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"WHY AM I AN ALIEN IN MY OWN COUNTRY?"

- Communication Problems that Finnish Higher Education Level Students Encounter when Returning to Their Home Country-

Pro Gradu -thesis
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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to examine how Finnish higher education level students experience the re-entry process. The focus is particularly on the possible communication problems that the returnees face when readjusting to their home country. Unlike the commonly investigated adaptation process, re-entry is a relatively little studied topic in the field of Intercultural Communication, and especially the communication focus of the phenomenon is often neglected or touched only superficially.

The study was qualitative by nature. It was conducted by an open-ended questionnaire sent by electronic mail to 33 Finnish students who had studied abroad for at least one semester. The results of the study, analysed by using content analysis, illustrated that the majority of the respondents encountered a re-entry shock, and faced communication difficulties upon re-entry. These difficulties were related to both nonverbal and verbal communication. The study could be further expanded by for example studying the role of intercultural communication competence from the perspective of re-entry or investigating and developing existing repatriate training programmes.

Keywords
Acculturation, culture shock, re-entry, reverse culture shock, personal growth, incompatible frames of reference, clash of cultures, stress

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Tämän työn tarkoituksena on tutkia, millä tavoin suomalaiset korkea-asteen koulutustason opiskelijat kokevat paluumuuton. Keskityin erityisesti mahdollisiin kommunikointivaikeuksiin, joita palaajat kohtaavat sopeutuessaan takaisin kotimaahansa. Toisin kuin sopeutumista, paluumuuttoa on tutkittu suhteellisen vähän kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän alalla. Erityisesti paluun viestintäperspektiivi on usein lyöty laimin tai käsitelty vain pintapuoleisesti.

Tutkielma oli kvalitatiivinen. Se toteutettiin avoimella kyselylomakkeella, joka lähetettiin sähköpostitse 33 suomalaiselle opiskelijalle, jotka olivat opiskelleet ulkomailla vähintään yhden lukukauden ajan. Tutkimuksen tulokset, sisällönanalyysin avulla analysoituna osoittavat, että suurin osa vastaajista oli kokenut paluusokin ja kokenut kommunikointivaikeuksia paluun yhteydessä. Nämä vaikeudet liittyivät sekä ei-verbaaliseen että verbaaliseen viestintään. Tutkimusta voisi laajentaa esimerkiksi tutkimalla kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän kompetenssia paluumuuton näkökulmasta tai tarkastelemalla ja kehittämällä olemassa olevia paluuorientaatioita.

Asiasanat
Sopeutuminen, kulttuurisokki, paluumuutto, paluusokki, henkilökohtainen kasvu, yhteensopimattomat viitekehykset, kulttuurien törmäys, stressi

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalised world, where the boundaries between countries are disappearing, and the intercultural contacts are more commonplace, also the human flow between countries is ever-increasing. In 2004 there were 8241 Finnish higher educational (universities and polytechnics) exchange students studying abroad (Cimo 2006). In addition to those 8241 exchange students, there were 4594 Finnish students completing a whole degree overseas (Kelan opintotukikeskus 2006). These 12 835 people have decided to study abroad. However, the majority of them are also returning to Finland at some point, which is an aspect that is often ignored. Nonetheless, returning home after living abroad can be much more problematic than expected and returnees might be faced with unpredicted and even severe symptoms, such as communication problems or alienation. In fact, several recent studies have indicated that sojourners report higher levels of distress during re-entry than during the initial cultural adaptation to another country (e.g. Sussman 2000).

In this study my aim is to investigate possible communication problems that Finnish returnees encounter when returning to their home country. The term communication has an endless amount of definitions. One relevant one comes from Ruben & Stewart (1998: 16). They state that "human communication is the process through which individuals – in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies – respond to and create messages to adapt to the environment and one another." According to Fiske (1992) communication means creating and exchanging meanings. All in all, communication includes creating and exchanging both verbal and nonverbal meanings in any situation, and "communication affects all facets of our lives" (Ruben & Stewart 1998: 1). When anything goes wrong in the communication process, the exchange of meanings becomes unsuccessful, and communication difficulties and barriers start to exist.

There have been surprisingly few studies done on the re-entry process and so far there are no studies focusing on the communication difficulties of returnees as such. Nevertheless, due to the accelerating human flow there is a need for

awareness, for both the returnees themselves and their home front, of the problems returnees might face.

As a consequence of having personal intercultural experience and having developed a willingness and curiosity to understand it better, in this thesis the focus will be on Finnish higher education level students who have spent at least one semester studying abroad. I am interested in finding out whether they will encounter communication difficulties when returning home. The reason for choosing a communication perspective is based on the central role of communication in re-entry. According to Smith (2001), for example, a key for successful re-entry is competent (intercultural) communication with the home front.

In my study I will draw on theories and literature about acculturation and re-entry. In addition, I will also look at communication barriers in literature and apply them to my research. The data of the study will be gathered by an open-ended questionnaire which will be sent via electronic mail. The related fields to my research are communication studies, intercultural communication, psychology, and sociology.

This study will be a relevant contribution to the area of intercultural communication with a new perspective to the re-adjustment process. In addition, it is important for practitioners to acknowledge the role of re-entry and to create effective training programmes in order to make the returning process less difficult. Apart from practitioners, the returnees themselves, as well as their families and friends, will highly benefit from this significant and present-day information.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section of the thesis previous literature on re-entry will be discussed and evaluated. Before this, however, the focus will be on earlier research about culture shock and acculturation in order to give grounding information for the returning process itself. Later on the issue of intercultural adaptation will be discussed from a perspective of personal growth, followed by a section that unfolds communication difficulties relating to the readjustment process. The Theoretical Background chapter will finish by identifying some possible strategies to apply in order to get through a re-entry.

There have been numerous studies focusing on immigrants and their adaptation. However, instead of these relatively permanent participants in their new society, there is also a group known as sojourners, who are temporary members in a foreign country. Sojourners usually know that they are returning to their home country after a certain period of time, which is exactly what makes them temporary members of the foreign culture. There are different types of sojourners, including international students. Sojourners have been focused on less than immigrants in previous studies. However, I wanted to take the sojourners', particularly international students', perspective for my thesis. As Berry et al. (1992: 348) state, "in their [sojourners'] case, the process of becoming involved in the plural society is complicated by their knowledge that they will eventually leave, and either return home or be posted to yet another country. Thus there may be a hesitation to become fully involved, to establish close relationships, or to begin to identify with the new society." Thus, according to the previous quote, it is possible that due to their short term sojourn, the international students would become less attached to the host country, and thus would be less likely to have a re-entry shock.

Nevertheless, despite the possible problems of becoming fully involved in the new society, there exists at least some kind of acculturation and identity changes in most sojourner cases, even if the length of the stay in the new country would be for example only six months. These changes can subsequently lead to even severe re-entry problems. As La Brack (cited in

Launikari & Puukari 2005: 191) explains, "re-entry shock or reverse culture shock is usually characterised by two unique elements: (1) an idealised view of 'home' and (2) a taken-for-granted familiarity with the home culture which fosters this illusion that neither home, nor the sojourner will have changed since she/he went away. This combination of mistaken attitudes frequently results in frustrated expectations, various degrees of alienation, and mutual misunderstanding between returnees and their friends and family."

There have been several studies showing that there are changes in sojourners' behaviour due to living in different countries. For example, Walling et al. (2006) have concluded that as a consequence of a cultural transition a person usually experiences changes in his/her worldview, values, goals, relationships, and communication style. However, so far I have not found any single study that would concentrate particularly on the communication difficulties of returnees, which I find a significant gap in the literature of the field. This is how I have arrived at my research topic of studying Finnish sojourner students and their possible communication problems during their returning procedure.

2.1 Culture Shock/Acculturation Stress

In order to understand the re-entry process, one should first be aware of what a culture shock and acculturation involve. Culture shock, with its disoriented feelings, arises from a difficulty to function in a different environment, usually in another country. As defined by Brislin (1981: 137), "the frustrations stemming from an inability to cope with situations using familiar methods leads to the internalised feelings collectively called ´culture shock´." This is a common phenomenon for anyone who moves abroad, but the symptoms of a culture shock can be very different for every individual. As El Said (2006) confirms, some sojourners go through a struggling of even years, whereas some experience only a little uneasiness, or even none. According to Brislin (1981), some symptoms of culture shock include preoccupation with personal cleanliness, irritability, creating negative feelings towards hosts, refusing to learn the local language, sense of hopelessness, a strong desire to interact with

people from one's home society, loneliness, declined quality of work, difficulty to communicate the feelings for others, etcetera.

Despite the negative feelings often related to culture shock, the phenomenon should not be considered abnormal or dreadful. It is a normal reaction to an unfamiliar situation. As J. Bennett (1998) sees it, culture shock is just like any typical human response to any transition, loss, or change. Thus, it should not be regarded as something awfully negative, but then again, it is important to have information on culture shock so that the phenomenon can be better understood and coped with by both sojourners and immigrants. "The difficulty in cross-cultural adaptation may cause serious psychological or psychiatric problems such as schizophrenia, paranoia, depression, and lack of confidence. This underlines the importance of competency in adapting to a new culture." (Chen & Starosta 2005: 251). Relevant information on adaptation and possible problems that might accompany it, such as communication difficulties, can prevent for example a failure of sojourn and an early departure home.

I want to emphasize my own criticism towards the early writings on adaptation, where culture shock was always described with a negative charge. Originally, culture shock was thought to be a disease, "[…] a malady contracted by persons who were suddenly transplanted from one geographic locale to another" (Ruben & Stewart 1998: 349). For example Oberg (1960), one of the pioneers on adaptation research, always described culture shock as a 'disease'. Also Barna wrote on culture shock in the same, pessimistic sense: "It is a state of dis-ease, and, like *a disease*, it has different effects, different degrees of severity, and different time spans for different people. Few escape it altogether, but many people who are *handicapped* by its presence don't recognize what's bothering them, or even that they're not acting like themselves." (Barna 1976: 1, italics added). I will give one more extreme example of the negative treatment of adaptation: "culture shock is a […] form of mental illness" (Foster 1962, cited in Barna 1976: 1).

In my own study I want to take a different approach from these early writings, as I believe culture shock and acculturation are phenomena that make people

grow as individuals. I will discuss this standpoint more in detail in a separate chapter later on in this thesis. However, at this point I would like to comment on the choice of words when describing a culture shock. For example Berry et al. (1992) prefer to use the term 'acculturation stress' instead of 'culture shock' in order to avoid the negative connotations that are related to the term 'shock'. The term 'acculturation stress' contrasts Oberg's term 'disease' for describing a culture shock (1960).

The main reason for discussing acculturation stress (or 'culture shock') is its crucial link with the re-entry process. Psychologically, as defined by Berry et al. (1992), acculturation stress implies the changes that an individual undergoes as a result of living abroad, or being in contact with other cultures. There are changes in for example one's identity, values, and attitudes. These changes can actually be quite profound in an individual. When adopting these new values, attitudes and a whole new identity, returning home after living abroad might truly become problematic. For example a recent study by Walling et al. (2006: 153) explored the relationship between cross cultural re-entry and cultural identity in US college student participants in short-term international mission trips. It was found that the foreign experiences of the students influenced their view of the home culture, often negatively. The findings implied that participants in short-term mission trips experienced big and difficult challenges to their cultural identity.

Walling et al's (2006) study was influential in my decision to concentrate on young, higher educational level students in my own research. I would argue that young people are possibly more vulnerable to big changes in their lives, as they have less life experience than older people. "Young adults are in the unique developmental stage of identity formation. It is logical to predict that international experiences have tremendous impact during such formative times, particularly on students' sense of cultural identity." (Walling et al. 2006: 154).

Initially, when moving abroad, it is hard to function in the new environment. A person in an acculturation process must learn new ways of behaving, thinking, and feeling in order to behave appropriately in the local culture (Gudykunst

1988). However, once one adapts the new ways of behaviour abroad, it can be hard to adjust again to the behaviour and thinking that prevails in the home country. A process called 'deculturation', or 'unlearning of the old culture' (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 337) occurred. "Adaptation in the new environment is not a process in which new cultural elements are simply added to prior internal conditions. As new learning occurs, *deculturation* of at least some of the old cultural elements can occur, in the sense that new responses are adopted in situations that previously would have evoked old ones. In the act of acquiring something new an inevitable part is also 'losing' something old. (Kim 2001). Through the adaptation and deculturation processes an individual uses new cultural responses in situations that previously would have seemed difficult and abnormal (see e.g. Hess 2005).

Our culture sets us a framework for our behaviour and communication. "A basic function of culture is to lay out a predictable world in which an individual is firmly oriented. From birth a child is formally and informally taught how to behave and what to expect from the environment, including the accepted verbal signs and symbols of interaction." (Barna 1976: 3). However, it is possible to change one's way of behaviour and communication in a new culture. It is possible to adapt to the communication style of the new country, and especially during a long stay abroad this usually happens to at least some extent. Usually adaptation difficulties are related to the lack of understanding of the behaviour of the people in the host culture. As Barna (1976) confirms, it is possible to learn these new means of communication in order to cope in the new environment.

As we just saw from Barna (1976), communication is vital to the acculturation process as adaptation occurs in and through communication. This is also why it can be assumed that returnees will have communication difficulties upon their returning, at least to some extent. They have most often adopted new ways to communicate and simultaneously returnees might have unlearned some of their old ways to communicate, which can emerge as something problematic in different types of interactions back in the home country. Due to the importance

of the communication issue in re-entry, and the lack of its treatment in previous literature, I have chosen a communication perspective to my thesis.

2.2 Re-entry

After having some awareness on acculturation, it is also easier to understand the re-entry process more profoundly. In this chapter I will discuss general aspects of re-entry, show how the concept of 'home' can change upon returning, discuss the unexpectedness of the re-entry shock and finally outline different stages for re-entry.

Re-entry is in several aspects similar to a culture shock. "Re-adjustment is a challenge for individuals when they return home from a relatively long residence in another culture. In many ways, it is very similar to the experience of a person who enters a new culture for the first time. The latter has been labelled as 'culture shock' and the former as 'reverse culture shock' or 're-entry shock.'" (Asuncion-Lande 2006).

Re-entry shock can cause for example alienation or frustrated feelings. It is possible that one has a sense of not belonging home or anywhere anymore and feels like a stranger in an environment that used to be familiar. Re-entry shock often includes a feeling of anger or alienation when discovering that one has become a 'stranger to one's own culture' (Asuncion-Lande 2006). Or similarly, as Junkkari & Junkkari (2003) put it, the returnees are looking at their home country with the eyes of a foreigner.

