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The Experiences of Hispanic International Students as Interviewees in a Cross-Cultural Interview Project

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The Experiences of Hispanic International Students as Interviewees in a Cross-Cultural
Interview Project

Ren Steven Carbutt

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Experiences of Hispanic International Students as Interviewees in a Cross-Cultural Interview Project

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In the field of world language education, it has long been affirmed that language and culture are inseparable. It has also often been asked how teaching language and culture in an inseparable way is to be accomplished. One solution that has been proposed is ethnographic interviews. Other studies have demonstrated that interviewing native cultural informants is beneficial for language students. This study examined whether such interviews are also beneficial to the native informants. The participants in this project, sixteen native speakers of Spanish, were each interviewed three times by a pair of Spanish students who employed ethnographic techniques as a part of the interview process. The native speakers answered two brief questionnaires, one before and one after the interviews, and many of them participated in one-on-one interviews with me, the primary researcher, to follow-up on their answers to those questionnaires and their experiences with the interviews.

I found that the participants perceived the project as beneficial in multiple areas including, but not limited to, the chance it gave them to talk about their culture, the interest they perceived in their culture and their viewpoints, and the opportunity it gave them to confirm, modify, or strengthen conclusions they had made from previous cultural experience. A small percentage of the native speakers either did not understand or appreciate the ethnographic techniques that were employed. However, after initial interviews, I gave the students of Spanish feedback on how to better make use of those techniques in order to improve the students' and native speakers' experiences with the interviews and a large majority of the native speakers observed how the subsequent interviews improved. Therefore, similar projects might benefit from making use of this information. Specifically, it might be useful to explain ethnographic techniques not just to interviewers, but also to interviewees, so that both groups might better understand and appreciate the purpose of those techniques. It might also be useful to give feedback to those who use ethnographic techniques to interview native culture informants.

Keywords: foreign language teaching and learning, culture, ethnographic interviews

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Culture and language are inseparable. In terms of language and culture teaching and learning and their related literature in recent years, that idea has been expressed in distinct ways over and over again. Perhaps the most popular related question when it comes to teaching language and culture in an inseparable way is simply, how is it done? Over the years, there have been many answers offered to that question. One of the most sensible of these answers may be the suggestion that teachers should work to facilitate intercultural interactions for their students. One example of such interactions is ethnographic interviews.

To put it simply, an ethnographic interview consists of interviewing a cultural insider about that person's culture. More specifically, an ethnographic interview seeks to take inquiry beyond lists of questions or the confirming or rejecting of preconceived notions. An ethnographic interview's purpose is to "dig deep" into topics that are important to the interviewer. These interviews often begin with a broad, open-ended question such as, "What is it like to _____?" or "How does it feel to _____?". These types of interviews have been used in a variety of settings, including assignments in which foreign language learners interview native speakers outside the classroom in the United States (Bateman 2002, 2004; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996), and in study abroad settings (Lee, 2012; Thompson, 2001). Although these studies have shown that these types of experiences are beneficial in a number of ways for students, including university students of Spanish and others, there seems to be no study that explores if or how such experiences might be beneficial, or at least perceived as beneficial, for the people being interviewed – in this case, international students at a North American university.

Many universities in the United States have the privilege of having international students, or students from other nations who are studying abroad in the United States, as a part of their student bodies. These international students often come from Spanish-speaking countries (Open Doors Report, 2011). In addition, the institutions of higher education in the United States with the largest number of international students also offer Spanish programs. These facts speak to the likelihood of a significant number of university Spanish programs being able to facilitate interaction between students of Spanish and international students from Spanish-speaking countries. However, as stated previously, although studies have shown that such interaction can be beneficial for students of Spanish, no studies to date have demonstrated if, or how, these students interacting with international students might be beneficial for the international students. Those international students are, in this case, students from Spanish-speaking countries. If it is demonstrated that interaction between students of foreign languages and cultures and students or individuals who are natives to those cultures is beneficial to both groups, then there need be no reservations about facilitating interaction between such groups as a possible way for simultaneous language and culture learning to take place.

Purpose of the Study

Because research has shown that ethnographic interview projects are beneficial for language learners, and because there is no research that demonstrates what benefits, if any, interviewees may derive from such cultural interview projects, this ethnographic interview project, which was largely inspired by Bateman's (2002, 2004) research, was designed to be carried out with participants who were international students and native speakers of Spanish at Brigham Young University. The overarching purpose was to find out how the project might be perceived as beneficial or not to these international students. In other words, the present study

principally sought to begin to find out the benefits and drawbacks of participating in an ethnographic interview project as perceived by international university students studying in the United States who are from Spanish-speaking countries and who have been interviewed about their culture by students of Spanish. The study was also designed to find out from these same international students how any benefits might be maximized as well as how any drawbacks might be minimized.

Overview of the Study

The participants in this study were native speakers of Spanish from BYU's English Language Center. Each international student filled out a pre-questionnaire and then each was to participate in three ethnographic interviews with two students of Spanish 205 at BYU. They were then asked to respond to a post-questionnaire. Finally, they were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with me so that I could find out more about their experience, especially as it related to the research questions.

The principal research questions of this study were:

- (1) What are the perceived benefits, if any, for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participate in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners?
- (2) What are the perceived drawbacks, if any, for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participate in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners?
- (3) According to international students who are native speakers of Spanish, what might be done to maximize any benefits of such a project while minimizing any drawbacks?

The data were then analyzed in terms of the research questions as well as themes that emerged from my analysis of the interview and questionnaire responses.

Significance of the Study

As has been mentioned, this research process was specifically meant to take into account the perspective of cultural insiders who interact with language learners in a series of ethnographic interviews. In addition to identifying the possible benefits that the international student participants might perceive and reflect upon as a result of this project, this experience may also have the potential to provide indications as to how to maximize the benefits for similar research participants, or students, taking part in similar projects. Accordingly, a significant portion of the study focused on maximization of benefits and minimization of drawbacks. It was also hoped that this project could provide insight related to the type of contact and reflection that might assist in overcoming the negative thoughts and feelings that affect many students who study abroad.

Preview of the Organization and Content of the Thesis

The present chapter has presented an introduction to the research that was carried out. Chapter 2 will provide a review of some of the literature related to international students and ethnographic interviews as a tool for culture learning. Chapter 3 will further outline methodology and research questions. Chapter 4 will present the results and findings of this study. Chapter 5 will discuss those results and elaborate on implications and ideas for further study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

International Students in the Nation and at Brigham Young University

In November 2011, the Institute of International Education released the “Open Doors” report, which stated that the number of international students in the United States has increased for five consecutive years, representing a 5% increase from the previous academic year and a 32% increase from ten years ago; these increases represent a record 723,277 international students studying in the United States. Of that number, three of the top 25 countries represented are Latin American. They are Mexico (#9), Colombia (#21), and Venezuela (#23), with the latter being one of the top five countries in terms of percent increase of student enrollment from that country. Recent statistics gathered about Brigham Young University show a 6% international student population and 1,091 self-identified Hispanics (BYU Demographics, 2010).

