International Students' Experiences in Higher Education: A Case Study Examining Uncertainty Reduction Theory in Communication Classrooms

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THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Susan Kuhn for the Master of Science in Speech

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Susan Kuhn for the Master of Science in Speech
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Title: International Students' Experiences in Higher Education: A Case Study

Examining Uncertainty Reduction Theory in Communication Classrooms

This was an exploratory case study which focused on international students'
experiences in higher education. In particular, this study investigated the efficacy of
uncertainty reduction theory in communication classrooms. The research asked four
exploratory questions: (a) What are the students' perceptions of the teacher/student
relationship? (b) Do international students experience uncertainty in communication
classrooms? (c) If uncertainty is experienced, what is its source(s)? (d) If uncertainty
is experienced, do students seek to reduce it, and if so, how?

A phenomenological perspective was utilized in this study as the organizing,
theoretical framework. Relevant literature on uncertainty reduction theory was
reviewed as well as literature specific to international education, the communication
classroom, the role of the teacher, and teacher self-disclosure. Focus group
interviews, individual interviews, and member checks were conducted with
international students who had taken communication classes at Portland State
University in the 1998-1999 academic year. Using a set of analytic measures, 21

initial categories were identified and subsequently collapsed into 4 key categories: international education, teacher/student relationship, uncertainty in the communication classroom, and approaches to managing uncertainty.

Based on analyses of the data, this study revealed findings significant to understandings of both international education and uncertainty reduction theory. First, a model of classes within international education was derived from the data and served to deepen understandings of international education, in particular the international students' perceptions of classes across countries.

Second, this research tested the extant claims of uncertainty reduction theory and raised questions regarding its conceptualization. The data revealed that the students' definitions of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction differed from those previously postulated, resulting in the formulation of new definitions. Also, context was found to strongly influence students' experiences of uncertainty; the context of the classroom not only determined the sources of uncertainty, but also influenced how uncertainties were coped with when they were not reduced. These alternative understandings of uncertainty reduction theory are significant as they could aid in further research that explores the theory's extant claims.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

A CASE STUDY EXAMINING UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY

IN COMMUNICATION CLASSROOMS

by

SUSAN KUHN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> We must study geography so that for us there is no foreign place.
> We must study humanity so that for us there is no foreign person.
>   (Ping, 1982, p. 2)

The study of other places and people can be achieved through various means: one of the most preferable being immersion in another country. International students, in particular, often find that foreign study in the United States (U.S.) allows them an excellent opportunity to not only attain their educational degrees but to also learn about "geography" and "humanity." For students throughout the world, the U.S. is a popular destination as 32% of all international students worldwide are enrolled in institutions of higher education and related organizations within the U.S. (United States Information Agency, 1998, p. 1).

The countries from which these students come, and their reasons for coming, are as varied as their experiences when studying in U.S. classrooms of higher education. Language proficiency may affect international students' experiences, but there are also cultural differences that can influence adjustments to a new university setting. Hoopes and Althen (1975) suggest that people live within culture groups composed of relationships which define who they are; when encountering a different culture though, people are deprived of many of the guides and cues which orient them to their environment. International students in the U.S. are an example of a group who can experience a sense of disorientation; they not only live in a different country

and culture but they are also students in an university which has its own unique culture within that particular national culture.

Albert and Triandis (1994) maintain that when "individuals from one culture are forced to adopt a very different cultural pattern...they are likely to experience high levels of stress, a reduction in positive outcomes, lower self-esteem, anomie, and general demoralization" (pp. 426-427). Thus, international students may become uncomfortable and/or uncertain because the guides and roles of the student/teacher relationship, and the rules and norms of the classroom, may differ from those they are familiar with in their own cultures.

The specific task of this study then, was to conduct interviews with students through which the researcher could understand international students' interactions with U.S. native teachers, and the students' perceptions of teacher/student relationships within the Portland State University (PSU) classroom context. In particular, this study sought to understand whether there was a relationship between the theory of uncertainty reduction and international students' perceptions of their experiences in classrooms of higher education.

Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) proposes that when strangers initially meet they strive to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability about the other's behaviors and their own (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Later research extended the theory's scope beyond initial encounters of strangers to ongoing relationships of other types, particularly romantic relationships (Berger, 1979; Baxter

& Wilmot, 1984; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988).

Little research, however, has considered the influence of uncertainty on the non-romantic relationships of teachers and students (Danielson, 1995; Haleta, 1996; McCrosky, 1998; Nelson, 1989, 1992), and none has examined URT in connection to university-level international students' relationships with U.S. native teachers.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research was to examine URT in the context of the university classroom. More specifically, this study explored the efficacy of URT in explaining international students' experiences within teacher/student relationships in communication classrooms at PSU.

DEFINTION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts were central to this study; uncertainty reduction theory and self-disclosure.

Uncertainty reduction theory

Uncertainty reduction theory proposes that when encounters occur, especially during initial encounters, people experience uncertainty about the behavior of themselves and others. Due to the numerous alternatives for another's behavior, an individual must be able to narrow the possible alternatives available to the other (and the self), by predicting and explaining the other's behavior. When uncertainty is

reduced then, individuals are able to predict and explain the behavior of the other, and thus guide their own behavior (Berger, 1979, Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

<u>Self-disclosure</u>

Self-disclosure is significant to this study as it has been suggested to aid in the reduction of uncertainty (Berger and Calabrese, 1975, p. 109). With few exceptions (Bradac, Tardy, & Hosman, 1980; Jourard, 1964, 1971), the traditional view of self-disclosure has been that individuals convey information about the self through verbal communication. The communication act though, says Sugita (1992), is comprised of both verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors (p. 5) which implies that disclosure, as a communication act, is also composed of verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors. Regardless, research in the area of self-disclosure has only attempted to quantitatively measure the verbal acts of disclosure (Archer, Berg, & Runge, 1980; Chelune, Skiffington, & Williams, 1981; Collins & Miller, 1994; Dindia & Allen, 1992). This study, which is qualitative in nature, may expand previous research with its inclusion of both verbal and nonverbal forms of self-disclosure.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was an examination of the efficacy of URT as it relates to international students' experiences in communication classrooms of higher education. Biddle (1997) says that "one of the strongest reasons for tying research questions to explicit theory is that the theory provides a context for interpreting one's results,

hence for understanding their implication (p. 515). URT, therefore, provides a context for understanding international students' experiences in communication classrooms.