It is often said that re-entry is actually even more complicated than moving abroad because facing difficulties at re-entry is usually unexpected. For example Adler (1981, cited in Coughlin 1999) supports this claim. Adler writes that returning to one's home culture is often more difficult than entering the foreign culture. She explains that this is due to too high expectations of home. Home is frequently thought of in a positive light, often unrealistically. In reality, there have usually been changes in the country and people, and of

course also the sojourner and his/her identity has changed through the intercultural experiences.

In other words,

> the re-entry shock can be described as a set of unmet expectations from both the migrant and the environment, which used to be familiar to him/her. While one has been staying abroad, there may have been changes in the home country's political situation, technology, or popular culture, for instance. Friends and family are maybe not the same any more, and also the migrant is probably a different person after having spent some years in a different environment - even if people would expect him/her to be the same. After adapting to a new culture it is actually natural to feel disintegration with home culture. It is all part of the process. (El said 2006: 47).

As early as in the 1920s some problems of sojourners and immigrants' adaptation were identified (Salakka 2006). And in the same way as culture shock, also the reverse culture shock was usually portrayed in a negative light. The most common perspective to re-entry shock research still today is a mental crisis point of view, but recently the shock has also been considered from a learning experience perspective or as a phenomenon related to multicultural identity formation (Salakka 2006). In my thesis I will combine all these perspectives: I will consider the difficulties and crises that re-entry can bring along, taking into account the possible identity changes of individuals. Additionally, I want to emphasize the learning process perspective because I personally see the shock as not only a crisis but also as a process of individual growth.

Even though problems related to transformation shocks were identified already in the 1920s, there is still relatively little information on the re-entry process in literature. I find it important to provide more information and understanding on the phenomenon, and therefore I will make an attempt to contribute to the field of intercultural communication with my thesis. It is important to keep in mind that re-entry is not a procedure concerning only the sojourner, but also the home front of the returnee, as Storti (1997: 3) confirms: "Readjustment has been found to have a profound effect not only on the returnee but also on

family members, colleagues, and close friends." Without relevant information on the phenomenon the home front can end up bewildered too.

2.2.1 Paradox of the Term 'Home'

When returning, it is often a surprise for many individuals that the place that used to be home is not actually the same, safe and familiar place anymore. Usually, in normal circumstances, home is considered "the environment where the person feels most comfortable, where the routines are familiar and where the individual is known, trusted and understood." (Coughlin 1999: 3). Also Storti (1997: 15) gives a good definition for the term 'home': "home is the place where you are known and trusted and where you know and trust others; where you are accepted, understood, indulged, and forgiven; a place of rituals and routine interactions, of entirely predictable events and people with very few surprises; the place where you feel safe and secure and where you can accordingly trust your instincts, relax, and be yourself. It is, in short, the place where you feel 'at home'."

However, when returning, the familiarity of places, familiar people, routines, and predictable patterns of interaction are questionable. Being at home can actually make you feel homeless. What used to be familiar might have become something strange and unknown for the returnee. As Smith states, many sojourners return home expecting a comfortable sense of familiarity, not predicting that they might encounter similar adaptation difficulties as they did when moving abroad (Smith 2001). This leads to a feeling of frustration, as the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar results in an inability to function effectively. One actually has to adjust to home again, which is usually unpredicted and challenging for the returnees, and one of the main reasons for the re-entry shock.

The returnees usually also have a new perspective of their home country. "You will respond to your homeland much the way a stranger would, and for the same reason: because you are now an alien in your own country." (Storti 1997:

23). There is a new worldview that one has adjusted to while living abroad, being a result of deculturation. Thus, often the returnee has identified oneself with new norms, values, and means of communication. Therefore the supposedly familiar environment feels strange and one feels unable to perform in it. However, we should not forget that for example hearing and being able to read and speak one's own mother tongue can cause a homely, relaxed feeling. This is especially related to short-term sojourners who have not "forgotten" their mother tongue while living abroad.

What often happens though, despite being able to speak the familiar language, one frequent symptom of a returnee is a strong criticism towards one's own country. Small, mundane things can seem enormous and foolish. However, as Junkkari & Junkkari (2003) write, these reactions are not in fact so much about the home country itself; they are about the emotional, unsure and unstable state of the returnee. Also, a returnee might not want to identify with one's home country because he/she is now 'different' due to the foreign experience, 'more than just a Finn', for example.

2.2.2 Unexpected Shock

As we have previously seen, one of the main reasons for experiencing a re-entry shock is its unexpectedness. The unfamiliarity of home is usually unanticipated, as well as are the changes in the sojourner him-/herself. In addition, views and responses from other people at home toward the sojourner may have changed too as a consequence of the sojourner's foreign experience and consequent changes. Generally speaking, the whole re-entry shock is unpredicted on a regular basis. This is exactly what makes the process so problematic.

For example Salakka (2006) and Smith (2001) concentrate on the unexpectedness of the re-entry shock in their writing. They agree that moving abroad is often easier and different from returning home due to the expectations. When going abroad, a culture shock is usually predicted, whereas

while returning, one is not prepared for the shock. One might not be consciously aware of the cultural constructs, and identity changes that one is going through. Upon returning these features start to arise, however, and the consequent feelings might be confusing and alienating.

Storti (1997) adds still something more to the unexpectedness of the shock. "The problem is not just that the re-entry shock is unexpected, that the returnee is unprepared for the experience; the returnee is in fact expecting the exact opposite experience, that coming home will be quite wonderful." (Storti 1997: 39). This statement by Storti is a much generalized view, since everyone has different expectations about coming home. Nonetheless, usually, if one has visited home during the sojourn, the experiences have been pleasant, just like on a holiday. However, when one permanently returns, the feeling of "being on a holiday" gradually disappears and the routines and reality become more clear. One might feel stuck at home, not being able to escape abroad again. In addition, one is often missing the people at home while living abroad, and during a vacation the returnee can be excited to see everyone at home, yet not having to be so attached to them because the sojourner will still return abroad to his/her "second life." These are additional reasons why the re-entry shock can feel so unexpected and confusing.

Thus, we have seen that one of the most difficult aspects about a reverse culture shock is its unexpected nature. It has been researched that people deal with stress better if they are prepared for it. When we have preparedness and knowledge of the factors causing stress, we can practice our reactions, go through issues, and consider alternatives (Junkkari & Junkkari 2003). It seems evident that relevant information on re-entry is required in order to diminish the stress reactions and to make the re-entry process smoother and less frightening.

2.2.3 Stages of Re-entry

Usually the stages of re-entry are similar to the stages of a culture shock. As simplified, first you encounter euphoric feelings, then you fall down to a crisis stage, and finally, you achieve a normal state of mind through adjustment.

This pattern is often described as a U-curve hypothesis, and it is commonly used in explaining the adaptation process and culture shock when entering a foreign country. The curve was taken into use already in the 1950s by Lysgaard, and since then it has been frequently applied, and also further developed. As Lysgard himself explains, "[we] observed that adjustment as a process over time seems to follow a U-shaped curve: adjustment is felt to be easy and successful to begin with; then follows a 'crisis' in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy; finally one begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming more integrated into the foreign community." (Lysgaard 1955, cited in Tange 2005). See the U-curve hypothesis below.

1) Honeymoon (initial euphoria)
• fascination and excitement about the new culture
• curiosity for differences
• emphasis on cultural similarities

2) Crisis (frustration)
• confrontation with different behaviours and values
• confusion and anxiety
• rejection of the new culture

4) Biculturalism (mastery)
• awareness and understanding of cultural differences
• autonomy and satisfaction
• dual cultural identity

3) Adjustment (recovery)
• learning new social and cultural norms
• effectiveness and comfort
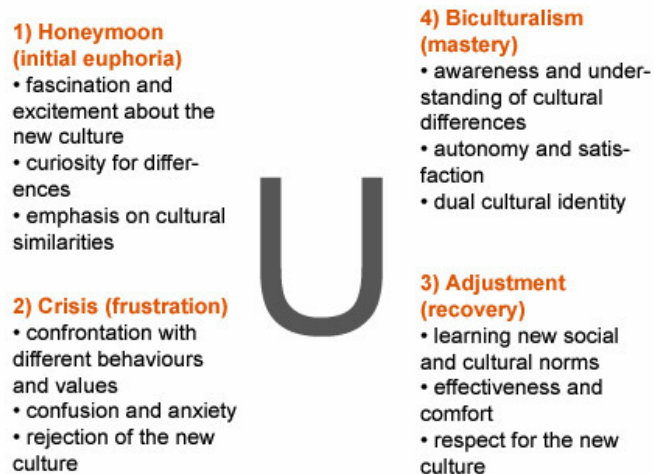• respect for the new culture

Figure 1. U-curve hypothesis (El Said 2006: 47).

The U-curve hypothesis has been further extended to a 'W-curve', which adds a second curve representing the re-entry phase during which the sojourner once again goes through similar processes (see e.g. Kim 2001: 20 or El Said 2006: 47). This is the most common pattern used in explaining re-entry shock, and

similar stages are described by several scholars. In this chapter I will explain some versions of the stages of re-entry. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that these are merely examples, since both the acculturation stress and the re-entry shock are very individual for every returnee, and, as for example Furnham & Bochner (1986, 133-134) point out, not everyone goes through an adaptation process that would necessarily represent a U- or a W-curve. Also the time that it takes to readapt varies, but it is said that an average of six months is needed in order to start feeling normal and to accept the situation (Adler 1997).

Among other scholars, for example Storti (1997) provides his extensive version on possible stages of re-entry. Even though the re-entry process is personal and can vary, he states that "the experience itself does seem to unfold according to a predictable pattern. For most people this pattern consists of four stages, each marked by characteristic feelings and behaviours. The length and intensity of each stage will be different for everyone, but the sequence seems to be consistent." (Storti 1997: 53). Storti's proposed stages are 1. Leave-taking and departure, 2. The honeymoon, 3. Reverse culture shock, and 4. Readjustment. This clearly corresponds to the stages we found in the W-curve.

Storti's first stage, 'Leave-taking and departure', includes anticipation and expectations of departure and returning home. Storti emphasizes that a full ritual of leave-taking is needed in order to start a new stage. Therefore it is important to start giving some thought to the returning process even before actually leaving. You need to think to whom to say goodbye, etcetera. This stage also includes usually some distorted feelings, but mostly an excitement related to returning back home.

Storti's second stage, 'The honeymoon', is explained as follows: "for nearly everyone, the first week or two after arriving home are close to perfect, very much what you imagined coming home would be like. Everyone is glad to see you and you are happy to see them." (Storti 1997: 56). At this stage I want to point out that communication is still easy because everyone wants to help you and people do not demand too much of you, as they want you to relax and be at

ease, as Storti confirms (1997: 58). The honeymoon is an idyllic, vacation-like stage.

The honeymoon stage is followed by a 'Reverse culture shock', where also communication with other people in the home country starts to become somewhat problematic. The honeymoon stage is replaced by confusion, alienation, and even depression. According to Storti, you start to become judgemental about your home country, and you realize you are missing the foreign country, remembering it as being perfect [compare to culture shock, where your home country is remembered as ideal]. (Storti 1997: 59). According to Storti, the returnee also starts to realize how much he/she has changed while being in another country and the returnees start to "realize how those changes set them apart from their compatriots." (Storti 1997: 61). This of course makes also communication problematic among other things. The confusion can sometimes feel unbearable, and many returnees react to the reverse culture shock by resisting adjusting to the home country. "An extreme reaction to such frustration and conflict is a complete rejection of his/her own culture and an attempt to go abroad once again." (Asuncion-Lande 2006).

Storti's last stage is called 'Readjustment': "For all the stress and unpleasantness of re-entry shock, it is not a permanent state of affairs. You do, in the end, get used to being home and bring closure to your expatriate experience. You actually reach a stage when your goal in life is no longer to go overseas again as soon as possible, when you focus on your life as it now is and not on how it used to be." (Storti 1997: 65). Also communication becomes easier again, as the stress and anxiety start fading, and as you gradually have more shared knowledge with the people at home after being able to tell them about the foreign experience and after hearing how they and their lives have changed too. The readjustment stage is usually rather slow, but if the process is successful, you end up having new and broader perspectives, and a more multicultural identity. You can compare this to the 'biculturalism' phase in the U-curve hypothesis presented in figure 1.

A somewhat different description of the re-entry stages has been suggested by Osland (1995). Osland describes three stages that are "1) the hero's refusal to return, 2) the crossing of the return threshold, and 3) the hero as a master of two worlds." (Osland 1995: 165). Note that Storti (1997) did not mention a possibility of a refusal to return, he emphasized more the positive expectations of returning home. Both the scholars, however, show the positive outcome of the re-entry process in their last stages, which is highly important. It is interesting to see how Osland talks about returnees as 'heroes'. Despite being perhaps a slightly comical term, the idea is in fact relevant due to the difficulty of surviving from the re-entry process and then heroically gaining new perspectives to the world, or in other words, seeing the world from more than just one perspective (Osland 1995). However, we cannot expect that his "mastery" would happen to everyone.

Besides Storti and Osland's stages, M. Bennett's (1998) last stage of his Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (cognitive structure to an evolution in attitudes and behaviour toward cultural difference in general) summarizes the positive outcome of a successful re-entry or an accomplished adaptation to a new country. According to Bennett, cultural adaptation develops through stages. Gradually one shifts from ethnocentrism, meaning the judgement of people using one's own set of standards (M. Bennett 1998: 26), to more ethnorelativist behaviour and thinking, which stands for "being comfortable with many standards and customs and to having an ability to adapt behaviour and judgements to a variety of interpersonal settings." (M. Bennett 1998: 26). Bennett's stages of intercultural sensitivity are Denial, Defence, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. In the next paragraph we will look into the last stage, Integration, as it is crucial in showing the constructive result that is possible to gain from an intercultural experience.

Having reached the stage of Integration one has learned how to deal with difference. However, in this case the concept of "difference" is somewhat contradictory, as the "home" the returnees return to is in the end not a real difference, but their known natural reality which they (used to) master. However, Integration stage is now looked at from a multicultural perspective.

People in the Integration stage are "achieving an identity which allows them to see themselves as 'interculturalists' or 'multiculturalists' in addition to their national and ethnic backgrounds. They recognize that worldviews are collective constructs and that identity is itself a construction of consciousness. They have many ways of seeing things, not one right or wrong one." (M. Bennett 1998: 29-30). The integration shows the positive outcomes that a troublesome culture shocks or reverse culture shocks can finally emerge with.

Typically a person, who survives from every day changes, is usually also more successful in dealing with changes in cultural environments. (Furnham & Bochner 1986, 134-135). Or why not vice versa: surviving from cultural changes and gaining new perspectives through intercultural experiences can also help in dealing with any kind of transformations in life. In the next chapter we will deal with the positive aspects of intercultural adaptation, and consider the process as personal growth, instead of something negative.