Culture Shock and Prejudice

Literature has shown that international students experience difficulty adjusting to their new homes. Because such adjustment difficulties are commonly related to cultural issues, this phenomenon has been referred to as “culture shock” since the 1950s (Oberg, 1954). Others since then have used the term and described the experience in their writing and research (Adler, 1975; Jackson, 2006; Ludwig, 2012; Pedersen, 1995; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham 2001) and now “culture shock” has become part of commonly understood speech. One recent example of this adjustment, or shock, from the literature that seems especially pertinent comes from Chavajay and Skowronek (2008), who found that 130 international students at a university in Utah “perceived ... acculturation stresses related to discrimination, feelings of loneliness, and academic concerns” (p. 1). The students with this perception were most likely in the second stage

of culture shock described by Oberg, which is often characterized by hostility and aggression, or perhaps the third stage in which a possibly grudging resolution is made to work through cultural differences (1954). To remain in either of these stages and harbor feelings of hostility, aggressiveness, or even resigned or condescending cooperation is to remain in a state conducive to the development of prejudice. However, there are a multitude of proposals that suggest ways to not remain in such a state or develop prejudice. Some of these proposals are outlined in the subsequent section.

Overcoming Culture Shock and Prejudice

One pioneering idea on overcoming prejudice is Allport's Contact Hypothesis. It essentially states that contact between distinct groups, when occurring under certain conditions, may lead to a decrease in prejudice. Allport names four necessary conditions for this outcome: equal status, common goals, institutional supports, and perceived commonalities (such as shared interests and humanity) between the people in each group (Allport, 1954/1979). Related research that has been carried out since the development of the Contact Hypothesis has tentatively concluded that "retaining group salience in a positive, intimate, cross-group interaction appears to be the best way to optimize intergroup contact" (Kenworthy, Turner, Hewstone & Voci, 2005, p. 283). In other words, the best interaction between people of different groups happens when individuals from those groups retain their group identity in a personal and affirmative setting.

The value of intercultural contact in a study abroad setting. Other studies that examined the experiences of U.S. students studying abroad, whose experiences in some ways parallel that of international students studying in the U.S., have affirmed the value of intercultural contact in that setting. Two examples of this are studies carried out by Williams

(2005) and Martinsen (2011). In the fall of 2002, two groups of participants were compared in Williams's study. One was comprised of 44 undergraduate university students at Texas Christian University who studied abroad for the semester in different countries including Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The other group was made up of 48 students from the same university who studied on campus during that same semester and were enrolled in one of two classes visited, an English course or a general studies business course.

The participants were given a self-report pretest at the beginning of the semester and a self-report posttest at the end, the results of which were meant to measure the students' intercultural sensitivity and intercultural adaptability, the combination of which were described in the study as intercultural communication skills. A comparison of pre- and posttest results was designed to demonstrate any change that occurred for the students at the end of the semester. These assessments were a combination of the already established and researched Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) and the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI). For the pretest, the 80 total items from both the CCAI (50) and ISI (30) were combined with a mixture of demographic questions to determine participants' background and previous exposure to other cultures totaling 95 questions on the pretest as opposed to solely the 80 CCAI and ISI items on the posttest. Thirty-six from each group, the abroad and on-campus students, returned pretest surveys. Of the abroad students, 27 returned posttests, and 25 of the campus students did the same.

The project's data analysis concluded that students who studied abroad demonstrated a larger increase in intercultural communication skills. However, it was determined that regardless of whether students studied abroad, "exposure to other cultures was the only statistically

significant predictor of total intercultural communication skills” (Williams, 2005, p. 369) with other predictors that were taken into account being gender, age, academic level, major, religion, and hometown. Given the challenges and limitations of the study, some of which are enumerated by the author, including the self-study format, the small size of tested groups, ... and the only moderate reliability of the ISI test, the results are not extremely generalizable. However, Williams contends that, insofar as they can, the project’s conditions and results do demonstrate the value of intercultural exposure, including personal contact between individuals of other cultures.

Martinsen’s study (2011) involved 45 participants who were native English speakers and students at a large university in the southwestern United States. The participants studied abroad in Argentina during a six-week summer program. The study’s goal was to determine how students change during that time in terms of cultural sensitivity, as well as the factor or factors that might predict gains in cultural sensitivity. The four factors measured were pre-program levels of motivation and oral language skills, relationship with host family, and interaction with native speakers.

Participants’ oral language skills were measured before and after the study abroad program by having them respond orally to two contextualized tasks from the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and the Texas Oral Proficiency Test, which is based on the OPI. Students’ motivation was measured by their responses on a 5-point Likert scale to statements on a brief questionnaire. These statements were based on previous research on motivation in language learning. The questionnaire’s reliability was calculated using a reliability coefficient, Cronbach’s Alpha, and was shown to have a good internal consistency of the questionnaires’ scores estimated reliability.

Surveys were used to measure relationships with host families and interaction with native speakers. The Language Contact Profile was used to measure interaction with native speakers, while another survey designed specifically for the study was used to measure relationships with host families. These instruments' reliability was also estimated as high through Cronbach's Alpha. Insofar as they could, the studies' conditions and results demonstrated that of all the factors examined, the only one that could be used to predict the increase in the study abroad student's cultural sensitivity was interaction with native speakers. In short, these studies show that in order for any gains from intercultural contact or exposure to occur, there must be intercultural contact or exposure.

Ethnography and ethnographic interviews. The practice of ethnography has the potential to enhance the benefits gained through intercultural contact or exposure. Interestingly, the term, as well as the practice, appear to have been described in distinct ways in different literature. In general, ethnography is a technique utilized by anthropologists to describe culture from an insider's, or native of that culture's, perspective (Spradley, 1979). However, one author, in discussing the historical evolution of the term, recognizes a distinction between "new" and "old" ethnography, with the "new" being more subjective and narrative in nature as opposed to objective and "encyclopaedic" in nature (Roberts, 2003, p. 125).

One research tool used by ethnographers is the ethnographic interview. This type of interview is conducted with a cultural insider from the community who is able to give a unique and exclusive viewpoint on a given subject (Rodríguez Pino, 1997). One description of such interviews indicates that an ethnographic interview is done "in the context of a relationship with interviewees with whom the researcher has, through an ongoing presence, established relations of rapport and respect" (Fielding, 2006, p. 99). However, as will be discussed later, ethnographic

interviews have also been used in conjunction with practices that do not require an interviewer's previous ongoing presence. Whatever the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, ethnographic interviews require an organized system in which students can be taught to pose evocative questions and develop listening skills in an interview situation.

Benefits of ethnographic techniques including ethnographic interviews. The use of ethnographic interviews to positively build and change students affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively has been advocated by various individuals (Byram & Morgan, 1994; Damen, 1987; Hickey, 1980; Jurasek, 1995; Robinson, 1988). Because these interviews require a significant time commitment from both students and teachers, they can lead to a variety of positive outcomes. It has also been pointed out that the students' part of that commitment can be particularly significant in that it puts students in a situation where they are required to listen to someone whose viewpoint differs from theirs, which they may have never had to do before (Robinson, 1988).