As the first qualitative study to consider URT within the educational setting, the questions asked were designed to allow the researchers to understand the international students' perceptions of their own experiences.

1. What are the students' perceptions of the teacher/student relationship?

2. Do international students experience uncertainty in communication classrooms?

3. If uncertainty is experienced, what is its source(s)?

4. If uncertainty is experienced, do students seek to reduce it, and if so, how?

RESEARCHER BACKGROUND

The initial phases of this study were the shared work of myself and fellow graduate student/researcher, Darlene Geiger. Our interests in students' experiences within higher education led to our collaboration in this research. While Darlene's thesis addressed students' perceptions of teacher self-disclosure, mine focused on student uncertainty. Our research was shared but our experiences in coming to this study were distinct.

My work in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms has exposed me to students who come to the U.S. with various first languages and primary cultures. While I have seen how language proficiency can influence a student's level of

academic performance and willingness to interact with others, I know that English proficiency is not the only factor that influences one's adjustment to studies and interaction within U.S. universities. The student's view or frame of reference may also influence the adjustment.

Students have different expectations of the post-secondary classroom based on their past experiences. Leki (1992) relates that international students are often surprised by U.S. classroom behaviors, systems of grading and exams, uses of body language, and socio-linguistic differences (e.g., appropriateness of questions or notions of modesty). Because these students are in an intercultural setting in which roles and behaviors are often unfamiliar and unclear, I wondered whether they experienced uncertainty. This case study then was initiated by my interest in understanding international students' experiences and their adaptation to their new environment.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I, *Introduction*, discusses international students in the U.S., the purpose of this study, and its subsequent research questions. Chapter II, *Review of the Literature*, discusses the phenomenological perspective taken in this study, and reviews research related to URT, international education, the communication classroom, the role of the teacher, and teacher self-disclosure. Chapter III, *Research Methodology and Data Collection*

Procedures, describes the qualitative research method and design, as well as the data analysis approach. Chapter IV, *Findings*, presents participants' demographic characteristics and educational backgrounds. Additionally, this chapter discusses the participants' experiences in the classrooms as they relate to international education, teacher/student relationships, uncertainty in the communication classroom, and approaches to managing uncertainty. Chapter V, *Discussion and Conclusion*, describes the relationship between context, uncertainty, and international students' experiences in international education. Implications and limitations of the study are also considered.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

This study explored the efficacy of URT in explaining international students' perceptions of teacher/student relationships in communication classrooms at PSU. The first section of this chapter presents the theoretical perspective. The second discusses the evolution of URT from its initial framework to its limited application in the classroom context. The third section examines four bodies of applied literature that are relevant to understanding international students' perceptions of their experiences: (a) international education; (b) communication classrooms; (c) role of the teacher; and (d) teacher self-disclosure.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A phenomenological perspective was taken in this study because it offered an appropriate framework from which to examine the experiences of international students from their own perspectives. Schutz's (1932/1967) social phenomenology was deemed particularly appropriate as it allows the investigation of a social event from the perspectives of those actually participating in it, in this case the students in the classroom. Phenomenology, relates Pilotta (1983), perceives meaning in whatever is seen or appears to the conscious in an experience (p. 271). It is not that the

meaning lies in the experience, but rather that those experiences which are grasped reflectively are considered meaningful (Schutz, 1932/1967, p. 69). One's perception of lived experiences is one's own reality.

Wagner (1970) contends that "phenomenology is concerned with that cognitive reality which is embodied in the processes of subjective human experiences" (p. 13). The emphasis on the subjective human experience is revealing of a perspective in which one world is interpreted in many different ways. One can not completely know the perspective of another without having fully lived the other's life. When people do reach points in which they believe they understand the experiences of another, it is often because of a shared social knowledge.

The social world, according to Schutz (1970), is experienced by humans as a "tight knit web of social relationships, of systems of signs and symbols with their particular meaning structure, of institutionalized forms of social organization, of systems of status and prestige, etc." (p. 80). While phenomenological theory suggests that each person constructs his/her own "world," the world is one which is socially constructed and organized to some degree by others. One's interpretation of the social world is determined by the cultural in-group to which the individual belongs (Wagner, 1970, p. 16).

Even though an individual learns within his/her own culture those experiences which should be taken note of or ignored, the meaning attached to those experiences is not totally culturally derived. Schutz, according to Wagner (1970), "showed that

even the socially most stereotyped cultural ideas only exist in the minds of individuals who absorb them, interpret them on the basis of their own life situation, and give them a personal tinge..." (pp. 16-17). There is not one cultural experience, but a different one for each individual who operates within the culture, in other words, the individual is never separate from his/her own perceptions of the experience. Again, as Schutz (1932/1967) states, it is the individual's reflection of an event which gives it meaning; the emphasis is on the individual's interpretation of the event, not the event itself.

A phenomenological perspective supported this study which focused on international students' experiences in U.S. university classrooms. The social world experienced by the students in this setting is, as Schutz (1970) describes, a system of signs, symbols, status, and prestige within an institutionalized organization (p. 80). All international students have been students in an educational system before, only now there are cultural variations in those shared signs and understandings of status. Past experiences have formulated their expectations of teacher/student interaction, classroom procedures, teacher/student roles, and appropriate behaviors. What were their lived experiences in the U.S. classroom and how did they interpret those experiences? Such were the inquiries for this study which were explored by drawing on Schutz' social phenomenological perspective.

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY (URT)

Uncertainty reduction theory proposes that when initial encounters occur, individuals experience uncertainty about the predicted behavior of themselves and others (Berger, 1979; Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Berger and Bradac (1982) assert that "uncertainty is determined by the number of alternatives that could occur in a given situation and the relative likelihood of their occurrence. As the number of alternatives increases, uncertainty increases" (p. 6). When uncertainty is reduced though, individuals are able to predict and explain the behavior of the other, and therefore guide their own behavior. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) initial theory posited 7 axioms and 21 theorems that specified the interrelationships among uncertainty, amount of communication, nonverbal affiliative expressiveness, information seeking, intimacy level of contact, reciprocity, similarity, and liking.

