여기간

- 귀하는 본 연구를 위해 2-3회 인터뷰에 참여하도록 요청받을 것입니다.

7. 연구 참여와 중지

- 귀하의 연구참여는 자발에 의한 것이어야 합니다. 거절하신다고 해도 어떠한 불이익은 없을 것입니다. 그리고 연구 참여 전이나 연구 참여 중이라도 중단하기를 원하시면 언제든지 연구 동의를 철회할 수 있습니다. 그러면 연구자는 즉시 연구를 멈출 것입니다.
- 연구에 참여하면서 본인의 경험을 이야기할 때 불쾌한 감정이 유발될 수 있습니다. 이럴 경우 귀하는 언제든지 인터뷰를 중단할 수 있습니다.

8. 연구참여에 따른 이익

- 귀하가 제공하는 정보는 한국인과 키르기스스탄인의 상호문화 이해를 증진하는 데 도움이 되며 이들을 위한 상호문화교육을 실시하는 데 기여할 것입니다.
- 연구자가 과정보담으로 귀하에게 금전적 보상을 하지 못하되, 인터뷰가 진행되는 카페에서 음료나 간식을 제공해드릴 예정입니다.

9. 개인정보와 비밀보장

- 이 연구의 참여로 귀하에게서 수집하는 개인정보는 다음과 같습니다. 나이, 성별, 이름, 전화번호, 이메일주소, 직위 이러한 정보는 연구를 위해 3년간 사용되며 수집된 정보는 개인정보보호법에 따라 적절히 관리됩니다. 관련정보는 연구책임자와 연구자만이 접근 가능합니다.
- 연구 참여자의 동의하에 연구 자료 수집을 위해 인터뷰와 동시에 녹음을 진행할 것이며, 음성녹음은 철저히 연구 참여자의 의견에 따라 처분할 것입니다.
- 연구를 통해 얻은 모든 개인정보의 비밀 보장을 위해 최선을 다할 것입니다. 이 연구에서 얻어진 개인 정보가 학회지나 학회에 공개 될 때 귀하의 이름은 익명 처리될 것이며 그 외의 개인정보는 사용되지 않을 것입니다.
- 공동연구자, 공용기관생명윤리위원회는 연구대상자의 비밀보장을 침해하지 않고 관련규정이 정하는 범위 안에서 본 연구의 실시 절차와 자료의 신뢰성을 검증하기 위해 연구결과를 직접 열람할 수 있습니다.
- 귀하가 본 동의서에 서명하는 것은, 이러한 사항에 대하여 사전에 알고 있었으며 이를 허용한다는 의사로 간주될 것입니다. 연구 종료 후 연구 관련 자료는 3년간 보관되며 이후 문서 파쇄, 녹음자료, 데이터 삭제의 방법으로 폐기될 것입니다.

10. 연구 문의

- 연구에 따른 위험이 발생하였거나 연구에 대해 의문점이 있는 경우 언제든지 연구자에게(010-2677-2979, aigulia@naver.com) 연락해주시오.
- 대상자의 안녕 및 권익에 대한 문의는 인하대학교 기관생명윤리위원회(032-860-9158)