2.3 Intercultural Adaptation as Personal Growth

As we saw in Bennett's integration stage in the previous chapter, intercultural adaptation has also positive outcomes. In this chapter we will have a closer look at them. As Walling et al. (2006) explain, it is worth studying changes that individuals go through during adaptation and re-adaptation since all these shifts usually contribute to the personal growth of the sojourner.

Opposed to early writings, even if culture shock or reverse culture shock may seem and sound like very negative experiences, they have recently received more positive reactions in the literature of the field. For example authors such as Kim (2001) or Smith (2001) see the shock as an important component of the adaptation process. Also J. Bennett (1998) perceives the shock and changes in individuals as a possibility for growth that can also change our communication patterns. She explains that if the changes are seen as disorentation, they can create communication barriers, but when the changes are perceived as challenge, communication can become more flexible and more creative.

One of the well-known models for depicting intercultural adaptation as personal growth is Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth model. See below.
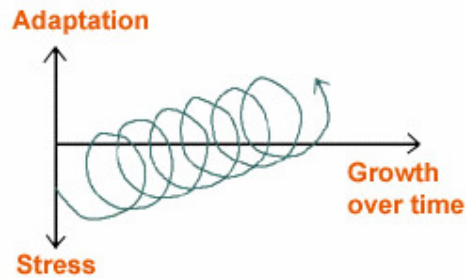

Figure 2. Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic model. (Kim 2001: 57).

Kim (2001) finds the negative tone of the early writings on the intercultural experiences disagreeable, as in her opinion, the problematic treatment of the topic can lead to the anticipation that moving to a new culture would be confusing and harmful. Therefore Kim has developed her Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic model, which illustrates an ongoing immigrant acculturation process, and explains how immigrants gradually become intercultural and experience personal growth. As Gudykunst (2003) clarifies Kim's model, acculturation and deculturation are important aspects of the adaptation process. With time stress starts to diminish, and relatively, adaptation begins to get easier. Finally, functional fitness and psychological health are the consequences of the intercultural changes. (Gudykunst 2003).

Thus, according to Kim (2001), one perspective to cross-cultural adaptation is to see it as an ongoing process, where learning and gradual adjustment take place. Every new spiral on the way adds to personal growth of the immigrant. Despite the stress and defensive reactions, "with time and some effort the individual will probably start to respond to the new environment by changing his/her behaviour, which then gradually leads to adaptation and growth" (El Said 2006: 49). However, we still have to keep in mind that the adaptation-growth process is not similar to everyone, and it should not be underestimated

that often there are also awkward reactions to intercultural adaptation. Thus, as Kim (2001) and Smith (2001) agree, intercultural adaptation is a double-edged process that includes both pain and growth, trouble and enrichment.

Despite getting to know the new culture where one has lived, one also starts to see the country of origin with new eyes and from a new perspective, which is a part of the learning process too. This is not possible if one has not come across with different ways to behave (see e.g. Hall 1976). In general, it is written about the Erasmus exchange programme, for example, that for many people the period of living abroad changes their lives in a significant manner. Getting to know other cultures, languages, and new people; developing a wider horizon; becoming more flexible and more open towards other people and cultures; being able to better respond to stressful cultural situations; and finally, creating a more stable and objective picture of one's own culture, oneself and one's identity are common results of living abroad (see Huete Machado 2004 and Launikari & Puukari 2005).

As we saw above, one important result of experiencing intercultural transformations is encountering a whole new identity:

> Unlike the original cultural identity that had been largely preprogrammed into the stranger through childhood socialization experiences, the emerging identity is one that develops out of the many challenging, and often painful experiences of self-recognition under the demands of a new milieu. Through prolonged experiences of trial and error, the stranger begins to 'earn' a new, expanded identity that is more than either the original cultural identity or the identity of the host culture. (Kim 2001: 65).

Finally, also a study on cross-cultural adjustment and effectiveness of Canadian technical advisors overseas by Kealey (1990) shows that those advisors who experienced a severe culture shock in fact functioned most effectively overseas. Thus, after this chapter, we could conclude that

> our attitudes about culture shock must change. The negative connotations associated with culture shock must be replaced with a realization that culture shock is an inevitable part of the process of cross-cultural adaptation. The fact that a large percentage of those who will be most effective overseas will initially experience a severe

culture shock only emphasizes the need for incountry support for advisors and their families. (Kealey 1990: 38).

2.4 Communication Difficulties in Re-entry

It is said that communication influences all facets of our lives. Through it we interact with our environment and others, both via verbal and nonverbal means. (Ruben & Stewart 1998). Good communication is "effective exchange of ideas and information between individuals through a common system of language and behaviour" (Henry and Hall Nicholson 2003). It is useful to understand the nature of human communication in order to comprehend communication situations better, the re-entry process being an important example. During re-entry individuals often encounter difficulties in telling others about their inexpressible foreign experience, and returnees often become disappointed because those at home seem unwilling to listen to their intercultural narratives (Smith 2001). As Smith states, communication is essential in a successful re-entry and in the negotiation of the new identity of the returnee. Nevertheless, we should not forget that also the home front can easily become confused because of the sometimes awkward communication with the returnee. It can be difficult for them to for example listen to the extensive stories of the returnee. Thus, both parties become uncertain, and this underlines the importance of "metacommunication", communication about communication (Griffin 1997).

One of the crucial elements affecting our communication is culture. Culture affects how we express ourselves, and different cultural backgrounds can cause conflict in our interaction (see e.g. Conflict Research Consortium 1998). According to Salo-Lee (1998), our cultural background is reflected in our communication and it affects the choices we make in our communication and perception. As a consequence of an intercultural experience, many individuals encounter a change in their cultural identity and personal values, and realize that they feel different from the people at home. These incompatible frames of reference are one reason why returnees might face communication problems back in their home country. Other aspects affecting returnees' communication patterns are the feeling of not belonging anywhere, and a high stress and

anxiety that often accompany the re-entry process. We will discuss these issues in the following chapters.

2.4.1 Incompatible Frames of Reference and Changed Perceptions

"Our personal characteristics and previous experiences have a major influence on what we see, hear, understand, believe, and remember" (Ruben & Stewart 1998: 113). There is a high importance of one's background and history to communication. People with similar backgrounds are usually drawn together and mutual understanding becomes easier. For returnees communicating successfully with people at home and being understood requires that the backgrounds of the interactants are not very inconsistent (Virtanen 1994, cited in Kuhalampi 2002: 56). Not many people at home have gone through re-entry themselves, and therefore, as Storti (1997) says, their experiences are different, and they do not "speak the same language" as the returnee. Even the nonverbal behaviour might be in discrepancy if the returnee has adopted new communication patterns from the host country.

There are major changes taking place during re-entry. The home environment might have changed, other people have changed, personal relationships are different, and the sojourner has changed too (Storti 1997). As Storti continues, many returnees imagine that time has stopped while they were abroad, and all the changes might come as a surprise. Nevertheless, in fact, while one has been away and experienced changes, the people at home have changed too, which then again causes changes in communication and relationships.

After returning there are often difficulties in communicating with your old friends and family at home (see e.g. Brislin 1981, Saviaro 2005, and Storti 1997). They do not seem to understand you and it is complicated for you to put your experience into words. The lack of shared knowledge becomes a barrier to communication. Like Scollon (1995: 11) clarifies, "communication works better the more participants share assumptions and knowledge about the world. Where two people have very similar histories, backgrounds, and experiences, their communication works fairly easily because the inferences each makes

about what the other means will be based on common experience and knowledge." The lack of shared knowledge leads frequently to misinterpretations and a feeling of being an "outsider" in the interaction (Kreckel 1981). Of course, this is not true in every case. Some people could be assumed to enjoy being with different kinds of people, instead of looking for familiarity in interaction.

Apart from the lack of shared experience, another barrier to effective communication in re-entry is a failure to listen. This can come apparent in both parties of the interaction - the returnee and the person at home. We easily drift off in a conversation when the issues that are discussed do not very closely concern our lives (Hahn 2006). The returnee often forgets to ask questions and show interest in what has occurred to the people at home, believing that the returnee is the only one whose life has changed and been interesting (Junkkari & Junkkari 2003). Similarly, it can be hard for the home-front to understand the experiences of the returnee, and this can lead to a seeming lack of attention and interest from their part. However, it should be taken into account that listening is a communication skill that can be learned (Kealey 1990). Sometimes though, a lack of interest can also be a sign of jealousy towards the intercultural experiences (Junkkari & Junkkari 2003 and Saviaro 2005). Consequently, when you cannot tell about your experiences, a part of your personality remains hidden, and you remain a stranger to the others (Kuhalampi 2002 and Storti 1997). This leads to a feeling of loneliness, isolation and frustration, which are all common symptoms of re-entry.

As it can be concluded, due to the changed perceptions and incompatible frames of reference, communication upon re-entry often becomes difficult. One way to alleviate the re-entry shock is to keep constantly in touch with the home-front, thus increasing shared knowledge. Many returnees often find comfort from other people who have also experienced intercultural transformations and with whom communication is thus easier (Brislin 1981 and Storti 1997).

> Home, to be precise, may include many familiar faces, but it contains
> very few familiar people. You won't be able to pick up where you

> left off with loved ones and friends nor take any of your relationships for granted. You won't be able to relax entirely and be yourself, trusting to your instincts, nor will they be able to relax and be themselves around you. You will have to come to know each other again. (Storti 1997: 20).

2.4.2 Clash of Cultures

Due to all the changes that are taking place the returnee might feel like he/she is living in between two cultures, not belonging anywhere anymore. Besides changed perceptions of the returnee, this feeling of alienation and identity confusion can make communication with the home front complex (Koehler 1986). The returnee is going through an internal cultural chock ("clash of cultures"): he/she might not feel like belonging neither to the host culture nor the home culture. The returnee has become a so-called marginal person (J. Bennett 1993, Kuhalampi 2002, Salakka 2006). "You are something of a cultural hybrid, viewing and responding to the world around you from the perspective of two different realities, partaking each of each but not fully belonging to either" (Storti 1997: 61).

The returnee usually has identified him/herself with new values and attitudes as a consequence of living abroad, and most often these values seem different from the values of the people at home. Communication between the returnee and the home front becomes intercultural (Smith 2001 and Storti 1997), and hence being understood becomes more difficult too. "Discovering your minority status can be unsettling, even frightening; you feel misunderstood, alienated, and alone in your own country" (Storti 1997: 62). Like Storti explains, in the beginning you were probably a stranger in the host country too, but it is even more difficult to all of a sudden be a stranger in your home country than in a foreign country where the confused feelings were expected. When returning to your home country, you are actually a foreigner, but others do not perceive you as one, which causes conflict (Storti 1997: 62).

When encountering communication problems due to living in a clash of cultures, the returnees often start to realize how much they have changed as a

result of their intercultural experiences, and how strongly these changes differentiate them from the people at home (Storti 1997). Returnees often end old friendships or romantic relationships because of the identity changes of the returnee and a new-found lack of "identity satisfaction" in the old relationships (Smith 2001). This is also one reason why returnees often search for new relationships with other people who have similar overseas experiences (Martin 1986, cited in Smith 2001). Another reaction to home country dissatisfaction is withdrawal, or an attempt to go abroad once again (Asuncion-Lande 2006). Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that many returnees can find communication during re-entry easy due to for example being finally able to speak and hear one's mother tongue.

It is said that adjustment and identity are inextricably linked (Isoko et al. 1999). Due to living abroad one's cultural identity often changes from a single-cultural identity to a multicultural one, which is one of the crucial reasons for feeling confused and alienated. Cultural identity is defined as "the mental framework through which individuals understand their way of being, interpret social cues, choose their behaviors, respond to their surroundings, and evaluate the actions of other people" (Sussman 2000). Due to clash of cultures, one's internal cultural framework has become somewhat confused and one's self-definition has become more difficult because one now sees things from several perspectives. As Luoma (2005: 11) explains, "*individual identity* refers to the individual's interpretation of his or her cultural identity, which is based on his or her own experiences." Thus, both the individual identity and the cultural identity of the returnee can be in a state of a conflict and change. This might be the case especially for younger individuals who are still forming their identity.

Yet again, the feeling of alienation and the state between cultures is often depicted in a negative light in the earlier literature of the field. However, the phenomenon could instead be seen as an identity-building process and a possibility for personal growth. Hall (1999) for example states that one's identity is built through understanding differences and comparing ourselves to others. This is what returnees often do, and through self-reflection they start to realize who they are not, and consequently who they are. Hannula (1997) and

Kuhalampi (2002) explain the importance of continuity when building a coherent identity. Therefore it would be useful for the returnee to keep a link between the home country and the host country. Keeping in touch with the new friends overseas is one possibility for succeeding in this. Living your life in the home country does not mean that you have to give up or deny your previous experiences.

Uniting old and new identities is not easy, but requires time and effort (Smith 2001). According to Smith, a key for the process of identity negotiation and a successful re-entry is competent (intercultural) communication with the home front. "This communication leads to improved relationships, greater social and emotional support, and ultimately the refinement of one's intercultural identity and that identity's orientation to the home culture" (Smith 2001: 9). Like Smith concludes, it is important to realize the intercultural nature of communication in re-entry and the need for intercultural sensitivity, not only abroad but also at home. However, we must keep in mind that it is not only our cultural identity that influences our behaviour, but our social and personal identities play a great role in any interaction too (Gudykunst 2005). Some returnees, for example, might not experience the feeling of marginality at all.

Finally, it can be concluded that the communication difficulties related to the clash of cultures can be complex, but greater understanding of the phenomenon for both the returnee and the home front can make the re-entry process smoother. After all, our identities are capable of change (Tange 2005). It is also up to ourselves whether we give the clash of cultures a negative or a positive connotation: whether we see it as stagnation or personal growth (Salakka 2006). We can decide ourselves whether we consider the returnees "cosmopolitans" or "aliens" (Kuhalampi 2002).

2.4.3 Stress and Anxiety

Furthermore, one final essential factor affecting the communication process of a returnee is stress. "Stress, as such, is a manifestation of the generic process that occurs whenever the capabilities of the individual are not adequate to the demands of the environment" (Kim 2001: 55). Stress and anxiety may rise for example from the feeling of not feeling included and perceiving ourselves different from everyone else (Gudykunst 2005), like we saw in the previous chapter when talking about the clash of cultures. According to McCroskey & Richmond (2001), anxiety can lead to communication disruption and to avoiding communication in general.