Berger (1979) further elaborated the theory by outlining three strategy types individuals use for reducing uncertainty. Strategies are devised, according to Berger, so that one can "find out things about others" in order to reduce uncertainty about them (p. 134). The various strategies outlined by Berger (1979) are passive, active, and interactive. *Passive strategies* signify that people learn about others through unobtrusive means such as observation, while a*ctive strategies* require that some verbal or nonverbal message must be sent and received. The third class of strategies are called *interactive strategies* and require direct communication between the participant-observer and the person perceived to be the source of uncertainty (p. 134).

While Berger (1979) offered many possible strategies, there were others he acknowledged that were not considered (p. 134). Because this study specifically focused on the classroom setting, those strategies suggested by Berger which appeared relevant to the context were the only ones discussed in this chapter even though the final analysis considers others which emerged from the data.

Two relevant passive strategies proposed by Berger (1979) are reactivity search and social comparison. First, reactivity means "the extent to which the social situation in which the actor is present demands that [s/]he communicate with and react to others" (p. 135). Reactive situations, according to Berger (1979), are situations in which the actor is involved with many others, and is thereby revealing information about him/herself through talk about the self, and verbal and nonverbal responses to others. This is perceived as pertinent because the communication classroom is a social situation in which the teacher (as actor) must interact with others. The students, therefore, are able to observe and attend to the teacher's verbal and nonverbal responses and actions through which information is revealed.

An aspect of reactivity which seems especially relevant to the classroom setting is that of listening to others (the teacher) talk about themselves. In a sense, the person speaking is verbally disclosing, but Berger (1979) only considers verbal self-disclosure to be an interactive strategy based on the principle of reciprocity. He says that self-disclosure is a strategy used when one wants the other to reveal information about him/herself: one discloses information in hopes that the other will reciprocate

with like information.

In this study, however, verbal self-disclosure by the teacher is assumed to serve more purposes than simply influencing reciprocation. For example, verbal self-disclosure by the teacher may illustrate a concept or introduce a topic at which point reciprocity by the student may be undesirable or even inappropriate. Listening to the teacher verbally self-disclose is considered in this study to more likely be a sub-category of the reactivity search rather than an interactive strategy as Berger had suggested (for a more detailed discussion of teacher self-disclosure see pp. 27-30).

The second passive strategy relevant to the classroom context is that of social comparison. According to Berger (1979), social comparison strategy suggests that an individual prefers to observe the target person interacting with known others as more information is believed to be gained when the observer knows the person with whom the actor is interacting (p. 137). Under this presumption, the international student would be able to learn more information about the teacher by watching the teacher interact with others which s/he knows. If the student knows no one else in the classroom, it seems likely then that more could be learned by watching the teacher in interaction with other international students who are more like the observer than U.S. students, and therefore, possibly more revealing of pertinent information.

A third strategy discussed by Berger (1979) which appears relevant to the classroom context is the interactive strategy of verbal interrogation: the participant-observer asks questions directly of the actor in order to gain information (p. 139).

Berger (1979) cautions that this is an obvious strategy that is not without limitations. First, he stresses that in most social interactions there is a limit to the number of questions that can be asked per unit of time (p. 140). In the classroom this is especially true as the time allocated for the class usually involves the discussion of relevant class content rather than personal information. Second, even though an individual can ask direct questions to another, it does not guarantee that the answers will be truthful (p. 140). The teacher, for example, may not desire to reveal specific information to a room full of students who are not only subordinates but are known for a limited period of time.

URT originally focused on initial interactions and was, according to Gudykunst and Nishida (1984), "designed to explain interpersonal communication in the U.S., with the vast majority of research limited to white, middle class, North American subjects" (p. 23). The last twenty-four years though, have seen intensive research of URT within a variety of settings beyond the initial encounters and an inclusion of subjects that were not North American. For example, a variety of researchers have studied the theory within the context of personal and romantic relationships (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988), and the theory has also been extended to explain cross-cultural variations in communication, variations in intercultural adaptation, and intercultural communication (Goldsmith, 1992; Gudykunst, 1983, 1985, 1986; Gudykunst &

Hammer, 1984; Gudykunst, Nishida, & Schmidt, 1989; Sanders, Wiseman, & Matz, 1991).

Only a limited amount of research has been found however, which considers the theory within the context of the U.S. classroom. Haleta (1996) studied the effects of teachers' language on students' levels of uncertainty, and Danielson (1995) examined the role of the course syllabi as an uncertainty reduction strategy. Particularly relevant though, were McCrosky (1998) and Nelson (1992) who each considered the theory of uncertainty reduction within the intercultural classroom. Unfortunately, neither study took account of international students' experiences as they both examined U.S. students' perceptions of non-native teachers or teaching assistants. The absence of data from international students is not only reflective of researchers' desires for an in-country population, but is also reflective of the structure of international education in which foreign students are often an unacknowledged minority in universities.

Due to the fact that international students have been overlooked in discussions of uncertainty reduction within the classroom, there is a need to acknowledge that if international students experience uncertainty, it might be for different reasons or be strategically managed differently than has been previously discussed in Western terms by Berger and Calabrese (1975) (e.g., verbal interrogation, self-disclosure). Within the intercultural educational setting it was expected that there could be many cultural factors influencing the students' interpretations of their uncertainty, for example:

1. Students might *experience* uncertainty in the classroom but may not desire to reduce it if uncertainty in their culture is not to be diminished, but experienced. (see Goldsmith, 1992, for a similar discussion)

2. Students from high-context cultures might place greater importance on the *context* than on the verbal message, which may be reflected in the type of strategy (passive rather than interactive) they choose if they seek to reduce uncertainty.

3. Students who have lived in the U.S. for an extended *length of time* may experience less uncertainty in the U.S. classroom as they will have adapted to such cultural practices as teacher self-disclosing.

4. The *gender* of the teacher might influence sources of uncertainty and strategies of reduction.

5. Specific actions, such as verbal self-disclosure by the teacher, might cause or affect student uncertainty. Such behaviors may be considered inappropriate for a teacher and may be viewed negatively as the *role* of the teacher is defined differently in different cultures.