Other literature discusses the need for students to have a heightened awareness of their own culture and for teachers to help them do so. It has been recommended that instructors let students examine cross-cultural interaction from their own point of view, thus empowering them to discover their own opinions (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). It has also been suggested that we can better comprehend distinct ways of interpreting cultural realities by first having an increased sensitivity to and understanding of our way of interpreting them (Galloway, 2001). Other studies have concluded that cultural observation techniques, or ethnography, when combined with reflection, can further increase students' cultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence (Jackson, 2006; Roberts, 2003).

Ethnographic interviews and study abroad. One setting in which ethnographic interviews have been used successfully in conjunction with some form of reflection is study abroad. Two examples of this can be found in studies by Thompson (2001) and Lee (2012). During the summer of 2000, 18 certified elementary and secondary school teachers participated in Thompson's study during Brigham Young University's Summer Institute in Spain. As a part of the study, the participants were given instruction on how to conduct ethnographic interviews and they were asked to complete 10 such interviews while in Spain. They also filled out a questionnaire every week which asked them to elaborate on their feelings. Among the information these questionnaires contained was participants' responses to the ethnographic interview process. They were also given a survey after their study abroad experience which was designed to quantify the participants' impressions regarding how the ethnographic interviews affected their attitudes and cultural knowledge.

The questionnaires and the survey indicated that the participants who completed them viewed the interviews as "an excellent learning and growing opportunity" (p. 70). Thompson reports that "many participants chose to ask native informants questions that they had thought about for a long time. Several were excited to return to their schools with their new-found knowledge to share it with their students ... One participant, who was born in Latin America, stated that she was able to learn more about her heritage and where her ancestors came from" (pp. 69-70). Other individuals reported that the interviews helped them to overcome stereotypes and see the people they interviewed as helpful, open, and honest. Many of the participants felt they were able to learn about individual and group similarities and differences between cultures through the ethnographic interviews.

Lee's study (2012) involved 16 American students as participants who were part of two study abroad programs sponsored by the Center of Modern Languages at the University of Granada in Spain in the Fall of 2009. As a part of their coursework, the participants conducted a number of ethnographic interviews, mostly with members of their host families or Spanish university students with whom they practiced speaking the language, and reflected on those interviews through blog entries. After having completed the required coursework, the participants were invited to complete an online survey about their experiences. Of the 16 participants, 15 completed the survey. They also participated in small group interviews (3-4 participants each) with the researcher. The discussion of the findings was centered on "the effectiveness of blogs on [Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and] the affordances of ethnographic interviews for ICC" (p. 12). What follows in this review of literature will focus on the latter of those two parts of the discussion, but it should not be forgotten that reflection, which in this case happened through blogs, has been shown to be an important part of maximizing the usefulness of ethnographic interviews.

The post-survey in the Lee (2012) study mentioned earlier reflected participants' perspectives in the form of their responses to statements about the project on a 6-point Likert scale. The statements from the survey related to ethnographic interviews were:

1. I enjoyed conducting oral interviews with native speakers.
2. I found ethnographic interviews engaging and informative.
3. Ethnographic interviews allowed me to gain valuable insights into the host culture. (p. 13)

Participants' responses for these items ranged from 4.13 to 4.27 with standard deviation ranging from 0.52 to 0.59. These responses were considered high ratings by the researcher given that a

response of 5 on the survey's scale indicated that its respondents strongly agreed with the statement. The researcher's views on the utility of the ethnographic interviews was summarized through the statement that ethnographic interviews helped participants "not only [gain] cultural knowledge but also [become] more aware of their own beliefs and attitudes toward their own culture" (19). These results, as well as those of Thompson's (2001) study, demonstrate that ethnographic interviews are perceived positively when used in study abroad. More specifically, they are also seen as useful in a number of ways including native and target culture learning and overcoming stereotypes.

Ethnography and the classroom. Study abroad settings are not the only place that ethnographic interviews have been shown to be useful. Studies by Bateman (2002, 2004) and Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) are examples of the process of ethnographic interview projects used in conjunction with university foreign language classrooms in the United States. The project by Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) took place in the Fall of 1991 at San Diego University and involved 26 university Spanish students in their third semester of study of the language. These participants were given an attitude survey which recorded demographic data and elicited students' attitudes and feelings about the study of Spanish and Spanish speakers. The participants were then trained in ethnographic interview techniques. After having completed the training, the participants were required to locate a native Spanish speaker to interview two or three times. Finally, the participants were given another survey which had the many of the same questions as the first one, as well as other questions about the process of participating in the ethnographic interviewing project.

Among the results of these surveys, two questions that appeared on both the pre- and post-attitude measures through data analysis showed statistically significant positive change. The

questions showed that participants felt more positive about both having a language requirement and Spanish helping them to make more Mexican friends. The more open-ended items on the post survey that were related more specifically to the ethnographic interview project “indicated a positive change in attitudes toward the local Mexican population in particular and toward Spanish study in general” (p. 440). These items also demonstrated the participants’ unanimous support of the project at the end of the semester, including the recommendation that it be required in future Spanish classes. The researchers took that recommendation and replicated the project in the Spring of 1992. This replication produced almost identical results.

Bateman (2004), expanding on this and other previous related survey research by using a qualitative case study methodology, aimed to “provide a rich qualitative description of the culture learning of a group of university students of Spanish as they participated in an ethnographic interview project” (Bateman, 2004, p. 236). Accordingly, 54 university Spanish students at the University of Minnesota’s Twin Cities’ campus, after having received training in the use of ethnographic interview techniques and locating, with or without assistance, a willing native speaker of Spanish, completed one to three interviews with their native informants. Prior to completing the interviews, these participants were given a questionnaire that provided information on their previous experience with language and culture learning. After each interview, participants were to submit via e-mail a journal entry which encouraged them to reflect on what they had learned. At the end of the semester, participants completed a post-questionnaire evaluating and giving feedback on the project. Additionally, at midsemester, six participants were selected to provide additional information through open-ended interviews with the researcher. This small group represented a “wide demographic cross-section based on students’ responses to the prequestionnaire” (p. 237).

The researcher's conclusions about this interview data were confirmed by the participants through member checks. The data were also analyzed through coding and grouping into related categories, which was aided by computer software. The analysis revealed positive change in a number of areas. These included: challenging stereotypes and misconceptions, desire to travel to, study in or live in a Spanish-speaking country, empathy for members of Hispanic cultures, interest in pursuing a friendship with Hispanic individuals, making accommodations for communicating across cultures, comfort and confidence in interacting with members of other cultures, awareness and acceptance of cultural differences, awareness of similarities among cultures, and awareness of the positive and negative aspects of the participants' own or U.S. culture. Although not all participants' responses were positive and there was a significant time commitment and coordination difficulty, the potential drawbacks of this and other studies involving ethnographic interviews have seemed to consistently be outweighed by the benefits of such projects. In commenting on the use of this type of project as a part of undergraduate university language and culture studies, one author has affirmed that "an ethnographic approach is as near as any student can get, in the few years of an undergraduate programme, to learning new cultural systems and practices from the inside" (Roberts, 1994, p. 14).