"When too anxious, our attention focuses on the anxiety and not on the effectiveness of our communication" (Gudykunst 2005: 288). Upon acculturation or re-entry, many individuals become uncertain due to anxiety, which results in poor communication:

> a person in a top-high state of arousal, especially if accompanied by feelings of anxiety, is distracted by 'internal noise' and cannot give full attention to the messages he sends and receives. Neither is he free from restraint to 'tune-in' emphatically to the persons with whom he is interacting to search for feeling and meaning tones. A person in culture shock does not fit the requirements of a good communicator. (Barna 1976: 13).

Apart from poor communication, anxiety results in self-preoccupation, helplessness, and expectations of negative consequences (Sarason et al. 2001). These reactions again give rise to poor communication, thus generating a vicious circle.

Furthermore, stress affects our willingness to communicate. If we perceive the others as "strangers", or if the others perceive us in such way, the uncertainty of both parties makes us reluctant to communicate with each other (Gudykunst 2005 and McCroskey & Richmond 2001). In the worst case this leads to a total withdrawal from communication. Let us imagine for example that the returnee has been living in a very collectivistic country and has adopted ways of

behaviour appropriate to a collectivistic culture. Then he/she moves back to Finland which is a highly individualistic country. There will be a conflict in the person's behavioural patterns, and the stressful situation causes uncertainty of how to communicate effectively. The person might become depressed as a consequence of the high anxiety, and can start to completely lose willingness to communicate with the people at home. "Reduced willingness to communicate results in an individual being less effective in communication and generating negative perceptions of him or her self in the minds of others involved in the communication" (McCroskey & Richmond 2001: 32).

Like we saw, negative perceptions of oneself can lead even to a depression, which is a common symptom of re-entry. When depression comes into the scene, communication breaks down, and both interactants will be affected (Henry & Hall Nicholson 2003). According to Henry & Hall Nicholson (2003), in an interaction, the person suffering from depression can be irritable, negative, isolated, reticent, overly sensitive, misinterpreting, refusing to hear what is said to him/her, and finally often withdrawing from the communication situation. The other interactant, conversely, can try to fix things excessively, talk too much, blame and shame, get angry, and also ultimately withdraw from communication. This of course is an extreme, but not an impossible example of what can occur during re-entry.

To finish, we can return to trying to turn stress and anxiety into a positive experience. "Though there are a number of negative consequences of stress, it is an inevitable part of the process of life and of becoming. It may also be a very positive force in the sense that stress presents opportunities for personal and social growth and change" (Ruben 1978, cited in Ruben & Stewart 1998: 235). We naturally try to avoid stress by withdrawing from the situation that we think causes it (Kim 2001). This however, can exactly lead to a withdrawal from communication situations during re-entry. A more constructive means would thus be to accept stress and stop fighting it (Kim 2001). As Kim continues, stress is in fact a necessary aspect of our adaptation process, just as we saw in chapter 2.3. "To experience growth, we must go through stressful experiences, not avoid them" (Kim 2001: 228). In addition, when we anticipate

stress, and when we know it is not only a negative experience, we cope with it better (see e.g. Barna 1976). Similarly, when we are conscious of our communication manners, we become "mindful" (Gudykunst 2005: 290), and consequently develop into better communicators in stressful situations too.

2.5 Strategies for Getting Through Re-entry

Finally, before discussing the methodology of the study, we will briefly look at possible strategies for getting through re-entry, as suggested in previous literature.

Some factors that help individuals in their re-entry and conflict solving are related to personality, but however, most of these characteristics can also be learned and developed. These features include nonevaluativeness, cultural empathy, acceptance, and self-awareness (Berry et al. 1992). Note that these features are almost always emphasized also in intercultural communication competence (ICC), which refers to an ability to function and perform in an intercultural situation, communicating effectively and appropriately (see e.g. Chen & Starosta 2005 and Hajek & Giles 2003). As we have previously seen, communication in re-entry frequently takes an intercultural form, as the returnee and the person in the country of origin now often communicate in culturally different ways. The relationship between re-entry and ICC has not been studied much, but I find it important to emphasize that the role of ICC in re-entry cannot be underestimated.

Apart from more personal aspects related to ICC, there are also concrete strategies to facilitate readjustment. Besides national re-entry services, in several universities and polytechnics in Finland there are re-entry orientations in which several returnees share their experiences and discuss aspects of re-entry. One often creates a safety network from other people who have lived abroad, and a re-entry orientation is a great possibility to meet those people.

Another important strategy is to keep in touch with the people at home while being abroad, as constant communication might alleviate the re-entry process (Walling et al. 2006). Coughling (1999) found out that when trying to cope with stressful situations, several repatriates took direct action and sought to control their emotions. In addition, one of Coughling's findings was that women, more often than men, sought for support from other people.

Furthermore, it is also significant to prepare oneself for re-entry. Knowledge about possible reactions is definitely helpful (Saviaro 2005). As Saviaro continues, it is central to give oneself time to adjust and to organize the problems related to re-entry so that they do not appear all at once. It is also believed that one of the most important strategies is to expect a shock of some level (see e.g. Storti 1997). When the phenomenon is better understood and expected, it is usually much easier to cope with. Moreover, understanding one's communication behaviour can help to facilitate the interaction with the home front during re-entry. In sum, "better communication skills lead to better adaptation" (Smith 2001: 7).

In the following chapters we will see how the data in this particular research was collected, and what kind of results emerged from the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

All in all, there has not been much research done on re-entry, and even though the amount of readjustment studies is gradually increasing, the communication difficulties that returnees frequently face are often neglected or touched only superficially in the existing studies. Nevertheless, effective communication is a vital aspect of a successful re-entry, and therefore the issue should be better understood both by the returnee and the home front. Assuming that there are communication difficulties related to re-entry, and considering the importance of understanding them better, I have chosen a communication perspective to my study.

The aim is to try to find answers to the following research questions through the data collected:

(1) How is the re-entry process experienced?
(2) What kind of communication problems are related to re-entry?
(3) How to prepare oneself and the home front for the possible communication difficulties of the readjusting process? Is there support available?
(4) How can one benefit from a re-entry shock?

Firstly, I will look at re-entry in a more general sense, investigating how it is experienced in my sample. Possible relationships between culture shock and re-entry will be looked at.

Subsequently, the possible communication difficulties and their nature will be looked at more in depth, taking into account for example how the returnees in this particular study found telling about their intercultural experiences to the people at home, and how factors such as stress affected their communication behaviour.

 I will also examine how the participants survived from re-entry, if it was difficult for them. It will be looked at who became the closest people for the respondents after they had returned home, and if they had enough support in general.

Finally, the possible benefits of a re-entry shock, and the outcomes of the intercultural experience in general will be looked into, being another important focus of the study. From the data collected it will be analysed what returnees have learned as a result of their experience.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Method

In spring 2007 the target group were sent a qualitative electronic questionaire consisting of 25 open-ended questions (see appendix 1). The questionnaire was provided both in Finnish and in English, and the participants could choose in which language they preferred to answer. The English questionnaire was provided in case some of the half-Finnish respondents felt more natural to answer in English. The questions were related to acculturation stress, re-entry and communication difficulties associated with it, as well as focusing on personal development and learning experiences related to intercultural adaptation. The participants were asked to reply to the questionnaire either in Finnish or in English via electronic mail within a month.

A qualitative research method was chosen in order to receive a great depth of information and understanding of the phenomenon, even though generalizations or universal statistics could not be done due to non-random sampling and the non-positivist nature of the study (see e.g. Frey et al. 2000). Instead, the focus was on the participants recalling and reporting their experiences more thoroughly. A qualitative research method was selected also due to its flexibility and the possibility to explore new ideas. This way the participants could tell their experiences with their own words, and the data could yield rich information, which subsequently can lead to contributing to the

theoretical understanding of re-entry in the field of intercultural communication.

The reason for choosing an electronic questionnaire, and not for example conducting an interview, were its relative advantages, such as being cheaper, quicker, easier to analyse, and also, an electronic questionnaire provided more anonymity for the respondents (see e.g. Frey et al. 2000). There were drawbacks too, however, because in a questionnaire nonverbal behaviour could not be accounted, the questions could not be clarified for the respondents, and an interview could have probed a greater rate of response (Frey et al. 2000).

Finally, adopting computer-mediated communication (CMC) to qualitative research is a relatively new phenomenon. I chose to try it, since electronic mail seemed to be a convenient and fast medium to send and receive the questionnaire. CMC is an umbrella term under which e-mail interviewing or email questionnaires fall, such as does also for instance video conferencing. Mann & Stewart (2000), for example, clarify that some further advantages of using CMC in qualitative research methodology include the ability to access more distant individuals, and the possibility to offer a safe and informal context for the participants. However, Lindlof & Taylor (2002) mention also that one needs well developed IT skills in order to participate in a study that uses CMC in data collection, which can limit the amount of individuals being able to contribute to the study. However, I assumed that this factor would not become a barrier in Finland among higher education level students. However, it is important to keep in mind that using CMC in this particular thesis is of no big relevance as such, since using a paper version of the same questionnaire would not have caused significant differences in the results.

3.2.2 Subjects and Procedure

The electronic questionnaire was sent to 33 Finnish or half-Finnish higher education level students, both from polytechnics and universities, who had

spent at least one semester studying abroad. Some of them were found through a person who organises a re-entry orientation in the University of Jyväskylä. Others were found through my own social network, from which some individuals either participated in the study or provided more contacts of potential participants for the study. Out of the 33 subjects 22 replied, which makes the response rate 67%. Higher education level students were chosen since it can be assumed that they are more vulnerable to big changes in their lives, as they have less life experience than older people and are still vulnerable to changes in identity (see Walling et al. 2006). Additionally, the human flow of young people between countries is ever-increasing, which makes the students an even more appropriate target group.

In my study, 21 of the respondents were female, and only one was male. Only three respondents reported having lived outside Europe. The countries of sojourn included Sweden, Russian, Poland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Island, Great Britain, USA, Japan, and Australia. The average age of the respondents at the time they had moved abroad was 21.9 years, the youngest being 18 and the oldest 26 years old. The average time spent abroad was 8.75 months. Finally, only three participants had studied abroad for one year or more. See the table below for a summary.

Table 1. Subjects of the study

Female	Male	Average age (yrs)	Average time spent abroad (months)
21	1	21.9	8.75

Subjects for the research were identified through snowball sampling, which "yields a study sample though referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Bierbacki & Waldorf 1981, cited in Lindlof & Taylor 2002: 124). Besides using my personal contacts, I contacted a person organizing a re-entry orientation in Jyväskylä University to gain as many individuals belonging to the target group as possible. Snowball sampling method was a convenient

choice in order to find individuals that fit the criteria of the sample. Once the sampling had been done, and the possible questions for the participants had been piloted and thus modified, all the subjects were sent the questionnaire.

3.2.3 Ethical Issues

The questionnaire was accompanied with an introductory e-mail clearly informing all the subjects that the participation in the study was voluntary, and that the data would be treated anonymously and confidentially. Contact details of the researcher were also provided in case the subjects needed more information concerning the study. In addition, an electronic copy of the thesis will be sent to those who participated to thank them for their time and effort, and sharing their valuable experiences. In sum, there were no major ethical dilemmas concerning this study.

3.3 Data Analysis

The type of data analysis used in this study was content analysis. Content analysis is used for qualitative studies, and its aim is to verbally describe the content of data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002: 107-108). In this study the content of the data of the 22 electronic questionnaires was studied and the questions relevant to the study were summarised. Content analysis was a convenient choice in this particular study, since it provides a great depth of information of the phenomenon, presented in the form of metacommunication (Griffin 1997) by the respondents themselves. It is interesting, but also challenging to analyse people talking about their own communication.

The analysing procedure started by reading the returned questionnaires several times. Then thematic units (see e.g. Krippendorff 2004) for data analysis were created based on the original research questions. This makes the content analysis inductive (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003), as the categorisation of the data was not based on previous theories or research, but on my own research

questions that also more broadly appeared in the questionnaire. However, as Eskola and Suoranta (1999) have stated, the categorisation can never be completely inductive, since there are at least the own preconceptions of the researcher included in the units. Nonetheless, here are the categories created for this data analysis with examples of the questionnaire questions that were used to analyse every category:

(1) How did the respondents of this study experience the re-entry process?

The first category included questions, such as

- What did you expect your re-entry to Finland to be like?
- What was it actually like?
- Could you describe your feelings upon returning?

(2) What kind of communication problems were related to re-entry?

This category consisted of questions, such as

- How did the people at home react when you told them about your foreign experiences? Did you encounter any communication problems?

- Was it easy or frustrating for you to express your experiences of living abroad? Did you feel like the others understood you? Please explain.

- Describe the changes you found about your own nonverbal communication or what others at home commented about it (e.g. eye contact, being "touchy", gestures, etc.).

(3) What helped the returnees to get through the readjusting process and the communication difficulties related to it?

In this category there were following type of questions:

- What helped you get through your re-entry, if it was difficult to you?

- Who was your support during the whole re-entry process?

- Who became the closest people to you after your returning?

- If you live in Finland now, how do you feel?

(4) How did the respondents benefit from their foreign experience?

In the final category, these questions were asked:

- How do you think you had changed while living abroad?

- What have you learned and how have you developed as a person as a consequence of your foreign experience?

After the categories were created, the results of the questionnaires were summarized and reported with examples, and conclusions were drawn. You will see these steps in the following chapters.

4. RESULTS

22 electronic questionnaires were returned out of the 33 sent. Thus, the response rate of this study was 67%. In this chapter the qualitative answers given by the respondents are summarized and examples of the phenomenon are given. The structure of reporting the results follows the pattern of the original research questions of this study. Most respondents answered in Finnish, but for this report the responses are translated also into English.

4.1 How did the respondents of this study experience the re-entry process?

First we will look more generally at how the re-entry process was experienced in this particular study. The data showed that 12 respondents out of 22 (55%) experienced a re-entry shock at least to some extent. Some had very strong emotions related to returning home:

F_1: Tuntui kuin olisin lentokoneen sijaan istunut aikakoneessa ja olisin palannut täsmälleen lähtöhetkeeni takaisin. Lähtö Ranskasta oli juuri niin haikea ja vaikea kuin olin kuvitellutkin, mutta Suomeen paluuseen liittyi yllättävän vähän jälleennäkemisen riemua.
F_1: It felt as if I had been sitting in a time machine instead of an aeroplane, and as if I had returned exactly to the moment where I started off from. Leaving France was just as sad and difficult as I had imagined, but returning to Finland included surprisingly little joy of reunion. [1]

F_2: Olin järkyttynyt siitä, miten lattealta suomen kieli kuulosti, miten kalvakoita suomalaiset olivat, ahdistuin kun sisälläni oli niin suuri kokemusmaailma, mutta läheiseni eivät sitä omanneet, enkä osannut sitä suullisesti heille selittää vaikka he pyysivät aina kertomaan vuodesta.
F_2: I was shocked by how lame the Finnish language sounded, how morose Finns were, I was distressed because I had such a world of experiences inside me but my close relatives had not experienced the same and I was unable to explain it to them verbally, even though they were always asking me about my year.