While these considerations do not seek to determine interpretations of international students' experiences, they are relevant to research that addresses students' experiences of uncertainty in international education.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

This section discusses the phenomena of international education, the appeal of the U.S. as a designation location for international study, and the implications of study abroad for foreign students. Husen (1994) says that " international education as a scholarly pursuit is a cross-disciplinary study of international and intercultural problems in education." It "refers both to the objectives and content of certain educational pursuits and to the institutionalization of such activities" (p. 2972). In the former case it focuses on the role education plays in bringing about the mastery of competencies, such as a knowledge of foreign language(s) and other cultures, in the latter case it refers to certain institutions or projects within or outside the formal educational system which endeavor to improve international and intercultural understanding (p. 2972).

While there are many approaches to campus internationalization (Backman, 1984, pp. 339-340), the most relevant to this study was that of the inclusion of foreign students in U.S. university student populations. Paige (1983) relates that the United States in particular, has been considered "attractive because of its open system of higher education, the large number of colleges and universities, the wide range of programs, and its perceived sophistication in the technical and scientific fields" (p. 103). Nonetheless, while Cummings (1991) notes that the U.S. does receive 1/3 of all overseas students, those students represent less than 3% of total higher education enrollments (pp. 107-108). In winter term 1999 at PSU, for example, there

were 743 international students from 73 different countries which was only 5.1% of the total student population (PSU Student FactBook Winter 1999).

One of the implications of so many students coming to the U.S., yet representing such a small percent of the total student population in higher education, is that a significant number of international students may be getting "lost in the crowd." The concern of many universities has not been on how to aid the international student in contributing to the educational experience, but rather on how to better "fit" the international student into the extant system of higher education. Wilson (1993) contends that "colleges and universities have usually worried more about the adaptation of foreign or international students to the United States and their sometimes problematic use as teaching assistants than about their possible contribution to public school and university international education" (p. 5).

International students are frequently not recognized as resources for international learning; instead they are often seen as disadvantaged and needing to work harder to assimilate into the classroom culture (Mestenhauser, 1983). Their decidedly distinct experiences, values, beliefs, norms, and patterns of behaviors are often not noticed or are not considered relevant to the higher education system of the U.S. The rules and routines of the classroom are reflective of U.S. values, and the education in such an environment functions to provide skills and perspectives that are useful in the U.S. society. For the international student, what they learn in the classroom can be outside the scope of the course content, and may affect their

understanding of the teacher and the course. Telling the story of their experiences in the classroom means letting them enact the role of "teachers" in international education, as well as in this research.

COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

The specific contexts of this study were communication classes at PSU which are considered here in terms of communication as a field of study, the goals of communication education, and the environment in which teaching and learning occur.

The field of communication is first reviewed in order to better understand the nature of the discipline and subsequent discussions of the communication classroom. According to Vangelisti, Daly, & Friedrich (1999), "the field of communication was founded, in part, because of a felt need to make people better communicators" (p. xi). The discipline began with the study and practice of rhetoric, and is currently a broad and diverse field that includes varied areas of study such as political communication, public speaking, intercultural communication, and speech and hearing science (Freidrich & Boileau, 1999; Lederman, 1992).

A common, defining characteristic can be found in the field though, and that, relates Craig (1989) (cited in Friedrich and Boileau, 1999), is "the intimate tie that exists between the discipline's work and practical communicative activities" (p. 8). Friedrich and Boileau (1999) explain that the communication discipline considers communicative behavior to be basic to human activity: from personal development to

the functioning of institutions (p. 8). This view is particularly important when considering the goals of the discipline in education.

Communicative behavior, relate Friedrich and Boileau (1999), is studied "with the dual goal of (a) understanding the structure, patterns, and effects of human communication; and (b) facilitating a higher quality of communication both for individuals and for society" (p. 8). The dual goal of understanding and practicing communication is accomplished through learning objectives which reflect what will happen in the classroom within a specific course. Learning objectives are usually referred to as psychomotor (behavioral), affective, and/or cognitive in nature (Freezel, 1985; Lederman, 1992; Sprague, 1999). Lederman (1992) states that cognitive objectives signify that the outcomes include intellectual mastery or understanding, while behavioral objectives involve action outcomes, and affective objectives refer to feeling-level or experiential outcomes (p. 21).

Cognitive objectives (e.g., intellectual mastery), it should be noted, are taught along with behavioral and affective objectives. In interpersonal communication classes students learn about nonverbal communication (e.g., eye contact, physical space, etc.) and may be involved in transforming that knowledge into action thereby achieving a behavioral objective of the class. Additionally, in examining interpersonal relationships the personal values, feelings, and attitudes of the students are analyzed and at times questioned or altered, resulting in the affective objectives of the course being attained.

Communication education then is distinct in that it not only teaches what is already known and practiced, but it teaches new approaches to understanding the extant, and gives structured practice to making change. Sprague (1999), stresses the importance of recognizing this as she speaks to future communication teachers,

> Communication is not just another content area for students to master or even just another academic skill. Nor is ours a subject that is new to students. We must recognize that when we say we are going to teach people to communicate we are "teaching" them something they have been doing rather successfully for most of their lives. The ways that they presently communicate are closely tied to their individual attitudes, values, and self-concepts. It is both our strength and our weakness that we change not just what people know, or even what they can do, but who they are (p. 18).

The environment in which such teaching and learning occurs is the third aspect of communication education that is considered here and is best understood, claims Staton (1999), by focusing on its relationship to the contexts of: (a) society; (b) the institution; and (c) the classroom (p. 32). First, Staton relates that the societal context, "includes both the geographical location of the institution and the cultural values and norms" (p. 37). While Staton discusses the physical setting in relation to the institution's geographical location in the U.S., it seems appropriate in terms of international education to also consider the institution's geographical location in the world. The formal system of U.S. schooling can be viewed in relation to schooling systems in other institutions world-wide as schooling systems are reflective of a country's values and norms.

The second context considered by Staton (1999) is the institution or campus at which the teaching/learning occurs. The physical setting is one feature of the

institutional context, and refers to; (a) the department's location on campus, (b) whether resources are housed within the department or must be obtained from outside, (c) the department's structural arrangement of space, and (d) the allocation of time (p. 35). The second feature of the institutional context is the institution's social atmosphere. Staton reports that the mission of the institution, whether the school is public or private, religious or secular, and the nature of the student population are examples of dimensions that contribute to the institution's overall social or cultural atmosphere (p. 36). These dimensions which help define the institutional context can also define the department and the classes within the department.