Chapter 2 Summary

Intercultural contact, especially the kind that occurs in ethnographic interviewing, has been shown to have the potential of being helpful in many ways, including aiding with culture shock and assisting in the reevaluation of prejudiced preconceptions. It has also been suggested that the ethnographic approach is a worthwhile activity for native speakers of Spanish to impart their original perspective about their life within the culture (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). However, what has yet to be evaluated is how the native informants or individuals who are

interviewed about their culture perceive such interviews. There are probably no teachers who would want their students to interview native cultural informants about their culture if research had demonstrated that such an activity was perceived as intrusive or a waste of time for the native cultural informants. This study seeks to begin to answer that question as it relates to international students from Spanish-speaking countries who were recently studying at Brigham Young University's English Language Center.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS

Study Design and Research Questions

In order to determine what international students who are native speakers of Spanish perceive to be the benefits and drawbacks of being interviewed about their culture by students of Spanish, qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions on pre- and post-questionnaires, as well as in-depth, open-ended interviewing were sought from international students who had been interviewed about their culture. During the one-on-one interviews with me, the participants were asked mostly open-ended questions about their interview experiences and, insofar as benefits and drawbacks were identified, they were asked for suggestions on how to maximize benefits and minimize drawbacks. Therefore, the research questions were as follows:

- (1) What are the perceived benefits, if any, for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participate in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners?
- (2) What are the perceived drawbacks, if any, for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participate in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners?
- (3) According to international students who are native speakers of Spanish, what might be done to maximize any benefits of such a project while minimizing any drawbacks?

The data were then analyzed in terms of the research questions, as well as themes that emerged from the interview and questionnaire responses.

Participants

The participants in this study were native speakers of Spanish who recently were studying as international students at BYU's English Language Center. There were 16 total participants, four male and twelve female. They ranged in age from 18 to 27 years with the average age being 22. Participants' experience with living in or visiting the United States ranged from one month and never having visited before, to living here for more than a year and having visited constantly for years. Seven of the 16 participants were from Mexico. The only other country that was represented by more than one participant in terms of the place they were born was Colombia. Other countries represented were Guatemala, Ecuador, Perú, Chile, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic, totaling nine countries.

Data Sources

The data sources from this study were:

- Pre- and Post-Questionnaires completed by the international students.
- Digitally-recorded, one-on-one interviews between 11 of the international students and me, as well as some informal notes taken during the interviews including after the recording had ceased.

Implementation of the Project

Thirty-two students enrolled in Spanish 205 at BYU received training from me instructing them how to conduct open-ended, ethnographic interviews. The training consisted of students watching a video about ethnographic interviews, practicing those skills with their classmates, and, with the exception of one pair, receiving feedback from me after their first interview with an international student. The students of Spanish participated in taped interviews with the 16 native speaker participants (two students per one native speaker) with each interview ideally lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The students of Spanish conducted the interviews, for

the most part, with the same international student. The international student participants received an e-mail forwarded from me briefly explaining the project and inviting them to participate. I met with many of those who responded to the e-mail. In those meetings the formalities of their participation were taken care of, and I obtained their contact information. Each pair of Spanish students was given then given the contact information of one of the participants, after which they contacted their interviewee to set up the interviews. There was provision for a little flexibility in the language used in the interviews, with the understanding being that the vast majority of the interviews would be conducted completely in Spanish.

Prior to their first interview with the students of Spanish, each international student filled out a pre-questionnaire. They then participated in one to three open-ended ethnographic interviews with two students of Spanish. After their last interview, participants responded to the post-questionnaire via e-mail or in person. Finally, I held one-on-one interviews with 11 of the participants to find out about their experience, especially as it related to the research questions. I made an effort to interview all 17 participants, and I was able to interview 11. Immediately prior to 10 of the 11 interviews, the participants filled out the post-questionnaire, after which I asked them to describe to me their experience in the ethnographic interviews with the students of Spanish. I asked them about their feelings and experiences about different parts of the interview that they described. I also asked them to elaborate on other aspects they mentioned, as well as areas that interested me even if they did not mention them. In the interest of maintaining the flow of some interviews, as well as trying to ensure that nothing significant was neglected, I sometimes used the questions and responses on the post-questionnaire to guide the conversation.

The 11 participants who participated in one-on-one interviews with me were representative of the entire group in terms of age, gender, nationality, and time lived or spent in

the United States,. The total time commitment for the international students was five hours maximum. Due to that large commitment, as compensation for their time, participants were invited to a pizza party at the conclusion of the research. At that party, they were invited to enter their names in a drawing to receive a \$100 Wells Fargo Visa gift card.

Data Analysis

There were over 100 pages of transcriptions just from my one-on-one interviews with participants, as well as 36 pages of quotes that fit into the various thematic categories that appear in Chapter 4. As the previous sentence implies, during transcription as well as after, the analysis consisted of identifying common themes in the data. In addition, the data were analyzed in connection with the research questions by looking for common themes among the interviewees' responses that were related to those questions. Of the common themes identified, however, some were clearly connected to the research questions while others were not as clearly connected but still had a connection. Therefore, the most important part of the data disaggregation and analysis seemed to be the follow-up interviews with the culture natives, and the subsequent transcription and analysis, because it solidified, both for me and for the native speakers of Spanish who participated in the one-on-one follow-up interviews with me, our interpretations of what had occurred and the significance of those interpretations.

There were several elements that affected how this study was designed and conducted. With regard to my choices pertaining to the interview process itself as well as transcription and data analysis, I consulted several sources (King & Horrocks, 2010; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Packer, 2011; Patton, 2002; Poland, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). However, I opted to follow a very simple interview format with the participants. In addition, after transcribing one interview verbatim, I determined that edited transcripts would be just as useful. The difference between the

first verbatim transcription and the subsequent transcriptions is that I transcribed little or none of the pauses, laughter, and filler words. I also omitted other aspects of spoken language in order to make the transcript more readable.

For the analysis, I engaged in a personal, intuitive analysis of the data as opposed to following what others might view as more formal and perhaps objective procedures. With regard to this latter type of analysis, Packer (2011) makes a solid, strong argument against the traditional method of data analysis of qualitative interviews. In this traditional method themes are said to emerge from the data as important. This emergence is said to be observed objectively and the themes are then said to be logically categorized and analyzed. In reality, however, the objectivity and logicity of such procedures are really more of a subjective analysis by the researcher. After pointing out the lack of logic and objectivity of this type of analysis, and citing several others who have pointed out the same or similar flaws, Packer suggests that researchers describe their analysis of their data in this way: “Here is my reading of the text. And here’s what this reading is responding to” (Packer, 2011 p. 119). Accordingly, the analysis of the data is my reading of what was said in response to my research questions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Questionnaire Data

Pre-questionnaires

There were three purposes of the questions on the pre-questionnaire. The first was to gather some demographic data on the participants. Second, was to determine the participants' previous experience with the United States and its cultures. The last purpose was to determine where the participants were starting in terms of intercultural experience and opinions, including where they thought their American interviewers were as far as their knowledge about each participant's unique culture. There were a total of eight questions on the pre-questionnaire.

In Question 6, participants were asked to quantify on a Likert scale of one to six the level of understanding they thought that Americans had of their culture. A score of one would indicate complete ignorance and a score of six would indicate complete comprehension. The lowest score given was two and the highest given was four with the average score being 2.87. Therefore, the overall perception of the participants is that Americans are just below the midpoint of the scale when it comes to having an understanding of the culture of the native speakers.