Despite strong or mild re-entry shocks in the study, 45% of the respondents found re-entry easy and experienced no shock. For example:

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[1] The quotes have been freely translated by the researcher.

F_3: Oli kiva palata kotiin, tuttuun ympäristöön ja perheen ja kavereiden pariin.
F_3: It was nice to return home, to a familiar environment and to be with my family and friends.

Possible correspondence between culture shock and re-entry shock were also looked at. It was found out that 10 (45%) of the respondents experienced no culture shock but did experience a re-entry shock. Only 2 (9%) experienced both a culture shock and a re-entry shock. 4 individuals (18 %) experienced a culture shock but no re-entry shock. And finally, 6 respondents (27 %) had neither culture shock nor re-entry shock. See table 2 below for summary.

Table 2. Correspondence between experiencing culture shock and re-entry shock

	re-entry shock	no re-entry shock
culture shock	2	4
no culture shock	10	6

Also expectations of re-entry were inquired in the questionnaire. In their writings Salakka (2006) and Smith (2001) concentrate on the unexpectedness of the re-entry shock. Storti (1997) mentions the positive and often idealised expectations about returning home. However, in my data the opposite was illustrated. Most respondents, 45%, had negative expectations or feelings about returning to Finland. 32% were excited about returning back home, and 23% had either no or neutral anticipations towards returning. Here are a few examples of the negative expectations about re-entry:

F_4: Itse asiassa melkein pelkäsin paluuta Suomeen, sillä uskoin elämän olevan melko tylsää ja sisällötöntä […].
F_4: In fact I almost dreaded coming back to Finland because I assumed life to be rather boring with no content […].

F_1: Kyllä harmitti lähteä!
F_1: What a shame I had to leave!

M_1: Pelkäsin palata Suomen todellisuuteen.
M_1: I was afraid to return to the reality of Finland.

When it was asked whether the returnees felt like Finns, strangers or both upon returning, it turned out that only 4 respondents out of 22 perceived themselves

as strangers. However, 7 respondents felt somewhat confused, reporting feelings of simultaneously both feeling like a Finn and a stranger. 11 individuals felt like Finns and at home, but most reported having now new perspectives to Finland and Finnishness:

F_5: Tunsin oppineeni hirveästi ja katsoin Suomea ja suomalaisuutta nyt ihan eri perspektiivistä. Tunsin kyllä olevani suomalainen enemmän kuin muukalainen mutta tunsin ehkä myös hitusen olevani "maailmankansalainen."
F_5: I felt like I had learnt a lot and I'd look at Finland and Finnishness from a different perspective now. I felt more like a Finn than a stranger but I also felt a tiny bit like a "cosmopolitan."

As Storti (1997) mentioned, there are major changes taking place during re-entry. When the target group of this study were asked about the changes in the people, the environment and the personal relationships at home, there were several different answers:

M_1: Ihmiset olivat aikuistuneet, menneet töihin ja perustaneet perheitä. Muutokset olivat suuria.
M_1: People had become more mature, had started to work and had formed families. Changes were big.

F_5: Ei puolessa vuodessa ollut muuttunut juuri mikään.
F_5: In half a year nothing had really changed.

F_1: Välit muutamiin ennen hyvinkin läheisiin ystäviin etääntyivät, koska tuntui, etteivät he ymmärtäneet ulkomailla kokemaani.
F_1: Relationships with some friends that used to be very close got colder because it felt like they did not understand what I had experienced abroad.

F_6: Etäisemmät ystävyyssuhteet kariutuivat, mutta sen sijaan ne syvät suhteet vahvistuivat entisestään.
F_6: More distant friendships came to and end but instead, the deeper relationships got even stronger.

F_6: [Ihmiset/ympäristö] eivät juuri olleet muuttuneet. Muuttunein olin kai minä itse.
F_6: [People/environment] had not really changed. I was the one who had changed the most.

We can see that there were very different types of answers to the changes taking place upon re-entry. Some found home, including the environment, people, and the relationships different, whereas some did not encounter any

changes at all. However, many people commented on the 'shock' of hearing Finnish language again after being abroad for a long time:

F$_7$: Todella kummallista oli myös se, miltä suomen kieli kuulosti pitkästä aikaa. […] Kotiin palattuani sitten kuuntelin ja katselin innoissani kaikki tyhmätkin mainokset, koska joka ikinen sana kaikui päässäni ja minusta tuntui, että kuulen koko kehollani enkä vain korvilla. Se tuntui uskomattoman ihanalta!
F$_7$: It was very strange also how Finnish language sounded like after a long while of not hearing it. […] When I returned I listened to and watched every silly commercial because every word echoed in my head and I felt like I was hearing with all my body, not just with my ears. It felt unbelievably lovely!

F$_8$: Suomen kieli särähti korvaan. […] Puhuin laivassa mieluummin ruotsia kuin suomea.
F$_8$: Finnish language grated on my ear. […] On the ship I rather spoke Swedish than Finnish.

F$_{17}$: Oli todella outoa kuulla taas suomea puhuttavan. […] Olin vähän järkyttynyt suomalaisten äänistä, jotka kuulostivat minusta ihan ankkaparven ääntelyltä.
F$_{17}$: It was very weird to hear people speaking Finnish again. […] I was a bit shocked by the noises of the Finns because to me they sounded like a flock of ducks.

Thus, we could see that in this study hearing one's mother tongue again for some was enjoyable and relaxing, whereas for some it was very unpleasant. In the following chapter we will see what other issues related to communication emerged from the study.

4.2 What kind of communication problems were related to re-entry?

In this chapter communication issues, and the communication difficulties and their nature will be looked at more in depth, taking into account for example respondents' changes in nonverbal behaviour, how the returnees in this particular study found telling about their intercultural experiences to the home front, and how factors such as stress affected their communication behaviour.

Previously we saw how people taking part in this study reacted to hearing Finnish language again after returning. In the questionnaire it was also asked if the respondents could describe any changes in their own nonverbal behaviour

that they themselves had noticed or what others had reported to them. The data showed that even 82% of the returnees had experienced some changes in their nonverbal behaviour as a result of their sojourn. Most common changes that were reported were being now more touching and affectionate, looking people more into their eyes, being more polite, using more gestures, and smiling more. Some commented on having learnt to kiss on the cheek when greeting people, having a new intonation in their speech, and having changed their style of clothing and eating customs. In the results of the question concerning changes in nonverbal behaviour it could be seen that for some people these changes caused communication problems back at home:

$F_{11:}$ Minusta oli kummallista palata Suomeen, kun ei enää tervehditty poskisuudelmilla. Ihmiset tuntuivat kauhean tylyiltä ja etäisiltä.
$F_{11:}$ I found it strange to return to Finland because no one would greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. People seemed very rude and distant.

$F_{19:}$ Luulen, että minusta tuli huomaavaisempi. Toisaalta sama "kohteliaisuus"-malli, jonka olin ottanut käyttöön saattoi esim. perhepiirissä vaikuttaa teennäiseltä ja etäännyttävältäkin. Snobilta…
$F_{19:}$ I think I became more considerate. However, e.g. in my family the same "politeness" model I had started to use perhaps seemed fake and alienating. Snobbish…

$F_{4:}$ Huomaan myös keskeyttäväni toisen puheen keskustelun aikana kommenttejani ja kysymyksiä varten, mikä on joistakin ärsyttävää.
$F_{4:}$ In a discussion I also notice that I interrupt what the other person is saying in order to add my own comments and questions, which some people find irritating.

According to most theories of the field, during re-entry individuals often encounter difficulties in telling others about their foreign experience, and returnees often become disappointed because those at home seem unwilling to listen to their intercultural stories (see e.g. Smith 2001 and Storti 1997). This can be for example due to incompatible frames of reference (see e.g. Kuhalampi 2000 and Storti 1997). When the issue of communication about the foreign experiences was looked at in the data of this study, it was found out that even 73% found it frustrating to tell others at home about their life abroad. Most felt that others either did not understand them or did not show very much interest towards the intercultural experience. A very common reaction was that only those people who had also lived abroad could understand the returnees.

Thus, most returnees encountered clear communication problems back in Finland. Here are several examples:

F_1: Ahdistavin kysymys oli "no, kerros nyt, millaista siellä oli?" Tuntui, etteivät ihmiset ymmärtäneet, ettei sellaista kokemusta voi tiivistää muutamaan lauseeseen.
F_1: The most distressing question was "so, tell us now, how was it?" It felt like people did not understand that you cannot summarize that kind of experience in a few sentences.

M_1: Ei ne ymmärrä, joten turha yrittää.
M_1: They don't understand so there's no point in even trying.

F_2: En osannut melkein ollenkaan kertoa kokemuksistani. […] En usko, että kukaan muu kuin samanlaisessa tilanteessa ollut ymmärtää. Itse asiassa isäni loukkaantui kun kerroin miten hirveältä suomen kieli korvissani lentokentällä kuulosti.
F_2: I couldn't tell about my experiences almost at all. […] I don't think that anyone expect those who have been in a similar situation can understand it. In fact my father took offence when I told him how horrible the Finnish language sounded in my ears at the airport.

F_{13}: Ihmiset olivat kyllä kiinnostuneita ensimmäiset viikot, mutta usein huomasin, etteivät he ihan oikeasti ymmärtäneet tunteita tai kokemuksia, joista heille kerroin. Luulen, että vain vaihtari voi ymmärtää toista vaihtaria.
F_{13}: Yes, people were interested during the first weeks, but often I noticed that they didn't really understand the feelings or experiences I told them about. I think that only an exchange student can understand another exchange student.

F_8: Kun saavuin Suomeen, seurasi suunnilleen ristikuulustelu siitä, mitä kaikkea minulle oli tapahtunut. Itse olisin siinä vaiheessa halunnut ensin rauhassa palautua matkasta ja lievästä kulttuurisokista Suomeen. Sitten kysymykset loppuivat kuin seinään ja kun joskus mainitsin, että miten joku asia oli Ruotsissa, niin tuli palautetta tyyliin "me ollaankin nyt Suomessa."
F_8: My arrival at Finland was followed by almost a cross-examination of all the things that had happened to me. At that point I would have wanted to recover quietly from the journey and from the mild culture shock in Finland. Then the questions suddenly ended up, and when I sometimes mentioned how something was done in Sweden, the feedback I got was like "well, we're in Finland now."

F_9: Olen monesti pitänyt suuni kiinni vaikka olisin halunnut sanoa jotain, koska en halua ihmisten ajattelevan, että olen ylpeä ja kerskailen.
F_9: Many times I've kept my mouth shut even though I would've wanted to say something because I don't want people to think that I'm proud or boasting.

F_{10}: With the friends that showed interest it was easy to express my experiences of living abroad. With those that were not so willing to listen I felt frustrated, especially when they changed subject and started to talk about their own experiences of being abroad travelling, studying, working, etc.

F_{11}: Kokemuksista oli hauska puhua. Välillä tosin huomasin kateutta.
F_{11}: It was fun to talk about the experiences. At times, however, I noticed jealousy.

All in all, frustration in communication was found in most cases. One additional finding from the data, however, was also that the returnees found it easier to tell about their sojourn to those people who had either visited them abroad or with whom they had had a lot of contact via phone, electronic mail, messenger, and etcetera.

According to McCroskey & Richmond (2001), stress and anxiety can lead to communication disruption and to avoiding communication in general. The data of this study showed that 64% returnees encountered no anxiety or stress. 36% of the respondents were clearly stressed when returning home, and commented on communication difficulties they encountered due to stress and anxiety:

F_1: Olin stressaantunut ja luultavasti hiukan masentunutkin palatessani. Tästä johtuen kommunikoin varmastikin usein melko töykeästi ja hermostuin helposti, kun koin, ettei minua ymmärretty.
F_1: I was stressed and probably slightly depressed too when I returned. Because of this I surely communicated often pretty rudely and I got nervous easily when I felt like I wasn't understood.

$F_{12:}$ Tämä [stressi] vaikutti puhetapaani ja äänensävyyni.
$F_{12:}$ This [stress] influenced my way of speaking and the tone of my voice.

$F_{13:}$ Stressi vaikuttaa yleensäkin viestintääni siten, että suutun helpommin, pinna on lyhyempi ja unohdan joskus huomioida läheisiäni tarpeeksi - niin myös nyt.
$F_{13:}$ In general, stress affects my communication in a way that I get angry more easily, I'm more uptight, and I sometimes forget to take my close relatives into account – which happened also this time.

Thus, there were cases where stress upon returning affected the communication between the returnees and the people at home. However, as we saw previously, most common causes for communication problems reported in this study were the differences in nonverbal behaviour, the difficulty of expressing one's foreign experiences to the people at home, not being understood, and the frustration of the home front of not showing enough interest in the stories of the returnees. In the following chapter we will see how the respondents got through re-entry and the communication difficulties related to it.

4.3 What helped the returnees to get through the readjusting process and the communication difficulties related to it?

We will now examine how the participants of this study survived from re-entry, if it was difficult for them. It will be looked at if there was support available, and from where/whom they got the help. Lastly, we will look at who became the closest people for the respondents after they had returned home, and if the returnees feel satisfied in Finland at the moment.

Some people affirmed that they had not needed any support during re-entry. Nevertheless, several individuals who found re-entry difficult described that they had found help from for example getting back to the routine, keeping oneself busy, giving oneself time to recover, talking to people with similar experiences, and communicating with friends that still live in the host country. Two returnees informed that the re-entry orientation organized by their university was very helpful. One person mentioned that it was comforting that things functioned in Finland. Another one said that the best relief was leaving abroad again.

The people who were mentioned as giving most support to these returnees were friends and family. Also, the majority reported that individuals who had similar experiences were of most help and seemed the most understanding and supportive. It was reported that communication was most effortless and successful with other students who had lived abroad. Some returnees also turned to their foreign friends living in Finland. Not everyone needed support, but those who needed it, mostly found it. However, there were a few cases where support was not available. See an example below:

F_4: Kukaan ei oikeastaan auttanut minua Suomeen muuton jälkeen, sillä melkein kaikkien mielestä "tuttuun" maahan ja ympäristöön palaamisessa ei pitänyt olla mitään vaikeaa.
F_4: No one really helped me after I moved to Finland because almost everyone thought that returning to a "familiar" country and environment should not be any difficult.