The third context considered by Staton (1999) is the classroom, which as a physical setting, is the room itself where instruction and learning take place. Staton relates that the room's size and shape can make a difference in the communication and atmosphere of the class. More instructional options are available, for example, to an instructor who teaches in a moderate-sized room with fewer students than one who teaches in a lecture hall to hundreds of students. Other physical features that can affect the class are the seating arrangement, the time the class is taught, how long it is taught, and even the general attractiveness of the room (pp. 33-34).

In terms of the social atmosphere of the classroom, Staton asserts that "from the beginning of class, the instructor and students engage in a process of negotiation about classroom norms and patterns..." that eventually constitutes the classroom's social atmosphere and culture (p. 35). Each class is viewed as distinct because of the

influence of the teacher and students involved in continual interaction and negotiation.

The interaction of the class changes though, based on the format of the class. Nicholson and Duck (1999) say that communication classes are most commonly taught as either a lecture course or a skills-oriented course. First, the lecture format allows the teacher greater control over the flow of information, but less teacher-student dialogue as course material is presented by the instructor to the students in the form of a lecture (pp. 87-88).

The skills-based course, on the other hand, is a course with the goal of developing students' communicative abilities through practice in activities and exercises (p. 89). Not only do class discussions and activities usually replace lectures, but Nicholson and Duck allege that the distance between the teacher and the student is usually lessened because of the trust and self-disclosure that are necessary to this kind of learning environment (p. 90).

In the communication classroom in particular, relates Lederman (1992), a supportive climate exists in which feelings and thoughts of the teacher and the students are shared and communication is characterized by clear messages, effective listening, and few distortions (p. 13). Further, she continues, when students and teachers talk about themselves they are using interpersonal relationships to facilitate good communication in the classroom.

> This means that the role of teacher goes well beyond the information provider. The teacher's role in the communication classroom is facilitating the process in which students learn about the course contents and in the process learn about themselves and others (p. 15).

Interaction in the communication classroom therefore not only reflects the interpersonal relationships that develop out of class discussions, but also reflects changed roles in the classroom as teachers and students interact interpersonally.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

While teacher/student interaction may influence the classroom and its atmosphere, it is also important to recognize that the interaction itself is influenced by the individuals as they enact their teacher/student roles. Biddle (1994) asserts that the role concept can be considered as three separate concepts: (a) role as social position; (b) role as behavior; and (c) role as expectation (p. 6127). Each concept is considered in this section because they are interrelated and pertinent to the study of teacher/student relationships.

First, role as social position relates to one's understanding of teacher/student roles as established within the context of the greater society. Roles, according to Hofstede's (1986) interpretation, are a function of society. Hofstede says that the school is one of four fundamental institutions existent "in some way in virtually all human societies." The other three institutions are the family, the job, and the community. "Each of the four," he remarks, "has its pair of unequal but complementary basic roles...which are the archetypes of interaction between human unequals" (p. 302). The role patterns of the four institutions interact, argues Hofstede (1986), in such a way that the patterns of one interaction are carried over into another.

The interaction of parent/child, for example, is extended into relationships of teacher/student and boss/subordinate (p. 302).

This interpretation of roles as a social function is supported by others, such as Stewart & Bennett (1991), who relate that roles are provided in order to integrate cultural members into society as functioning and contributing members (pp. 108-109). Additionally, Philips (1983) asserts that role differentiations, such as teacher/student, are organized similarly to "differences in age, social class, and occupation in other contexts" (p. 75).

According to Biddle (1994), teacher as a role refers to those who are designated by an occupational title which focuses on such static characteristics as the recognition of teachers as a separate social position, or the status of the teaching profession (p. 6127). Since the occupation of the teacher is designated by society as a social position that involves certain characteristics and expectations, it is therefore an ascribed identity. Ascription of identity, says Collier (1998), "is the individual's perception of the identity attributed to self by others" (p. 373). A teacher understands who s/he is, and what is expected of him/her, because of society's framing of the role.

The second role concept relates to the expectations that are held for teachers. Role expectations can refer to expectations of behavior or conduct which reflect the prevailing socio-cultural laws, customs, habits, desires, and theories concerning their activities and can be held by the individuals themselves, or as Biddle (1994) suggests, by school administrators, politicians, or members of the public and parents (p. 6130).

Role expectations are culturally embedded and therefore can differ significantly within different institutions and countries.

International students, as example, have developed a wide range of expectations of teacher behavior through their past experiences in their own cultures (Leki, 1992). Students may expect teachers to be formal in dress and behavior yet they may encounter teachers in the U.S. who wear sandals or shorts to class, and who prefer to be called by their first names (pp. 48-49). The behaviors enacted by teachers in the U.S. can conflict with the students' understandings of the role of the teacher. The students' expectations in these instances are not fulfilled and the students may become confused and find adjustment difficult, while students from the U.S. may find teacher/student encounters predictable and effective. "Interaction and communication flow smoothly," argues Nadal (1980), " when the expectations about a role, or roles, are shared and enacted as expected. When the expectations are not shared and thus not fulfilled during interaction...communication breaks down" (p. 18).

Expectations are significant and are seen as a major indicator of the third role concept, behavior. Expectations, according to Biddle (1994), are thought to be learned through experience and to affect the behaviors of those who hold them in predictable ways (p. 6127). Behaviors become predictable in such a way that they can actually be evaluated in both prescriptive (should) and proscriptive (should not) terms (Triandis, 1972). The behaviors which are deemed correct or incorrect for specific roles are dependent on a cultural specific interpretation.

Nadal (1980) contends that behaviors may be shown or acted out differently, depending on one's culture (p. 24). Many English speakers, for example, nod their heads to indicate agreement while some individuals from India will tilt their heads to one side (Leki, 1992). While the Indians may be expressing agreement with an instructor, the teacher will often understand the behavior to signify doubt (p. 52). The roles of the teacher/student are labeled the same in both countries but the behaviors expressed are distinctly different because of the cultural orientation; thus, what is deemed appropriate or inappropriate behavior for a teacher or student can vary greatly between cultures.

TEACHER SELF-DISCLOSURE

Teacher self-disclosure is a particular behavior that is practiced by many teachers in U.S. classrooms and has been supported by numerous research findings. The literature indicates, for example, that teacher self-disclosure increases student learning (Goldstein & Benassi, 1994) and student recall (McCarthy & Schmeck, 1982; Nelson, 1992), as well as improves students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness (Sorenson, 1989) and student attitudes (Nelson, 1992).