On the other side of the coin, Question 7 asked if cultural differences had affected the participants' intercultural interactions, and if so, how. That question showed that ten of the sixteen participants felt that cultural differences had affected their intercultural interactions little if at all. Interestingly, in response to the next question, "If you could choose one or two aspects of your culture that you would like Americans to understand what would it/they be and why?" Fourteen out of 16 participants had encountered cultural differences in their intercultural interactions, and the most common answer to what they would like Americans to better

understand was the participants' social interactions, with the main idea being that closeness with friends and family is very important to them. Specifically, they want their unique manner of interaction in close social relationships to be at least understood, if not valued.

Post-questionnaires

The purpose of the post-questionnaire, which was based on the post-questionnaire used by Bateman (2002, 2004) was for the participants in part to give some descriptive details about their experience; however, the majority of the questions were geared toward eliciting responses that would give an evaluation of their experience in the three interviews with the students of Spanish. Of the 15 participants who responded to the post-questionnaire, 12 had participated in three interviews or more (one participant's response indicated that individual had done four interviews). Two participants completed two interviews and one did only one. The length of almost all of the interviews with the students of Spanish was reported as being between 40 and 60 minutes. There were two items that made use of a six-point Likert scale on the post-questionnaire. A score of six would indicate that a participant felt comfortable during the interviews for one item, and that it would be very probable that they would participate in a similar project in the future on the other. Fourteen of the 15 participants reported feeling comfortable during the interviews, and twelve of them indicated that it would be very probable that they would participate in a similar project in the future.

The remainder of the questions on the post-questionnaire (Questions 4 through 10 and 12) were designed to elicit open-ended responses to items that were connected to the research questions. The first of those questions (Questions 4 through 7) dealt with the learning that might have taken place during the project, both what the participants learned about themselves and what they learned about the U.S. and their home cultures. Question 8 asked what impact, if any,

the project had on their attitudes towards Americans. Questions 9 and 10 asked participants to describe the positive and negative aspects of their participation, and Question 12 asked them to give suggestions as to what they might change about the project (see Appendix A).

The next section will give a more detailed picture as it analyzes the responses to these questions in conjunction with what the eleven participants who participated in one-on-one interviews with me said to elaborate on them. Here, however, I will first give a summary of the most common responses to each of the items in the tables below. Only responses that were mentioned by two or more participants will be shown.

Table 1

Responses to the question “What differences between your Culture and the culture of the United States stood out for you during and after the project?”

Response	No. of Mentions
Friendship and socializing	4
Education	3
Dating and marriage customs	2
Family	2
Food and food preparation	2

Table 2

Responses to the question “What are the most important things you learned about yourself?”

Response	No. of Mentions
I have a greater appreciation for my native culture	7

I can help others	2
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Table 3

Responses to the question “What are the most important things you learned about your culture?”

Response	No. of Mentions
The positive aspect of my culture, especially family, and my culture’s importance	5
There are things about my culture that can be improved	2

Table 4

Responses to the question, “What did you learn about the culture of the United States?”

Response	No. of Mentions
It is more broad or open-minded than my home culture	4
It is more independent than my home culture	3
Compared to my home culture, it is more focused on or there are more opportunities for education, progress, and personal growth	3

Table 5

Responses to the question “What impact, if any, did this project have on your attitude towards Americans?”

Response	No. of Mentions
It had a positive impact	5
It had no impact	2

Table 6

Responses to the question “What were the positive aspects of your participation?”

Response	No. of Mentions
To talk about my culture	7
To talk about and learn about U.S. culture	4
To make a contribution to the project and cultural understanding	3
Social interaction with interviewers	2
To help with and actively participate in the project	2

Table 7

Responses to the question “What were the negative aspects of your participation?”

Response	No. of Mentions
Nothing	7
Not finishing the interviews	3

Table 8

Responses to the question “If you could change anything about this project, what would it be and why?”

Response	No. of Mentions
Nothing	4
More preparation by the interviewers	4

Open-ended Data from Post-questionnaire and Interviews

In this section I will be examining the benefits perceived by the participants that to me to emerge the most: educating others, appreciating interest in their own culture, learning more about and better appreciating their own culture, learning more about and better appreciating U.S. culture, and confirming, strengthening, or modifying conclusions from previous experiences. I will also discuss the participants' views on the unique value of this project, its drawbacks, and how it might be improved. As noted in the title, the participants' quotes that I will use to exemplify the various themes come from open-ended question data from both the post-questionnaire and the one-on-one interviews I had with eleven of the study's participants.

Perceived Benefits

Educating others. One of the first themes that emerged was that these interviews gave participants the opportunity to speak as experts and educate others, including dispelling myths about their countries. When asked to describe their experience with the interviews, one participant, Cristóbal (all participants' names have been changed) put it this way:

“Bueno, fue muy interesante platicar con personas que no son de mi misma cultura o que no haya conocido ... Este, y más poder comentar todas [las cosas que se hacen en mi país] a alguien que, pues, no lo conoce porque hay mucha gente que tiene mucha como una ideología o una imagen de lo que es nuestro país y, pues, poder aclarar esas dudas y todo eso es algo como muy muy, pues, lo pude aprovechar mucho ...” (*Well, it was interesting to talk to people who are not from my same culture or who have not gotten to know it ... And, what's more, to be able to tell all the things that are done in my country to someone who is not familiar with it, because there are a lot of people who have a lot*

of, like, an ideology or an image of what our country is and, so, to be able to clarify these doubts and all that is something I could really make the most out of ...”).

Other participants observed that, in addition to correcting misinformation about their culture, it was also satisfying to talk about their culture because they feel that theirs is a less well-known viewpoint and way of life. One in particular, Jacobo, said it very directly:

“Bueno, para mí, fue muy relajante o muy buena la experiencia porque pude ... dar a conocer un poco de mi cultura que casi no es muy conocida” (Well, for me, it was very relaxing or a very good experience because I was able to ... make known a little of my culture which is virtually not very well known).

This role of educator and expert that the participants assumed and found valuable is very interesting when considering that one of the benefits for the students of Spanish in Bateman’s study was a change in stereotypes or other misconceived points of view of Hispanic cultures. That both students of Spanish who were interviewers and native Spanish speakers who were interviewees found it valuable to educate and be educated in this way in both of these studies appears to be an encouraging sign of the contribution these projects can make to the lives of both the culture learners and the culture teachers who participate in them.

Appreciating interest in their own culture. It seems, however, that educating others about the participants’ cultures and viewpoints would not have been valuable had they not felt that those who were interviewing were interested in what they had to say. Therefore, it was encouraging to observe that many participants explicitly stated that the students of Spanish who interviewed them seemed sincerely interested in what they had to say. For example, one participant, Anita, answered one of the post-questionnaire items with the following: “Me gustó que había interés en conocer más acerca de mi cultura y no pensar solo en los estereotipos” (*I*

liked that there was interest in knowing more about my culture and not solely thinking of stereotypes). That participant expressed the same sentiment elsewhere on the post-questionnaire, as well as during the follow-up interview with me. Many other participants expressed a similar perception of genuine interest from their interviewers. In fact, one of the participants, Jacobo, felt that the students of Spanish were sincerely interested enough to perhaps change how they live:

RESEARCHER: Sí, entonces, para resumir yo veo tres beneficios que has mencionado, que pudiste hablar de tu cultura, pudiste compartir de los valores y también sentiste que tal vez ellos, por el conocimiento, el entendimiento nuevo que...