When it comes to the question of who became the closest people to the returnees after their readjustment, the most common answers included family,

friends (usually those who had also been close to the respondents before they left Finland), a partner, and again, those people who had also lived abroad were mentioned several times.

When asked whether the respondents currently felt happy in Finland, if they lived here, it turned out that 16 respondents, being the majority, were satisfied living in Finland now, even though some had first experienced a re-entry shock:

$F_{10:}$ I feel happy and appreciating every day the good things that this country has to offer.

$F_{7:}$ Tunnen oloni hyväksi ja onnelliseksi. Tunnen olevani turvassa.
$F_{7:}$ I feel good and happy. I feel that I'm safe.

$F_{1:}$ Olen sopeutunut takaisin Suomeen, mutta eri tavalla kuin ennen lähtöäni. Koen, että voin asua täällä olematta kuitenkaan samanlainen kuin stereotyyppinen sulkeutunut suomalainen. Yritän välillä ihan tietoisestikin pitää hengissä pientä sisäistä ranskalaistani, ja uskon tulevaisuudessa muuttavani ainakin lyhyeksi ajaksi ulkomaille.
$F_{1:}$ I have adapted to Finland again, but in a different way than before I left. I feel that I can live here without being similar to a stereotypical, reserved Finn. Sometimes I try even consciously to keep alive the small, inner Frenchman inside me, and I believe that in the future I will move abroad at least for a short while.

Apart from the 16 satisfied individuals, 2 individuals lived already outside Finland, and 4 were discontented to live in their home country. This is how some dissatisfied individuals described their feelings about living in Finland:

$F_{11:}$ Ajoittain tuntuu tylsältä ja kaavamaiselta. Ulkomailla tunsi elävänsä ja tekevänsä elämässään jotain.
$F_{11:}$ From time to time it feels boring and rigid. Overseas I felt like I was alive and that I was doing something with my life.

M_{1}: [Tuntuu] synkältä.
M_{1}: [It feels] gloomy.

Even though the majority of the respondents currently felt satisfied in Finland, all except one stated that they would feel comfortable, or even desirable, to move abroad again. Some had already made concrete plans of returning overseas:

$F_{7:}$ Olen jo lähdössä samaan maahan kesätöihin ensi kesäksi (2007).
$F_{7:}$ I'm already leaving to the same country to work for the summer (2007).

$F_{14:}$ Mielelläni lähtisin ja vähän sitä jo suunnittelenkin.
$F_{14:}$ I would go with pleasure and I am planning it a little bit already.

$F_{15:}$ Aion mennä uudestaan. Todennäköisesti loppuelämäkseni.
$F_{15:}$ I will go again. Probably for the rest of my life.

Returning overseas is often a reaction to a re-entry frustration (Asuncion-Lande 2006), but in this study moving abroad was mentioned even if people were satisfied with living in Finland. However, there were also a few cases, where the thoughts of moving abroad were used as a support mechanism to survive from the re-entry shock:

$F_{15:}$ Suomesta vieraantumisen tunnetta helpotti se, että tiedän asuvani ulkomailla tulevaisuudessa
$F_{15:}$ The thought of knowing that I will live abroad in the future helped me with the feeling of having alienated from Finland.

However, in the following chapter we will see what positive issues and learning experiences emerged from the respondents as a result of having lived overseas.

4.4 How did the respondents benefit from their foreign experience?

Finally, we will observe from the data of this thesis what kind of learning experiences and personal development appeared in the respondents as a consequence of their sojourn. We will first look at the personal changes that the respondents mentioned in the questionnaire, then see how their perceptions of Finland have changed as a result of their intercultural experience, and finally we will summarize what the returnees have learned and how they have developed personally after returning home.

Every single respondent stated that he/she had experienced changes due to the intercultural experience. The most common changes were having become more independent, more open-minded, and having broadened one's horizons. Also

changes and development in intercultural understanding were commonly mentioned. Here are some examples of the encountered changes:

$F_{16:}$ Olen iloisempi, avoimempi ja ennakkoluulottomampi.
$F_{16:}$ I'm happier, more open, and less prejudiced.

F_5 Silmäni ovat auenneet toisten kulttuureiden ymmärtämiselle ja erilaisuuksien näkemiselle. […] Suvaitsevaisuus on lisääntynyt jatkuvasti. Into lähteä yhä uudestaan ulkomaille on lisääntynyt myös.
F_5 My eyes have opened for understanding other cultures and differences. […] My tolerance has continuously increased as well. I am also keener on returning abroad.

$F_{17:}$ Eihän vierasta kulttuuria voi ymmärtää muuten kuin asumalla siellä. Ehkä se on avartanut maailmankuvaa. Omankin kulttuurin näkee nyt eri valossa.
$F_{17:}$ It is impossible to understand a foreign culture without living there. Maybe that has broadened my worldview. Now I see my own culture in a different light too.

$F_{18:}$ Luulen, että kyseenalaistan ympäröivän kulttuurin tapoja enemmän kuin ennen, oli se sitten kotikulttuuri tai vieras.
$F_{18:}$ I think I question the traditions of the surrounding culture more than before, whether it was my home culture or a foreign one.

$F_{11:}$ Kokemusmaailmani on avartunut, en pelkää kohdata uusia tilanteita, tiedän selviytyväni omillani vaikka vieraassakin ympäristössä. Itseluottamukseni on siis kasvanut. Kaipaan matkustelua entistä enemmän. Lisäksi ymmärrän ihmisten erilaisia taustoja paremmin.
$F_{11:}$ My world of experiences has become broader, I'm not afraid to face new situations, I know I will cope on my own even in an unfamiliar environment. Thus, my self-esteem has become stronger. I yearn to travel more than before. In addition, I understand better the different backgrounds of people.

M_1: Olen suvaitsevaisempi, kokeneempi, puheliaampi ja itseluottamukseni on korkeammalla tasolla.
M_1: I'm more tolerant, more experienced, more talkative, and my self-esteem is on a higher level.

Many people mentioned that they looked at Finland now from a different perspective. When it was concretely questioned how the respondents' views and feelings about Finland had changed, there were several different types of answers. Some mentioned that they respected Finland less after living abroad than before, whereas some said that they appreciated their home country a lot more after the sojourn. The answers were very diverse. First we will have a look at the more negative issues reported.

Someone mentioned that Finland felt even more remote and colder than ever before. Some returnees were disturbed by the reserved and rude character of

Finnish people. It was mentioned that now some of the participants of the study noticed how Finns do not take each other into account, do not greet for example neighbours, do not smile enough, and complain too much unnecessarily. Other negative perceptions mentioned were the use of very few nonverbal gestures, impoliteness, individuals spending strangely huge amounts of time alone, and people drinking too much alcohol. Some also mentioned that after living abroad Finland felt small and monotonous.

F_2: Huomasin, että kaikki ei olekaan täydellistä Suomessa, mikä oli minulle iso pommi.
F_2: I noticed that everything wasn't perfect in Finland after all, which was a big shock to me.

Nevertheless, there were also several positive perceptions that had emerged as a result of the sojourn:

F_7: Opin arvostamaan Suomea paljon enemmän ja näkemään kotimaani toisesta näkökulmasta. Suomi tuli minulle rakkaammaksi ulkomailla oleilun ansiosta. Aiemmin en ymmärtänyt ollenkaan, mitä puhe puhtaudesta, luonnon rauhasta, turvallisuudesta yms. Suomessa oikein tarkoitti, koska en ollut kunnolla tutustunut mihinkään muuhun maahan, jossa tällaisia asioita ei juuri ollut. Opin arvostamaan myös suomen kieltä ja olemaan ylpeä siitä.
F_7: I learned to respect Finland a lot more and to see my home country from a different point of view. I started to love Finland more as a consequence of having lived abroad. Before I didn't understand at all what the talk about cleanness, peace of nature, safety, etc in Finland meant because I had never before properly got to know any other country where these things would not really exist. I also learned to appreciate the Finnish language and to be proud of it.

F_9: Opin arvostamaan monia asioita Suomessa ja ymmärsin, miten hyvin meillä on asiat jopa samankaltaiseen Saksaan verrattuna.
F_9: I learned to appreciate many issues in Finland and I understood how well things were here, even compared to as similar country as Germany.

Apart from the clean nature, safety, language, and all the things that functioned well, the positive perceptions of Finland also included good housing, high level of technology, the honesty of people, and society being tolerant and helpful.

Lastly, it was asked what the returnees had learned and how they had developed as persons as a consequence of their foreign experience. Again, the majority of the respondents reported having developed, grown, and learned a lot due to living overseas. Most common answers included having become

more independent and developed in tolerance and open-mindedness, feeling more mature, and having improved language skills and cultural understanding. The returnees had also learned to adapt to different situations, become more tolerant of uncertainty, be more relaxed, and trust themselves and other people. In addition, the target group had developed a better self-knowledge and self-esteem, developed new perspectives to life, learned to be less prejudiced, and finally, the returnees appeared with stronger personalities in general.

$F_{18:}$ Opin ajatuksen, että asiat järjestyvät ja että kyllä mie pärjään :).
$F_{18:}$ I learned a thought that things will be ok and that I'll survive :).

4.5   Summary

Thus, here the results of the qualitative electronic questionnaire will be summarized. First of all, 55% of the respondents experienced a re-entry shock of at least some level. However, 45% found it pleasant and easy to return home and to be surrounded by familiar people. Those for whom re-entry was very difficult and painful reported for example that they yearned back to the host country, and that Finland and Finnish people seemed cold and reserved. From the data it was also found out that the most common relationship between culture shock and re-entry shock in this study was to experience no culture shock but to go through a re-entry shock, which was the case for 45% of the respondents.

Opposed to previous writings which emphasize that returnees usually have no expectations or that they have positive anticipations about returning to one's home country, in this study it turned out that most respondents had a negative attitude towards re-entry, and some were even afraid of it. In the previous literature of the field it is also often mentioned that returnees feel uncomfortable and weird, in other words 'strangers', back in their home country. In my study, however, only 4 individuals out of 22 clearly felt like strangers.

When the participants of this study were asked about the changes in the people, the environment and the personal relationships at home, there were various

responses. Some mentioned that changes were big, whereas some reported that nothing had really changed at all.

When it comes to the communication difficulties, the actual focus of the study, many individuals found Finnish language strange after not hearing or speaking it for a long while. Also, 82% reported that they had experienced changes in their nonverbal behaviour, for example now using more haptics, looking people more into their eyes, and smiling more. For some people the changes in the nonverbal behaviour caused communication difficulties and confused feelings at home. A very common communication difficulty was also not being able to express the foreign experiences to the others at home, and the others not showing enough interest towards the intercultural stories or not being able to understand the returnee. These problems were encountered by even 73% of the respondents. Most found it easiest to communicate with those individuals who had also lived abroad and had similar experiences. After all, most returnees of this study reported not having been clearly stressed upon returning. 36% stated that they were stressed or anxious, and many of those commented on how the stress made their communication behaviour poorer.

Next, surviving from re-entry was looked at. Those who found re-entry difficult, also usually found support from the home country, for example from family and friends, from re-entry orientations, or by keeping oneself busy. Important resources for support were also those people with similar experiences. At the moment, however, the majority of respondents had recovered from their possible re-entry shocks and were satisfied with their lives in Finland. However, some had moved back abroad already and nearly all stated that they would feel comfortable, or even desirable, to move to a foreign country again. For some returning overseas or thinking about it was seen as a relief for re-entry shock.

Finally, arriving at the learning experiences, personal growth and development that appeared in the respondents, everyone stated that they had changed as a consequence of living in a foreign country. Most commonly, returnees had become more independent, more open-minded, and described having new

perspectives and worldviews. Also development in intercultural understanding was commonly mentioned, as well as better self-knowledge and stronger self-esteem. Almost everyone reported having developed as a person and having experienced personal growth as a consequence of the sojourn.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of the findings

The findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding better the re-entry process and the communication difficulties related to it. The data of this study confirmed that re-entry shock was experienced by the majority of those Finnish higher education level students who took part in the study. Moreover, even a larger number of students experienced communication difficulties upon returning. In this chapter we will discuss and analyse the results more precisely, again in the order of the original research questions.

5.1.1 Why and how did most of the respondents experience re-entry problems?

First of all, the study showed that despite living abroad for a short period (the average duration of sojourn in this study was 8.75 months) there were re-entry difficulties for most respondents. For some reactions were very strong and overwhelming, whereas some experienced only mild effects. However, 45% experienced no shock at all. These results already show how individual and unique the re-entry process is for every returnee. Therefore it is important to be careful when drawing generalizations related to re-entry.

Another relevant finding from the data was that the most common correlation between acculturation stress and re-entry shock was to experience no acculturation stress but to have problems at re-entry. One way to explain this could be to assume that the sojourners became rather involved with the host culture, and that they had enjoyed their time abroad. In these cases most probably a large amount of 'deculturation' (Gudykunst & Kim 1997: 337) has taken place. Old habits of the country of origin have been replaced to some extent by new ones that took place in the host country. This explanation would disprove the statement by Berry et al. (1992: 348) that sojourners, being only temporary inhabitants of a country, would not become fully involved in the

new culture, would not establish close relationships there, nor would relate themselves to the new society.

According to the research literature, other possible factors affecting re-entry are age, gender, education, cultural distance, and expectations about re-entry (see e.g. Berry et al. 1992 and Saviaro 2005). In this study the average age of the respondents was 21.9 years. It was assumed that young people are more vulnerable to big changes in their lives, as they have less life experience than older people. As one may recall, Walling et al. (2006: 154) stated: "young adults are in the unique developmental stage of identity formation. It is logical to predict that international experiences have tremendous impact during such formative times, particularly on students' sense of cultural identity." The data of this study proves this statement, even though we have to keep in mind that not everyone experienced acculturation stress or re-entry shock in my study.

It is also said that gender affects re-entry. In this case this particular study is very subjective because all except one student were females. Some have previously written that women in general experience more problems regarding acculturation than men do (see e.g. Berry et al. 1992). However, based on this study we cannot draw any conclusions on how gender relates to adaptation. Another important factor affecting re-entry is said to be cultural distance: "Cultural distance has been used to refer to how far apart two cultural groups are on dimensions of cultural variation" (Berry et al. 1992: 361). It is assumed that with a higher cultural distance there would be more difficulties in acculturation and re-entry (see e.g. Chen & Starosta et al. 2005). However, in my study, for example, both individuals who had lived in Sweden encountered strong re-entry problems when returning to Finland. Thus, even cultural distance cannot indicate whether one will have a re-entry shock or not.