While self-disclosure is commonly defined as the communication act or behavior which lets the self be known to the other (Bradac, Tardy, & Hosman, 1980; Jourard, 1964, 1971), the emphasis of research has been on verbal disclosure: personal statements one makes about him/herself to another. Sorenson (1989), following the

traditional verbal conceptualization, defines teacher self-disclosure as "teacher statements in the classroom about the self that may or may not be related to subject content, but reveal information about the teacher that students are unlikely to learn from other sources" (p. 260). Beck's definition (1983) (cited in Nelson, 1989) is less specific as it simply suggests "that anything personal in the classroom is self-disclosure" (p. 15). This second definition of teacher self-disclosure, which seems rather vague, is actually more inclusive as it allows non-verbal behaviors, as well as verbal communication acts, to be interpreted as self-disclosure.

Due to the fact, however, that teacher self-disclosure has not been explicitly defined in terms of both verbal and nonverbal communication, Sorenson's (1989) definition above is consciously altered into the following definition which is inclusive of both features of communication.

> *Teacher self-disclosure is defined as teacher's verbal and nonverbal acts in the classroom that may or may not be related to subject content, but reveal information about the teacher that students are unlikely to learn without having interaction with that teacher.*

In reviewing self-disclosure research it is noted that there is not only a limited amount of research that has considered nonverbal self-disclosure, but also an absence of research pertaining to international students' perceptions of teacher self-disclosure. In 1979, McCarthy outlined parameters of teacher self-disclosure which needed to be defined and studied, but international students' perceptions of teacher self-disclosure was not included on the list, and since then has not become part of any such list, or study. This may indicate that, to some extent, the relationship between teacher self-

disclosure and international students has not been considered relevant. International students in the U.S. are often expected to adjust to U.S. classroom behaviors and communication styles, without the U.S. teachers and students making similar adjustments or even acknowledging that the classroom cultural behaviors may be very ethnocentric and have unintended effects.

An additional concern that may have kept researchers from approaching such a topic is the knowledge that verbal self-disclosure is a Western construct which is not completely transferable to all other cultures. Researchers who have considered self-disclosure cross-culturally are Sugita (1992), who studied the concept in relation to interaction between strangers in Japan, and Gudykunst and Nishida (1984), who conducted a comparison of subjects from Japan and the U.S. While both studies examined verbal self-disclosure with Japanese subjects, only Sugita acknowledged that there is a nonverbal feature to self-disclosure.

Such a feature may be significant when studying high-context cultures such as Japan. A high-context (HC) message or communication, according to Hall (1977), is one in which most of the information is assumed to be carried in the physical context or in the person rather than in the transmitted and explicit part of the message. The context in which interaction takes place, and the identity of the other person, are perceived to be as important as the message communicated. A low-context (LC) communication, on the other hand, is just the opposite in that the mass of the information is in the explicit, transmitted message (p. 91).

It is suggested then, that individuals who communicate with high-context messages, such as the Japanese, would be less reliant on explicit verbal disclosure than individuals who use low-context communication, such as those from the U.S. (Hall, 1977). Therefore, an individual from a high context culture may perceive different features of the communication encounter as disclosure than would someone from a low context culture. Extending this notion into the classroom then, both the context of the encounter (the classroom) and the roles of the individuals (teacher and student) interacting may be significant in an intercultural encounter.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy of URT in explaining international students' experiences in higher education. The following questions were addressed: What are the students' perceptions of the teacher/student relationship? Do international students experience uncertainty in communication classrooms? If uncertainty is experienced, what is its source(s)? If uncertainty is experienced, do students seek to reduce it, and if so, how?

This chapter is divided into five sections. Section I, *Methodology,* discusses the theoretical perspective, qualitative research methodology, and case study approach. Section II, *Research Design,* considers the pilot study and details the specific procedures of the study. Section III *Data Analysis Procedures,* discusses the data analysis process. Section IV accounts for *Reliability and Validity.*

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Perspective - Phenomenology

Shuter (1984) contends that the several methods for conducting naturalistic field research can be grouped into two major areas: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative approaches are concerned with the subjects and their experiences and

therefore are "based on the assumption that an understanding of cultural patterns flow from immersing an investigator in the subject's natural environment" (p. 197). In order to understand the subjects from the subjects' own point of view, state Bogdan & Biklen (1992), most qualitative research is approached from some sort of phenomenological perspective (pp. 33-34).

Phenomenology, according to Shuter (1984), is rooted in the philosophy of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and is concerned with the essence of what it investigates rather than its contents (p. 195). The approach questions all assumptions about reality in order to understand the essence of being and reality (p. 197). An emphasis is on the subjective features of people's behavior, and the numerous ways of interpreting experiences that are available to each of us when interacting with others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 34).

Phenomenologists, contend Taylor & Bogdan (1998), seek to understand social phenomena from the actor's own perspective and therefore, examine how the world is experienced. The important reality is that which people perceive it to be (p. 3). The researcher must "empathize and identify with the people they study in order to understand how those people see things" (p. 7). Feelings of empathy allow the researcher in a sense to "stand in the other's shoes." The understanding of the other's life that is acquired though, is not a complete understanding because that is only possible through the actual living of the other's life. Shutz (1970) says that "what can

be comprehended is always only an 'approximate value' of the limiting concept of 'the other's intended meaning'" (p. 169).

Qualitative Methodology

A qualitative research approach was utilized to conduct this study. According to Ting-Toomey (1984), "qualitative research is a mode of investigation that shares the metatheoretical assumptions of the interpretive paradigm" (p. 169). This paradigm, she professes, "is based on the assumption that social reality is created and sustained through the subjective and intersubjective experience of the actors in the scene." The social actors are viewed as being actively involved in the interpretation of their own symbolic activities; language games, verbal rituals, metaphors, and social dramas. The examination of these interpretations then becomes the basic task of qualitative studies (p. 170).

This method was selected as the appropriate one for this study for the following reasons. First, while this study was exploring the efficacy of a theory (uncertainty reduction) within a specific context (the classroom), the emphasis was given to the social actors' (the students') experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. The purpose was to gain access to the students' experience in interaction with native U.S. instructors and the students' understanding of the occurrence, or absence, of uncertainty in relationship to those encounters. What was considered significant was the international students' experiences, not the quantitative occurrence of previously constructed categories and assumptions by the researcher.