JACOBO: Recibían.

RESEARCHER: Sí que iban, a tal vez, vivir una vida diferente, cambiar.

JACOBO: Sí, pues, eso fue lo que, bueno, que yo espero que un día tal vez no que lo hagan en gran manera, pero como dicen de las cosas pequeñas se hacen grandes.

Entonces, tal vez de recordar lo de valorar.

RESEARCHER: Y viendo el interés que ellos tenían cuando tú hablaste, ¿cómo te sentiste?

JACOBO: Pues, me sentí bien el saber que estaba tanto contando acerca de un poco de mi país que ellos se interesaban también en lo que uno tiene que, no tiene que vivir porque no todo es igual, pero también les hice ver que una persona latina o una persona que es fuera de los Estados Unidos valora un poco más lo que es sus recursos.

(Researcher: Yes, then, to summarize I see three benefits that you have mentioned, that you were able to talk about your culture, you were able to share about your values, and that you also felt that perhaps they, because of the knowledge, the understanding that ...

Jacobo: They received.

Researcher: Yes, that they were going to live a different life, change.

Jacobo: Yes, well that was what, well, what I hope that one day perhaps they won't do it in a grand way, but as they say from small things come big things. So, perhaps remembering the idea of valuing.

Researcher: And seeing the interest that they had when you spoke, how did you feel?

Jacobo: Well, I felt good knowing that I was telling so much about my country and they were interested also in what one has to, not has to live, because not everything is the same, but I also made them see that a Latino or a person that is outside of the United States values their resources a little more).

Learning more about and better appreciating their home culture. The benefits perceived by these participants affect not only their teaching, but extend to their learning as well. Although some participants did not recognize that they learned about their home culture, other participants' experiences were very different. For example, one participant, Fernando, thought about the cultural differences discussed in the interviews after they were over, which deepened his awareness and appreciation for those differences. Perhaps more telling is that Fernando did not have all the answers for the interviewers' questions. Because of that he decided to investigate, including asking his parents for more information on some of the topics discussed. When speaking about how the interviews would affect his future actions he said,

Yo creo que por si en el futuro otras personas tienen interés o quieren saber más y vienen a mí y me preguntan porque yo soy mexicano y ven que no tengo así como una fuente una gran variedad de temas acerca de cultura mexicana, siento yo que van a tener como una idea general de cultura mexicana. En cambio, si tengo más conocimiento puedo

enriquecer su conocimiento de ellos y ellos a la vez pueden tener como más hambre de conocer más la cultura mexicana y pueden ir a México e investigar ...

(I believe that if in the future other people are interested or want to know more and come to me and ask me because I am Mexican and they see that I do not have a great variety of topics about Mexican culture, I feel that they will have like a general idea of Mexican culture. On the other hand, if I have more knowledge, I can enrich their knowledge and at the same time they can have more hunger to know the Mexican culture and they can go to Mexico and investigate ...).

Thus, that participant believed that learning more about his culture could be beneficial to his people as well as those with whom he talks about his culture in the future.

Several participants also expressed that it was good for them to talk about the country, culture, and people that they miss while studying abroad. For instance, one participant, Anastasia, after saying that sharing about her culture was a positive experience, was asked why it was positive. In part of her answer she observed, “ ... hay algunas cosas que ya no como que me olvidé, pero entonces cuando estaba hablando con ellas entonces me puse a acordarme de más cosas ...” (*... there are some things that I had forgotten, but then when I was talking with them I started remembering more things ...*).

Learning more about and better appreciating U.S. culture. Many participants also indicated that they were able to learn more about and better appreciate natives of the United States and their culture. This occurred as the participants’ experiences and cultural similarities and differences were discussed with the students of Spanish. As far as the benefit of not only observing but also discussing these cultural similarities and differences, Anastasia put it best:

Como ellas me estaban como preguntando algo y cuando yo les respondía ellas decían como eso es diferente o si no, oh, nosotros también hacemos esto. Entonces, como había cosas que yo no sabía que ellas hacían aquí. Entonces, sentía como que no éramos tan diferentes, y luego en otras cosas como, ah, que me gustaría que en mi país sea así o si no ellas que les gustaría que sea así aquí” (*The girls were asking me something and when I responded they would say that is different or, if not, oh, we also do that. So there were things that I didn't know that they do here. So, I felt like we weren't so different, and then in other things, like, ah I would like for it to be like that in my country or, if not, they would like for it to be like that here*).

She perceived both the first sentiment she expressed about having greater appreciation for cultural similarities, as well as the second thought about the desire she and the students of Spanish had to emulate certain aspects of each other's cultures, as positive.

One specific example of a cultural difference that came up repeatedly in the interviews which some of the participants thought was worthy of emulation is the independence of young people. Linda explained it this way, “... lo que veo que es diferente es que aquí muchas veces se van de sus casas cuando ... tienen como 18 algo así y en México normalmente se quedan en sus casas ...” (*The thing that I see that is different is that is that here young people often leave their homes when ... they are 18 or something like that and in Mexico they normally stay at home ...*). Another quote by Anita demonstrates not only an aspect of her culture that the interviewers may have talked about adopting but also how her thoughts about Americans changed:

ANITA: ... Antes de estar aquí lo que yo pensaba era como no dan besos y no se abrazan porque son como muy secos, no sé, como muy . . .

RESEARCHER: ¿Fríos?

ANITA: Uh-huh, fríos, exacto, pero cuando llegué aquí vi que se hablan mucho y, por ejemplo, cuando voy a comer al [Centro] Cannon como siempre están los amigos juntos y como veo que platican mucho y así. Entonces, como digo pues, no es cierto no es que sean tan fríos solamente ...

RESEARCHER: Mm-hmm. Pues, me interesa mucho la conclusión porque dijiste que tenías cierta perspectiva antes de venir . . .

ANITA: Mm-hmm.

RESEARCHER: . . . y después cambió, ¿verdad?

ANITA: Exacto.

RESEARCHER: Cambió y ahora has llegado a otra conclusión. En tu opinión, ¿ayudaron las entrevistas con esto, con llegar a esa conclusión?

ANITA: Yo creo que sí porque como sí tengo muchos amigos americanos y mis roommates ... pero como con ellas como fueron muy amables. Platicamos mucho.

Entonces sí como sentí que no son así de fríos y secos como yo antes pensaba. Pues, solo tenemos diferentes culturas.

(Anita: ... before being here what I thought is, they don't greet with kisses or hugs because they are very dry. I don't know like very ...

Researcher: Cold.

Anita: Uh-huh, cold exactly, but when I got here I saw that they talk to each other a lot, and, for example, when I go to eat at the Cannon [Center] friends are always together and I see that they chat a lot and so on. So I say that it's not true that they are just so cold

...