Finally, it was mentioned that expectations of re-entry affect how readjustment is experienced in reality. In the theory section it was said that one of the main reasons for experiencing a re-entry shock is its unexpectedness or idealised expectations about returning home. In this study, however, only 32% of the returnees were excited about returning back home, and 23% had either no or

neutral anticipations towards returning. Contradictorily, most respondents had very negative expectations about returning home. Many were even afraid of returning and did expect a re-entry shock. This could be for example due to previous knowledge about the issue, as more writings on re-entry have been published recently. Also, good experiences and enjoyment of living abroad reduce the excitement about returning home to 'monotony'.

Apart from the previously mentioned factors that affect re-entry, it could be also assumed that the amount of times spent abroad would have an effect on re-entry. In addition, amount of contact with the home culture while living abroad, and the reactions of people at home upon returning could be said to affect re-entry. Moreover, some respondents mentioned that they had met a partner overseas, which made re-entry more difficult. Oppositely, some individuals mentioned that someone special had been waiting for them at home, which then again made re-entry easy and desirable. As we see, there are as many types of re-entries as there are individuals. No two individuals experience the phenomenon in the exact same way.

One surprising finding in the study was that despite all the previous writing of alienation during re-entry, in this enquiry only 18% of the returnees felt like strangers in their home country. However, there were 32% who mentioned feeling confused about whether they were Finns or strangers. For the rest home actually felt like home, or at least most felt cosy to some extent, somewhat contradicting what Storti (1997) wrote about incorrect idealisation of home while still abroad. However, most returnees of the study reported having now new perceptions towards Finland and life in general. Thus, without necessarily feeling foreign, many people were possibly looking at their home country with the eyes of a foreigner, as was suggested by Junkkari & Junkkari (2003). The new perceptions and views imply the need to adapt again to one's home country.

According to Storti (1997), there are major changes taking place during re-entry. When the target group of this study were asked about the changes in the people, the environment and the personal relationships at home, there were

several different answers. Some found home, including the environment, people, and the relationships different, whereas some did not encounter any changes at all. It could be assumed that those who perceived big changes would have also had more difficulties adapting home.

5.1.2 Why did the majority of the respondents encounter communication difficulties upon returning?

We interact with our environment and others by communicating, both verbally and nonverbally. As it was said earlier in chapter 2.4, good communication is "effective exchange of ideas and information between individuals through a common system of language and behaviour" (Henry and Hall Nicholson 2003). However, for many returnees it often seems like the home front is not 'speaking the same language' as the returnee him or her self.

The data of this study illustrated concrete examples of 'not speaking the same language'. Many respondents commented on how strange the Finnish language sounded like after not hearing or speaking it during the sojourn. For some it sounded beautiful, whereas for some the sounds were unbearable. Considering the latter case, it can be assumed that not identifying oneself with one's own mother tongue can be problematic and can cause confused and unexpected feelings. Apart from the verbal language, the majority of the respondents also commented on differences in the nonverbal communication between them and the home front.

In fact, the data showed that even 82% of the returnees had experienced some changes in their nonverbal behaviour as a result of their sojourn. As a consequence it could be assumed that many returnees felt different, and maybe somewhat alienated, from the home front because their nonverbal communication was in discrepancy. As Salo-Lee (1998) explained, our cultural background is reflected in our communication choices, and in this case in our choices of nonverbal communication. Based on the new cultural experiences of the sojourner, the returnee has now novel ways of communicating. He/she

might notice that the frames of reference with the home front are now different and even incompatible (see chapter 2.4.1). The returnee is perhaps also going through 'a clash of cultures' (see chapter 2.4.2), not knowing which way to behave. Communication between the returnee and the home front has become intercultural (Smith 2001 and Storti 1997), and effective communication "through a common system of language and behaviour" has become poorer. For example:

$F_{11:}$ Minusta oli kummallista palata Suomeen, kun ei enää tervehditty poskisuudelmilla. Ihmiset tuntuivat kauhean tylyiltä ja etäisiltä.
$F_{11:}$ I found it strange to return to Finland because no one would greet each other with a kiss on the cheek. People seemed very rude and distant.

Apart from the changes in nonverbal behaviour, returnees often face other communication problems related to incompatible frames of reference. It is said that when two people share similar experiences and backgrounds, communication usually works rather smoothly (see e.g. Scollon 1995). Upon re-entry mutual understanding between the returnee and the home front often becomes complicated due to changes in experiences and knowledge that are not common for both parties. The majority of the participants found it difficult or even impossible telling the home front about their sojourn because "they wouldn't understand anyway." In the data another reason for not feeling comfortable about telling about the experiences was the unwillingness of the home front to listen. This is said to be a common communication problem in re-entry, like we saw in the theory section. However, none of the returnees mentioned that they themselves would have been a source for communication difficulties too by not being very interested in what had happened in the lives of the people at home. According to Junkkari & Junkkari (2003), the returnee often forgets that he/she is not the only one whose life has changed. Fortunately, listening is a communication skill that can be learned and developed (Kealey 1990).

One respondent also mentioned that one reason for not being willing to discuss the foreign experience was that the returnee thought the other people would get jealous about the stories. Jealousy actually is a common reaction to the

narratives, and thus also a cause for the lack of interest by the other communicator (Junkkari & Junkkari 2003 and Saviaro 2005).

What became obvious from the data was that returnees found it easiest to communicate with people who had had similar experiences. This proves the fact that communication is usually most trouble-free with people who have comparable histories. Thus, due to smoother communication, the people who have experienced intercultural alterations often become the source of comfort for returnees.

Finally, when it comes to stress, according to McCroskey & Richmond (2001), stress and anxiety can lead to communication disruption and to avoiding communication in general. Nevertheless, it was concluded that in this study only 36% were clearly stressed when returning home, and had communication difficulties as a result. Most reported not being that much stressed but maybe more likely sad, and some encountered no negative feelings at all. Some of those who were stressed said that they were nervous and rude in their interaction due to anxiety. Some also mentioned that they were depressed when returning, which clearly made their communication poorer. Cases of stress and depression, along with other examples of communication barriers in re-entry underline the importance of understanding the readjustment difficulties more in depth. But to remind one about Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth model (see chapter 2.3), "to experience growth, we must go through stressful experiences, not avoid them" (Kim 2001: 228).

5.1.3 What different sources for support did the returnees find?

We will discuss now how our returnees survived from the stressful and frustrating situations in their home country, and thus we will see possible suggestions for preparing other returnees for re-entry. It was important to find out that the majority of the returnees who found re-entry problematic found some kind of support in Finland. However, unfortunately a few cases also

explained that no one really helped them with re-entry because no one thought it should have been hard to return to a familiar country. This illustrates how some people are still unaware of the struggle related to readjustment.

Those who obtained support, found it from similar sources that were mentioned in the theory section. These included giving oneself time to recover (see e.g. Saviaro 2005), going to re-entry orientations organized by the university, and keeping in touch with people in the host country (see e.g. Storti 1997). Giving oneself time is one of the most important factors in surviving from re-entry shock. Also, if returnees know already beforehand about the possible re-entry shock, they probably cope with it better too. In this study many students expected to have a shock, which possibly was an advantageous fact. In addition, understanding one's communication behaviour, and the changes that take place in it because of the sojourn, also facilitates interaction at home and helps both the returnees and the home front to prepare themselves for readjustment complications. All this emphasizes the need for deeper information on re-entry and the communication difficulties related to it.

When it comes to re-entry orientations, it seems like they were useful to at least some of the students. There you can share your foreign experiences and feelings related to re-entry with a peer group. As it was said, many people find it comforting to talk to other people with similar experiences, and a re-entry orientation is a good place to find those people. It was also mentioned that it was helpful to keep in touch with those friends who still live in the host country. This is related to continuity which is an important aspect of building a coherent identity (Hannula 1997 and Kuhalampi 2002). Often the returnee feels that he/she is between cultures. Nonetheless, in fact the returnee does not have to decide which culture he/she prefers or feels most comfortable in - it is possible to maintain the link between both cultures. Maintaining the link is often even recommended in order to alleviate the internal culture shock, or 'clash of cultures'. Living your life now in the home country does not imply that you should forget or deny your previous experiences. All in all, all these confused feelings related to re-entry are in effect an important part of one's

identity forming, especially in the case of younger individuals, like in this study.

To continue, most repatriates in this study found support from their friends, family, and partners. Some returnees also explained that it was easier to communicate with and find support from those people whom they had constantly kept in touch with while living abroad, and who had possible also visited them (see e.g. Walling et al. 2006). By constant information to both directions both communicators know already beforehand what is happening in the life of the other person. This can somewhat alleviate the re-entry shock where all the information usually comes in too large amounts, which again easily causes a barrier to communication.

Another one said that the best relief was leaving abroad again. Leaving home again is often a reaction to a re-entry frustration (Asuncion-Lande 2006). Many returnees escape the confused feelings by going back abroad, which again can cause a vicious circle, as the next re-entry can be just the same as the previous one, and the easiest way to escape from the frustration is to go abroad once again. However, it was very interesting to discover in this study that the majority of the respondents felt satisfied living in Finland now, even though some had first experienced a re-entry shock. This shows that the state of the shock is usually only temporary, and with time one gets used to living back in the home country again. Those who were still unsatisfied mentioned for instance that they felt like they did not feel 'alive' in Finland. This is also a common reaction because abroad one was living a more 'glamorous' and novel life. One was different from the others and got a lot of attention, whereas in the home country one seems similar to everyone else (see e.g. Storti 1997).

Even though the majority of the respondents currently felt satisfied in Finland, all except one stated that they would feel comfortable, or even desirable, to move abroad again. Some had already made concrete plans of returning overseas, not to escape from re-entry shock, but preferably out of curiosity. This was an interesting feature from the data because from the frequent desire to go abroad it can be concluded that these students have become more

courageous and curious, and are willing to see and experience more. They have created a stronger self-esteem which contains a sensation that they will survive.

5.1.4 What kind of changes and personal growth did the returnees find in themselves as a consequence of having lived overseas?

We already saw that most returnees had a stronger self-esteem after living overseas. It was remarkable that every single respondent had experienced some personal changes after the sojourn. This already provides evidence for the importance of investigating the changes that individuals go through during intercultural adaptation. As Walling et al. (2006) states, all these transformations usually contribute to the personal growth of the sojourner. In this study the students reported to be now more open, braver, less prejudiced, more culturally sensitive, and having broader horizons. These are all clearly positive aspects.

Thus, despite the re-entry shock that most of the returnees encountered, yet people found such positive changes about themselves. Also Kim (2001) and Smith (2001) see the shock and changes as a possibility for growth. In this study we asked how the respondents thought they had developed as a result of their sojourn. Again, the majority of the respondents reported having developed, grown, and learned a lot due to living overseas. Most common answers included having grown to become more independent, more tolerant, and more open-minded. The returnees had also learned to adapt better to different situations, become more tolerant of uncertainty, become more self-aware, etcetera. Also, many had improved their language skills and cultural understanding, both of their own culture and the foreign one. For example Hall (1976) explains that it is impossible to truly understand one's own culture well without having compared it to other cultures and different ways of behaving.

The returnees of this study explained that they had created new perspectives towards Finland and Finnishness after returning from overseas. However, not everyone had created more positive and idealised views of their home country.

When it was questioned how the respondents' views and feelings about Finland had changed, there were several different types of answers. Some mentioned that they respected Finland less after living abroad than before, whereas some said that they appreciated their home country considerably more after the sojourn. The answers were very diverse. More negative perceptions included many stereotypes of Finland: people were said to be cold, rude, and reserved. Possibly the sojourners had not paid much attention to these aspects before their departure, but now that they have something to compare Finland with, these features stand out more easily. Especially if one is suffering from a re-entry shock, the most negative characteristics of the country and its people are usually prominent. It is common to think that 'everything was better abroad' (see e.g. Junkkari & Junkkari 2003). Especially, if the expectations about returning to Finland were too idealised, these negative aspects and the reality might become as a surprise to the returnee, just like a few respondents described.

Despite many negative perceptions about Finland, many people also found features that they started to appreciate more than before. These included mentioning that society functioned well, housing was good, clean nature was appreciated, and the country felt safe. In addition, the honesty of Finns was respected. Again, these reactions would not have been possible without having compared them with something different.

Generally speaking, it was proven that despite acculturation stress and re-entry difficulties, returnees most commonly experience personal growth and development. They become, not aliens, but 'cosmopolitans', as one respondent brought up. Adaptation, either to a foreign country or back to one's home country, is an ongoing process, where learning takes place. As Gudykunst (2003) explained, functional fitness and psychological health are the consequences of the intercultural changes. Therefore acculturation stress and re-entry should not be thought of in a negative sense, even though they would include negative feelings. Instead, we should learn to better understand the phenomena, and the new identity of the sojourner.

All in all, it was vital to notice that most changes that the returnees encountered in themselves were related to intercultural communication competence (ICC). These features include nonevaluativeness, cultural empathy, acceptance, and self-awareness (Berry et al. 1992). Thus, we can briefly conclude that most of the returnees in this study have developed to be significantly more competent in intercultural communication. This skill is also needed in readjustment, since communication in re-entry frequently takes an intercultural format (Smith 2001 and Storti 1997). However, the time to adapt takes time, and the changes and development that people see in them come gradually. Possibly with the next sojourn and the next re-entry these returnees are able to communicate and perform more effectively, especially if they have knowledge about their own communication behaviour and about communication difficulties related to adaptation and re-entry. With the right attitude, for example if the shock-alike situations are perceived as challenge instead of disorientation, individuals have potential to change their communication skills to be more effective and flexible (J. Bennett 1998).

If we return to discuss identity, one may recall how Isoko et al. (1999) explained that adjustment and identity are inextricably linked. Due to living abroad one's cultural identity often changes from a single-cultural identity to a multicultural one. Identity changes are often the origin for the confused and alienated feelings. However, we need to keep in mind that multicultural identity and intercultural sensitivity are very positive characteristics, which include seeing the world from more than just one perspective, and being able to adapt one's behaviour according to context. Thus, despite the stress and challenges related to intercultural adaptation in the beginning, after things settle down, the returnees can be very proud to possess an ethnorelativist worldview in today's multicultural world.

5.2 Evaluation of the method

It is said that in qualitative research the researcher can never be completely objective (Eskola & Suoranta 1999 and Krippendorff 2004). However, the researcher being subjective does not mean that the study would be unqualified (Eskola & Suoranta 1999). As Krippendorff explains, messages can not have a single meaning (2004), which means that everyone related to the research has different perceptions to the study, including the researcher, the participants of the study, as well as the reader. There are as many possible interpretations as there are individuals, none of the inferences necessarily being less qualified than any other.