Second, this study adds depth to previous research in the field of uncertainty reduction which, even within cross-cultural contexts, has been predominantly researched through quantitative methods. According to Ting-Toomey (1984), the intent in such research is not to elicit the "insider's meanings", but rather to study "a set of hypothesized relationships concerning human behavior in a generalizable, predictable social world" (Ting-Toomey, 1984, p. 170). Reality is viewed dichotomously, says Shuter (1984), rather than as a process (p. 200). The social world though is not always predictable and because reality is not dichotic, the usefulness of viewing one's reality in such a way is limited. A method of inquiry which allowed for the interpretation of experience to be one of process was appropriate and meaningful to this study.

Qualitative Case Study

Case study, explains Sturman (1997), "is a generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon." The distinguishing feature of case study

> is the belief that human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose collection of traits....case study methods include both the particular and the universal instead of segregating the two, and moves from the particular to the universal and back in graded steps (pp. 61-63).

In order to understand the characteristics of a part, therefore, it is necessary to understand the whole to which it belongs, and the interrelationship between parts (p. 61). According to Sturman, while both quantitative and qualitative approaches may be used in the investigation, qualitative techniques are most often used when one seeks to understand the "interrelationships of complex variables" (p. 61).

The qualitative case study, relates Philipsen (1982) can be used in four ways to yield theoretically valuable findings. A qualitative case study can be used to: (a) generate hypothesis; (b) test the soundness of extant claims; (c) qualify the scope of extant claims; and (d) construct and test descriptive frameworks (pp. 12-17). The preceding uses were not all applicable to the case study detailed here; this study, for example, did not generate a hypothesis. On the other hand, the study did examine URT, the soundness of its claims and scope as related to international students' experiences of uncertainty within the specific context of the communication classroom.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Pilot Study

A three part pilot study was conducted prior to the actual data collection as a combined effort of myself and Darlene Geiger.

Phase I - Expert Panel/International Students. In the summer of 1998, two international graduate students at PSU, who were acquaintances of the researchers, were individually interviewed in order to learn of their educational experiences in the U.S. and their native countries. Additionally, we obtained information regarding their experiences of uncertainty in the classroom, and their perceptions of teacher self-disclosure. Portions of the interviews were transcribed in order for the researchers to learn of the process of transcribing and to be able to critique the interview process and guide.

Phase II - Expert Panel/Teachers. In the fall of 1998, two teaching assistants (TAs) from PSU, who were acquaintances of the researchers, were interviewed. Similar interviews were not conducted in the final study but served initially as an aid in understanding teacher intentionality in self-disclosure and the teachers' perceptions of teacher/student roles. Interviewing the TAs together also allowed the researchers an opportunity to learn of the focus group process, even though the group was admittedly small.

Phase III - Focus Group/International Students. In the fall of 1998, international students in one communication class were approached by the researchers and asked to participate in a group interview. Three undergraduate international students agreed to be interviewed as a focus group. These students made two contributions to the pilot study: (a) they provided further depth to the study by offering information regarding undergraduates' experience in communication classes; and (b) they allowed the researchers the opportunity to critique the focus group interview guide and process.

Sample Type and Size

For purposes of this study, the sample was limited to a total of eight to ten international students: eight being the minimum number of students needed to conduct the study, and ten being the maximum number allowed. This decision was made based on McCraken's (1988) "less is more" principle. He contends that it is more

important to work in-depth with a few people than superficially with many of them (p. 17).

The participants of the final study met the following criteria: they were (a) enrolled as international students at PSU; (b) registered as undergraduate students at PSU; and (c) currently taking, or who had taken a class in the Communication Department at PSU with an instructor who was white, female, and native to the U.S.

The criteria was established for various reasons: First, the sample was limited to those who were international students because their educational experiences were viewed as distinct from other students in higher education, and are often underrepresented in literature and research in education and communication.

Second, based on acculturation research, and our initial pilot study, the length of time the international students had been in the U.S. was not a deciding factor in who was included in this study. Bennett (1986) suggests that the two levels of adjustment in the acculturation process are: (a) an acceptance of behavioral differences; and (b) an acceptance of the underlying cultural values differences (p. 184). In her study, Lu (1992) found that Chinese teaching assistants used "specific strategies to adapt to behavioral and communication patterns of the U.S. university classroom; however, they were not quite aware of cultural values behind the behavioral and communication patterns" (p. 113). Our pilot study revealed similar results which implied that the second level of adjustment had not occurred; students were often able to describe teachers' behaviors, but at times were unable to explain

the underlying cultural values of those behaviors.

Third, undergraduates in particular were chosen because this classification is representative of the majority of international students worldwide who study abroad. Open Doors (1997) reports that 57.2% of international students world wide are enrolled at either the undergraduate level or in practical training, non-degree and intensive English programs. Additionally, a study concerning undergraduates is more reflective of the Communication Department at PSU; the department enrolls more students as undergraduates that graduates. According to the Portland State University Student Factbook Winter (1999), 79.2% of the students enrolled in communication classes were undergraduates.

Fourth, those students who were taking communication classes were selected because of the researchers' belief that communication classes present distinct teacher/student communication patterns. In particular, skills and theory emphasized in communication classrooms are based in Anglo cultural values such as individuality, informality, directness, openness, and equality (Koester and Lustig, 1991, p. 252). The distance between teachers and students is lessened and a degree of self-disclosure and trust are believed to be necessary in a learning environment based on the practice of communication (Nicholson and Duck, 1999, p. 90). As a result, the discipline itself may determine to some extent the patterns of communication that exist in communication classrooms.

While all lower division communication classes were considered to have similar communication patterns, public speaking classes were thought to be distinct and were not included in this study. Because students often experience apprehension in giving speeches (Lucas, 1999), it was thought that this feeling might unduly influence participants' perceptions of their experiences in such classes and therefore possibly skew the data.

Finally, white female U.S. native teachers were chosen for the following reasons. First, female teachers were chosen because of availability; the majority of teachers in the department were female. Second, the condition that the teachers be white and U.S. native was included so international students would not have to take into account a teacher's race and/or nationality. Based on the findings in our pilot study, international students may perceive teachers differently based on race and nationality. One student said that she felt more comfortable with the teacher, and more positive about her own performance, because the teacher was Asian like herself.