Researcher: Mm-hmm. So, your conclusion interests me a lot because you said you had a certain perspective before coming

Anita: Mm-hmm.

Researcher: and it later changed, right?

Anita: Exactly.

Researcher: It changed and now you have arrived at another conclusion. In your opinion, did the interviews help with that, with arriving at another conclusion?

Anita: I believe so because, yes, I have a lot of American friends and my roommates ... but with the girls it was that they were very kind. We chatted a lot. So, yes I felt that they were not cold and dry like I thought before. We just have different cultures).

Both the observations about youths' independence and Anita's perspective change are obviously not tied solely to the participants' experiences in this project. However, the quote by Anita and information in the next section show that the interviews served to confirm or strengthen participants' conclusions from previous experiences.

Confirming, strengthening, or modifying conclusions from previous experiences.

After reviewing the post-questionnaires, and especially after doing follow up interviews with eleven of the sixteen participants, it became clear to me that what many of them reported as things they had gained or learned from their participation were in fact insight that they had gained prior to the experience. My question then became: what is the real, as opposed to perceived, value of this project for the participants, if it indeed has any? Several of the participants' comments led me to conclude that the project was valuable because it gave the participants the chance to reflect on their previous experience and conclusions and confirm, strengthen, or modify those conclusions. For example, one participant, Carmen, said she learned

that we may all have different cultures, but we all share a common humanity. When asked if she learned that during the project or had it confirmed to her during the project, she said that it was partly confirmed to her in the interviews. In addition to Carmen's explanation, which supports this conclusion, several international students made similar comments and, if asked about my conclusion, agreed that it was correct.

Another, perhaps less direct example comes from another international student, Liliana, who participated in the following exchange:

RESEARCHER: Bien y ¿cuándo estabas hablando de tu cultura, sea de comida, de días festivos, lo que sea, cómo te sentiste?

LILIANA: Me sentí orgullosa de saber como de conocer como, pues, parte de mi cultura y poder explicarla a otra persona, y pues como, por ejemplo, estas chicas creo que no conocían México ... pero es como muy bonito platicar cosas que pasan o que están pasando en tu país, fuera de tu país.

(Interviewer: Good and when you were talking about your culture, whether about food, or holidays, or whatever, how did you feel?)

Liliana: I felt proud to know like be familiar with like, well, part of my culture and be able to explain it to another person, and well like, for example, these girls I believe they aren't familiar with Mexico ... but it's like very beautiful to talk about things that happen or that are happening in your country outside of your country.)

Although she probably had been proud to know about her culture or talk about it previously, it appears from her comments that the interviews gave her an opportunity to confirm and strengthen that conclusion.

How This Project is Uniquely Valuable

In the early stages of the one-on-one interviews that I carried out with participants it seemed clear to me that any benefits that were being reported by the participants were more connected to their previous experiences rather than to the project itself. This and other challenges seemed compounded as I as I recorded a follow-up interview with Isabela. She was making “tortilla de patatas” in her kitchen for some guests who were to arrive soon. It was hot, and she did not seem to be focusing on our interview. In the midst of that challenging and discouraging set of circumstances, suddenly Isabela confided that her participation in the project and the interviews had really been beneficial for her. Some aspects of her participation that she mentioned as being beneficial were that the project helped her to better understand and appreciate her previous intercultural experiences as well as form new conclusions about those experiences.

The fact that some of the participants, including Isabela, mentioned having had previous experiences that were similar to this interview project was what raised the question as to whether this particular project was in any way uniquely valuable to them. I approached this in my interviews with many of the participants, again including Isabela, by asking them if they had ever had a similar experience and then asking them to compare any similar experiences they might have had with their experience in this project. Although some of the international students did not remember ever having an experience like they had during these interviews, others felt they had had comparable experiences. There were several ways that the participants identified what they felt distinguished this cross-cultural interview project from any other intercultural exchange in which they had previously participated. In all but one of these instances, the participants described the interview project as, at least in part, being more valuable than any

other exchange. The particular participant who was the outlier, Liliana, observed that living with roommates of other cultures is more valuable in the sense that it is more of an intimate, ongoing cross-cultural interaction.

However, Liliana and other participants spoke about several ways that this project was uniquely valuable to them. For example, several observed that the interview project was a longer, more focused way of talking about culture than the sporadic discussions they might have with friends, roommates, or study buddies. It was also pointed out that for some it is easier to open up and share about themselves, their experiences, and their culture in a setting where there is only one native informant as opposed to a large group of them. In addition, many were thrilled to be able to share in that type of a setting with students of Spanish who seemed to know very little about the culture. One other element that stands out is that the participants were all able to speak about their native cultures in their native tongue. I asked one participant, Irma, about how that made a difference to her considering that she had had many opportunities to talk about her culture in English

RESEARCHER: ¿ ... cómo se siente eso, poder hablar de tu cultura en tu idioma materno versus hablar de tu cultura en inglés?

IRMA: Bueno, cuando uno habla de su propia cultura en su propio lenguaje uno siente mucho más cómodo ... cuando lo habla en español uno se siente como más en casa ...
(Interviewer: ... how does that feel to be able to talk about your culture in your mother tongue versus talking about your culture in English? Irma: Well, when one speaks of her own culture in her own language one feels much more comfortable ... when one speaks of it in Spanish, one feels at home ...).

Perceived Drawbacks and What Might Be Improved

Although the international students made several comments about the negative aspects of the project and how it may have been improved, there were really only two that were made by multiple participants. The first was that there was nothing negative about the participants' participation. One participant, Valeria, for example put it this way

No vi algo negativo de acuerdo a las reuniones. Tal vez debía de haber dejado que hablaran un poco más ... tal vez eso debía de haber dejado que ellas como se abrieran un poco más y no solo yo estar hablando y solo que ellas me preguntaron, o tal vez un poco más intercambiar. (*I did not see anything negative about the meetings. Maybe I should have let them talk a little more ... perhaps I should have have let them open up a little more and not just talk and have them ask questions, maybe a little more exchange*).

With regard to the latter half of that comment, another participant, Isabela, thought that some informal get-to-know-you activity done prior to the project might facilitate such exchange. Valeria disagreed, however, stating that keeping the interaction less personal would be ideal. Such disagreement on how to improve the project characterized the participants' suggestions with the only exception, besides that participants would change nothing about the project, being that participants would have liked to have seen more preparation by the students of Spanish prior to each interview.

As far as how this project might have been improved, there is more to tell than the simple better preparation by the students of Spanish. As I listened to the interviews that the students of Spanish carried out with the native Spanish speakers, I often found that the students of Spanish were not fully applying the ethnographic interview techniques they had learned about and practiced prior to the interviews. Accordingly, I pointed out what each of the interviewers was

doing well, as well as how they might improve by more fully implementing ethnographic interviewing techniques. Some examples of the feedback I gave were comments such as “great job letting your interviewee talk most of the time;” “you seemed like you were not able to understand some of what your interviewee was saying some of the time, do not be afraid to ask for clarification or ask him/her to slow down;” “respond a little more to what your interviewee says to show your active listening and go into some more depth on some of the topics you went into.”