While the general terms reliability and validity (see e.g. Frey et al. 2000) may be applicable to quantitative research, Guba & Lincoln (1985) provide alternative terms for the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. The terms Guba & Lincoln (1985) prefer to use are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is defined as the degree of 'truth' that the findings of a particular research have for the participant whom with the study is carried out" (Erlandson et al. 1993). In this particular research the credibility was good. The perceptions of the researcher were articulated, and the procedure itself was convenient and relevant to this study. Other methodological choices, such as conducting interviews, were considered but an electronic questionnaire turned out to be the most applicable choice (see chapter 3.2.2). A pilot questionnaire was provided to one individual in order to verify the data and to make the procedure more explicit. One aspect that can make the study less trustworthy is the large amount of questions in the questionnaire. Possibly some participants experienced a fatigue effect towards the end of the questionnaire and did not pay as much attention to the last questions as the first ones. Moreover, in this study we relied on what the respondents remembered. If the re-entry had happened a long time ago, perhaps some memories were imprecise. In addition, there was a self-selection bias when choosing the participants for the study, as many of them were chosen through personal contacts, causing most of the

respondents to be female university students. Naturally, as was mentioned before, the data has also been analysed from the perspective of the researcher, which makes the analysis subjective.

Transferability is not the same as generalizability. As compared with positivistic inquiry, naturalistic inquiry is more context-dependent, thus decreasing the possibility and appropriateness of discussing external validity (Lincoln & Guba 1985). This study was transferable, since thick description of the procedure was provided to the readers, thus making it possible to apply the same study in other contexts or with other participants. Also, the questionnaire form was added in the report (see appendix 1). The use of purposive sampling makes the study transferable as well. Nevertheless, we have to take into account that since the sampling was non-random and rather small, we cannot make generalizations or create universal statistics based on the data of this study only.

As for dependability, the term is defined as the extent to which, if the inquiry "were replicated with the same or similar respondents in the same context, its findings would be repeated" (Erlandson et al. 1993: 33). In this study dependability was achieved by maintaining all the documentation, such as the returned questionnaires, and making it possible for the others to see them if asked from the researcher.

Finally, we will discuss the confirmability of the study, or "the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher" (Erlandson et al 1993: 34). The researcher was aware of the bias, but of course the subjectivity could not be completely eliminated. For example, when analysing the data it was sometimes difficult to make inferences due to the unstructured and indistinct nature of the responses. This was a limitation especially when percentages were counted. Lastly, several theories were used in data analysis in order to make the study more trustworthy. External reviews judging the conclusions and inferences were not applied in this study.

All in all, this study illustrated significant findings, of which some were similar to the hypothesis. However, some results contradicted previous theories, which again is an important concern and shows the need for further studies. As for recommendation for future studies, it would be interesting to conduct a study focusing on the role of intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity in re-entry, since this side of readjustment was touched only superficially in this research. In addition, an interesting viewpoint for a further study would be to investigate the re-entry process from the perspective of the returnees' family and friends. This angle could provide new insights to the phenomenon. In addition, the quality and the need for re-entry orientations could be examined.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, most of the returnees taking part in this study did find re-entry difficulties despite the short-term nature of the sojourn. It also turned out that when they perceived no culture shock, or in other words the more involved the sojourners got with the host country, the more likely they were to encounter problems at re-entry. This disproves, or questions the theories that state that sojourners, being only temporary inhabitants of a country, would not relate themselves to the new society.

To briefly answer to the research questions, the study illustrated that the re-entry process is experienced in a variety of ways, some returnees finding it more difficult than others. There is no one pattern for how one experiences re-entry. The communication difficulties that were related to re-entry included both verbal and nonverbal issues, and it was apparent that there were communication problems related to re-entry. In order to prepare oneself and the home front for the possible communication difficulties of the readjusting process, it is good to remember that experiencing a re-entry shock is not abnormal. Having relevant information concerning it facilitates the process. In addition, sharing the experience with those who have dealt with the same issues, turned out to be helpful. All in all, there is a relatively big amount of support available from several sources, and some universities organize re-entry orientations too. Knowing that the state of the shock is only temporary might relieve the negative feelings also. And at last, it is essential to keep in mind that through re-entry shock, and other difficult experiences included in the foreign experience, one finally encounters personal growth and development. Below you can see more information related to the conclusions of this research.

Thus, the study proved how unique the re-entry process is for every returnee. Therefore it is important to be careful when drawing generalizations related to re-entry. This was especially relevant when discussing the factors affecting re-entry. For example, in contrast to several previous writings, it was found out that returnees coming from a country with a very low cultural distance compared to Finland (for example Sweden, as opposed to China), re-entry

shock was still often experienced. Another factor contrasting previous theories was that most participants in this study did not have idealised views of home, and in fact many expected to have a re-entry shock. Possibly the expectations could also explain why so few participants in the end felt like complete aliens back in their home country, as it is often said that expecting and knowing about re-entry shock alleviates the negative reactions.

Concerning the topic of the research, one of the most enchanting results of the study was that the majority of the returnees encountered communication difficulties upon re-entry. These were related to both verbal and nonverbal communication. These findings emphasize the powerfulness of the intercultural experience, and how easily individuals adapt to the new ways of behaviour in the host country, probably without even noticing it. It was interesting to find out how the changed frames of reference made the communication between the returnee and the home front intercultural, and how cultural sensitivity would have been needed from both interactants. Also, many of the returnees mentioned how the home front did not show enough interest in their foreign stories, whereas no one mentioned that the returnees themselves would not have been interested enough in the life of the other interactant, which possibly was the case also. It should not be forgotten that communication is always a two-way process.

What became obvious from the study was that the returnees found it easiest to communicate with and ask for support from people who had had similar experiences. This proves the fact that communication is usually most trouble-free with people who have comparable histories. Other sources for those who needed support were time, family, friends, partners, re-entry orientations, and maintaining the link between the host country and the home country. Unfortunately, however, a few cases mentioned that they found no support because people thought that there should not be anything difficult in returning to a 'familiar' place. This emphasizes the need for more information related to re-entry.

In addition, an interesting discovery was that the majority of the respondents felt satisfied with living in Finland now, even though some had first experienced a re-entry shock. This shows that the state of the shock is usually only temporary. Even though the majority of the respondents currently felt satisfied in Finland, all except one stated moving abroad again seemed attractive. This was a remarkable finding because from the frequent desire to go abroad it can be concluded that these students have become more courageous and curious. They have built a stronger self-esteem.

Apart from a stronger self-esteem, the study illustrated that foreign experiences, despite the negative shocks included in them, are a possibility for personal growth and development for individuals. Very remarkably, every respondent stated having experienced changes as a result of living abroad. The most considerable changes were becoming more independent, more open-minded, and more culturally sensitive. Clearly, most individuals had become more competent in intercultural communication as a consequence of spending time abroad. They had in fact created a multicultural identity.

All in all, the findings of the study were significant, especially when it comes to communication difficulties related to re-entry, an area not studied almost at all in the field. There is still a lot more to investigate and discover, but fortunately we have come to a good start with re-entry research, taking into account all previous writings as well as this particular study on re-entry.

We have come to the end of this study. We saw what a significant gap in the literature of the field there was regarding communication difficulties in re-entry, and with the help of this particular study, we have seen what an enormous amount of facts and awareness of re-entry is yet to be investigated and to be updated. If there were 12 385 Finnish students studying abroad in 2004, the demand for information on the topic is considerable, taking into account also the family and the friends of the returnees, as well as practitioners who are to create effective re-entry training programmes.

Therefore we should not stop the talk about sojourn when the sojourner jumps on the aeroplane and leaves the foreign land. Quite the opposite, we should undeniably also take into account re-entry, which is a vital process in the whole intercultural experience. As we have seen, its end products, such as personal growth and development, are outcomes that the sojourners can everlastingly benefit from. With all the experiences, and with all the possibilities, the students of today have the world at their feet.

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The electronic questionnaire form in English

Dear all,

I am currently writing a thesis as a part of my MA studies in Intercultural Communication at the University of Jyväskylä. In my thesis I will focus on investigating possible communication problems that Finnish returnees encounter when returning to their home country. I will concentrate on higher education level students who have spent at least one semester studying abroad. I will collect their experiences through an electronic questionnaire that you can find in this email.

I would truly appreciate your participation in completing the open-ended questionnaire and sharing your valuable experiences for the purpose of my thesis. Your information will be treated anonymously and confidentially. Unnamed quotations might be used in the thesis itself or in research seminars related to it. If possible, try to answer every question in the questionnaire within one month, either in English or in Finnish. Do not hesitate to write to me for additional information (jekaikon@cc.jyu.fi). You can also return the questionnaire by email to the previous address.

Thank you for sparing a moment and being kindly and helpful!

Best wishes,
Jenni Ikonen

Age when moving abroad:

Gender:

Nationality:

The foreign country you lived in:

The time spent in the foreign country:

1. How did you first adapt to the new culture?

2. In the long run, how would you describe your adjustment to the new country? Did you feel like part of the new culture/ strongly like belonging to only the Finnish culture/ like you belonged to both cultures/ or that you did not belong anywhere?

3. How did you keep in touch with your friends/family at home?

4. During what moments did you miss home?

5. After how much time did you feel "at home" in the foreign country you lived in, if you did at all?

6. Did you experience a culture shock? Please explain.

7. What did you expect your re-entry to Finland to be like?

8. What was it actually like?

9. Could you describe your feelings upon returning? (E.g. Did you feel like a Finn, a stranger, both, or neither?)

10. How had the people/environment in the home country changed, if they had?

11. How did your old relationships change when you moved back to Finland, if they did?

12. How did the people at home react when you told them about your foreign experiences? Did you encounter any communication problems?

13. Was it easy or frustrating for you to express your experiences of living abroad? Did you feel like the others understood you? Please explain.

14. Describe the changes you found about your own nonverbal communication or what others at home commented about it (e.g. eye contact, being "touchy", gestures, etc.).

15. Were you stressed or anxious when you returned? How did that affect your communication in the home country?

16. How do you think you had changed while living abroad?

17. How did your perceptions or feelings about Finland change as a result of having lived abroad?

18. What features in Finland were hard for you to face when returning? (For example, did you think people were reserved, etc.?)

19. What helped you get through your re-entry, if it was difficult to you?

20. Who was your support during the whole re-entry process?

21. Who became the closest people to you after your returning?

22. If you live in Finland now, how do you feel?

23. How would you feel like about moving abroad again?

24. What have you learned and how have you developed as a person as a consequence of your foreign experience?

25. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?

The electronic questionnaire form in Finnish

Hei!

Kirjoitan parhaillaan gradua osana kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän opintoja Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Gradussani keskityn mahdollisiin kommunikointiongelmiin, joita suomalaiset paluumuuttajat kokevat palatessaan kotimaahansa. Syvennyn ylemmän asteen oppilaitoksen opiskelijoihin, jotka ovat viettäneet vähintään yhden lukukauden opiskellen ulkomailla. Kerään heidän kokemuksiaan elektronisen kyselyn välityksellä, joka löytyy liitteenä tästä sähköpostista sekä suomeksi että englanniksi.

Arvostaisin kovasti osallistumistanne tähän tutkimukseen ja toivoisin, että jakaisitte arvokkaat kokemuksenne täyttämällä kyselyni. Tietojanne käsitellään anonyymisti ja luottamuksellisesti. Nimettömiä lainauksia saattaa esiintyä gradussani tai yliopiston graduseminaareissa. Jos mahdollista, yrittäkää vastata jokaiseen kysymykseen kuukauden sisällä, joko suomeksi tai englanniksi. Lisätietoja varten voitte ottaa yhteyttä minuun (jekaikon@cc.jyu.fi). Voitte myös palauttaa kyselyn sähköpostitse edelliseen osoitteeseen.

Kiitos vaivannäöstä ja tärkeästä avusta!

Ystävällisin terveisin,
Jenni Ikonen

Ikä, jolloin muutit opiskelemaan ulkomaille:

Sukupuoli:

Kansalaisuus:

Maa, jossa asuit:

Aika, jonka vietit ulkomailla:

1. Kuinka aluksi sopeuduit uuteen kulttuuriin?

2. Miten kuvailisit sopeutumistasi ulkomaille pidemmällä aikavälillä? Tuntuiko, että olit osa uutta kulttuuria/ kuuluit vahvasti vain suomalaiseen kulttuuriin/ kuuluit molempiin kulttuureihin/ et tuntenut kuuluvasi mihinkään?

3. Miten pidit yhteyttä perheeseesi ja ystäviisi kotimaassa?

4. Millaisina hetkinä sinulla oli koti-ikävä?

5. Kuinka pitkän ajan kuluttua olosi oli kotoisa uudessa maassa, jos se oli lainkaan?

6. Koitko kulttuurisokkia? Kuvaile.

7. Minkälaiset odotukset sinulla oli paluustasi Suomeen?

8. Millainen paluusi todellisuudessa oli?

9. Voisitko kuvailla tunteitasi, jotka liittyivät kotiinpaluuseesi? (esim. tunsitko olevasi suomalainen, muukalainen, molempia tai ei kumpaakaan?)

10. Kuinka ihmiset/ympäristö olivat muuttuneen kotimaassa, jos ne olivat muuttuneen ollenkaan?

11. Miten vanhat ihmissuhteesi muuttuivat, kun muutit takaisin Suomeen?

12. Miten ihmiset kotona reagoivat, kun kerroit heille ulkomaan kokemuksistasi? Huomasitko minkäänlaisia kommunikointivaikeuksia?

13. Oliko sinun helppoa vai turhauttavaa kertoa ulkomaan kokemuksistasi? Koitko, että muut ymmärsivät sinua? Kuvaile.

14. Luonnehdi muutoksia omassa ei-verbaalisessa viestinnässäsi, joita itse huomasit tai joita muut ihmiset sinussa havaitsivat? (esim. katsekontakti, koskettelu, eleet yms.)

15. Olitko stressaantunut palatessasi? Miten tämä vaikutti kommunikointiisi?

16. Miten koet muuttuneesi ulkomailla asumisen seurauksena?

17. Miten näkemyksesi tai tunteesi Suomesta muuttuivat ulkomailla asumisen aikana?

18. Mitkä asiat Suomessa olivat sinulle vaikeita kohdata palatessasi? (esim. tuntuivatko ihmiset varautuneille, yms.?)

19. Mikä auttoi sinua paluumuutossasi, jos se oli sinulle vaikea?

20. Kuka oli tukenasi paluun aikana?

21. Keistä muodostui sinulle läheisimmät ihmiset paluusi jälkeen?

22. Jos asut nyt Suomessa, miltä sinusta tuntuu?

23. Miltä sinusta tuntuisi muuttaa ulkomaille uudestaan?

24. Mitä olet oppinut ja miten olet kehittynyt ihmisenä ulkomaan kokemuksiesi seurauksena?

25. Haluaisitko vielä lisätä tai mainita jotain?