Interestingly, the pair of students that seemed to have the most difficulty applying ethnographic interviewing techniques received the most feedback from me after their first interview to try to help them improve subsequent interviews, whereas one of the pairs that seemed to do best was the only pair that, due to technical difficulties, did not receive feedback from me on their interviews. In addition to my feedback, two other variables may have also come into to play with the pair that seemed to have the hardest time. First, that particular pair was the only all-male grouping. Second, they were the only pair that was unable to do all of their interviews for the project with the same participant. Additional points that should be kept in mind about the suggestion that participants made about their interviewers being better prepared are: first, it may have been a response by the participants to ethnographic interviewing techniques, which some seemed to appreciate and value more than others; second, as with responses to other questions, it is possible that participants felt obligated for some reason to come up with some sort of a response to every question posed to them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter I will briefly discuss the findings of this study in terms of the research questions: First, the perceived benefits for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participated in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners; second, the perceived drawbacks for international students who are native speakers of Spanish that participated in ethnographic interviews with Spanish language learners; and third, according to international students who are native speakers of Spanish, what might be done to maximize any benefits of such a project while minimizing any drawbacks.

Perceived Benefits for International Students

The participants of this study seemed to perceive their participation in this study as beneficial overall. Their comments showed enthusiasm for talking to the Spanish language learners about their culture, and contentment that those learners were interested to hear what they had to say. The participants also indicated that this project helped them learn about and gain a better appreciation for both U.S. culture and their own culture. One participant, Isabela, commented on her post-questionnaire that the most important thing she learned about herself was to respect and be tolerant of others; she indicated that she had been thinking of that for a while. Although much of what she and other participants reported as having learned as a result of their participation seemed clearly to be based on previous knowledge and experience, the study served to assist the participants in confirming, consolidating, and modifying conclusions from that previous knowledge and experience. The study was seen as uniquely valuable in that it afforded the participants the opportunity to speak in a longer, more focused way about their culture than they had done in other experiences. In addition, it was seen as uniquely valuable because of their

distinctive audience, the intimate setting, and the fact that they were able to talk about their native culture in their native tongue.

Perceived Drawbacks for International Students and How to Maximize Benefits While Minimizing Drawbacks

For many of the participants, there were no perceived drawbacks. In fact, for all of the participants there was only one drawback that was mentioned by multiple participants. That drawback is that many of the participants felt that the students of Spanish could have shown better organization or preparation going into the interviews. In some cases, it seems that the participants would have preferred to be given a comprehensive list of questions that were to be asked during the interviews, which would not have been in accordance with ethnographic interviewing techniques.

In other cases it may have been something else. Specifically, as part of the process of participants being interviewed by the students of Spanish, I listened to every initial interview and provided feedback to the students on their use of ethnographic interviewing techniques. In every case but two, I was able to give feedback, listen to the subsequent interviews, and observe improvement in the application of ethnographic interviewing techniques. One of the exceptions to this was a pair of female students of Spanish who were unable to give me a recording of their first interview. The participant they interviewed, however, did not indicate that she felt that the students of Spanish were in need of better organization or preparation going into the interviews. The other exception was the lone pair of male students of Spanish who did not interview the same person for their second interview and did not appear to apply the feedback I gave on more effectively using ethnographic interviewing techniques. Notwithstanding those exceptions, however, nearly all students appeared to benefit from implementing feedback on their

interviewing techniques, especially if they were able to conduct subsequent interviews with the same individual.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although the participants and the students of Spanish represented different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, to my knowledge they all shared a common religion, were near in age, and were all university students. Because of that and the relatively small sample size, the results cannot really be generalized to larger and more diverse groups. Accordingly, future research in this area might be done with a larger sample size as well as a more diverse population. In addition, Bateman (2002, 2004) has also suggested the need to carry out a longitudinal study that would demonstrate if the benefits perceived by those who participate in ethnographic interview projects are long lasting.

Conclusion

As previously stated, ethnographic interview projects are perceived as beneficial in a variety of settings to the students of the language and culture that carry out the interviews. The data from this study demonstrate that its participants perceived it as beneficial in several ways that were unique and valuable to them. Something else which several participants observed was that the interviews with the students of Spanish got better the second and third times. My own observations confirmed these comments. I believe this is because the participants and students of Spanish became more comfortable with each other in subsequent interviews and that the students of Spanish more fully applied ethnographic interview techniques. Thus, it appears that feedback on the application of those techniques can be very useful for those who do the ethnographic interviewing. This was specifically confirmed by my listening to the interviews that were

conducted after they received feedback and observing the improvement. Many of the participants also commented on how those subsequent interviews improved.

The data of this study and others that were described in Chapter 2 indicate that these types of projects overall are beneficial for both students of a foreign language and the culture, native participants they interview. This would confirm what one participant, Carmen, saw as the value of the project and others like it, “Yo pienso que la forma más eficaz de conocer una cultura es viajando y conociéndola así, pero no de vacaciones, no de una semana y me regreso. Tiene que ser una temporada larga ... o a través de una persona que ha vivido esa cultura y que te transmite conocimiento de lo que es vivir allá.” (*I think that the most effective way to know a culture is traveling and knowing it that way but not on holiday, not one week and then I come back. It has to be a long while ... or through a person that has lived in that culture and that transmits to you what it is to live there*). In other words, short of living in another country for a significant amount of time, the best way to learn about another culture is by taking the time to talk to someone, preferably a native of that culture, who has lived in it.

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APPENDIX A

Pre-questionnaire

General Information

In any report or publication of this study no information that will identify you will be included.

1. Gender: M F

2. Where are you from?

3. How old are you?

Help us to understand your experience with the culture of the United States by responding to the following questions:

4. How long have you lived in the U.S.?

5. Before coming here, had you visited this country often?

(if you respond affirmatively, please elaborate a little)

6. Indicate the level of understanding you think that Americans have of your culture

complete ignorance 1 2 3 4 5 6 complete understanding

7. Have cultural differences affected your intercultural interactions? How?

8. If you could choose 1 or 2 aspects of your culture that you would like Americans to understand what would they be and why?

APPENDIX B

Post-questionnaire

(modified from Bateman, 2002, 2004)

Respond completely and honestly to the following questions.

In any report or publication of this study no information that will identify you will be included.

1. How many interviews did you participate in?

2. About how long did each interview last?

Interview 1: _____ minutes

Interview 2: _____ minutes

Interview 3: _____ minutes

3. Indicate the level of comfort you felt during the interviews (if the person or people were not the same during the whole project, respond only about the last person or group)

uncomfortable 1 2 3 4 5 6 comfortable

Briefly explain your answers to numbers 4 through 10, and 12

4. What differences between your culture and the culture of the United States stood out for you during and after the project?

5. What were the most important things you learned about yourself?

6. What were the most important things you learned about your culture?

7. What did you learn about the culture of the United States?

8. What impact, if any, did the project have on your attitude towards Americans?

9. What were the positive aspects of your participation?

10. What were the negative aspects of your participation?

11. If someone were to ask you to participate in a similar project in the future, how probable would it be that you would do it?

not very probable 1 2 3 4 5 6 very probable

12. If you could change something about this project, what would you change and why?