Contacting International Students

In February of 1999, the researchers received approval from the Human Subjects Research Review Committee to conduct the research. Subsequently, class rosters from fall term 1998 and winter term 1999 informed the researchers of those students who met the requirements, and their addresses and phone numbers were provided by the International Education Services office. Twenty-five students were initially contacted by mail (Appendix A), and then by phone, with requests for

participation in 1 to 3 interviews. Of those contacted, 8 agreed to participate.

<u>Interview Process and Sites</u>

Focus group and individual interviews began late in winter term 1999 and continued for five weeks. A total of 8 students were interviewed in the focus groups, 6 of whom were later individually interviewed. Two of the 6 also met for member checks in winter term 2000. The students who agreed to participate in the study read and signed a formal written consent form (Appendix B) which acknowledged that they were willing to participate and that they understood what was entailed.

Interviews were conducted on campus in an effort to establish comfort and convenience for the students, as well as establish our credibility as fellow students and student researchers. Interviews were either conducted in the meeting room of a coffee shop or one of several library study rooms. The majority of the interviews were held in the coffee shop because the setting was more relaxed than other areas of campus.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTATION AND APPROACH

<u>Self-as-Instrument</u>

The instrumentation for this study included interview guides, as well as the researchers themselves. McCraken (1988) stresses the importance of viewing the investigator as a kind of "instrument." Due to the need of the researcher to use his/her experience and imagination to fashion a match for the patterns revealed in the data, it is thought that the self of the researcher is considered a "bundle of templates" to

which data can be held up against until parallels emerge (p. 19). While the self-as-instrument process works most easily when the respondent's ideas match those of the researcher, the process can also work when the researcher imaginatively constructs the meaning of the subject's ideas. The researcher in this instance accepts and lives with the ideas of the subject as if they were "the most natural of assumptions," thus, allowing the subject's assertions to become the truth (pp.19-20).

The idea of "self-as-instrument" was especially important to this study. First, the researchers followed McCraken's suggestion of relying on their own experiences to aid in understanding the subjects' experiences. Both researchers were students in the same department from which the participants were drawn and therefore, as "insiders" themselves, were knowledgeable of both the structure of the classes and the relationships that develop between teachers and students. Their own experiences were at times a close match to the international students, closer than if they had been complete "outsiders."

Second, the researchers found it necessary to set aside any presumptions they had about the students' experiences in order to imaginatively reconstruct reality as it was told by the students. This was important for being able to reconstruct the students' views of the classroom experience within a phenomenological perspective. While insiders in one respect, the researchers themselves were not international students in a U.S. university and therefore could not rely entirely on their own experiences to guide their understanding of the international students' perspectives.

Interview Guides

The second type of instrumentation used in this study was that of interview guides. Development of the interview guides was a multi-step process. McCraken (1988) first suggests constructing a set of biographical questions with which to open the interview in order to allow interviewers to "ascertain the simple descriptive details of an individual's life" (p. 34) (see Appendix C). Subsequently, separate interview guides were designed for the focus group and individual interviews (see Appendices D & E).

Focus Group Interviews

McCraken (1988) and Morgan (1997) stress that the individual qualitative interview should not be used in isolation because the realities it reports are not the only realities with which the interviewer must contend. They suggest that focus group interviews can also be useful in instances such as this when the respondents may be more forthcoming with the added safety or stimulus of a group. Focus group interviews therefore aid in establishing a sense of comfort and community for participants who might otherwise experience discomfort or a sense of reserve.

Morgan (1997) relates that the focus group interview is a research technique in which the researcher determines the focus, and the data comes from the group interaction (p. 6). Such a technique was found applicable to this study which brought together three separate groups to talk about the same researcher derived topic: the students' perceptions of their experiences with U.S. instructors in communication

classrooms. The focus group interviews were conducted first because, as Morgan (1997) points out, "focus groups can provide a useful starting point for individual interviews that involve unfamiliar topics or informants" and can reveal the range of the "informants' thoughts and experiences prior to the first individual interview" (p. 22).

The design of our focus group interviews varied somewhat from Morgan's suggestions in regards to size, length of time, and number of groups, but according to Morgan the term "focus groups" is a broad umbrella that can include numerous variations (p. 6). First, we limited the number of individuals in each group to three as we had found in our pilot study that students continually talked over each other and/or finished each others' sentences.

Second, the number of groups that we interviewed was limited to three because we were also collecting data from the participants in individual interviews and therefore did not need to rely solely on focus group interview data. Third, interview time was limited to a maximum of an hour and a half, again based on our experience in the pilot study which revealed that students' English proficiency decreased as interview time increased.

Individual Interviews

Upon completion of the focus group interviews, 6 of the participants were asked to contribute to the second phase of this study. Participants for the individual interviews were chosen based on their linguistic and comprehension levels as well as

their ability to self-reflect. In order to understand the students' perspectives, the students themselves needed to be able to understand the questions, reflect on their experiences, and have the ability to share those with the researchers.

This study's "individual interview" was a modification of McCraken's (1988) "long interview." Due to the nature of the sample population, McCraken's suggested 2 or 3 hour interview time was lessened because: (a) the pilot study findings indicated that language proficiency decreased as interview time increased, and (b) the participants had limited time available for the individual interviews as all were full-time students who had already participated in focus group interviews, and agreed to meet later for "member checks."

Member Checks

Member checks involve the researchers returning to the participants of the study to have them verify the findings in some manner. Member checking, remark Lincoln and Guba (1985), contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness of the report. Seidman (1998) suggests that the researchers check with the participants to verify the initial chunking (analysis) of the data (p. 100), while Lincoln and Guba (1985) urge the interviewer to return to the participants with the final written report. In this study, general findings were discussed with select international students, but the final written theses were not presented to them.

Transcription

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researchers. The transcribing of the taped interviews followed a process that ensured maximum "interrater reliability" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). The researchers transcribed separate tapes and then reviewed the other's transcriptions resulting in every tape being listened to four times. Discrepancies were discussed, and agreement reached on the final draft of each transcription.

McCraken (1988) cautions that transcripts should be prepared by a professional typist because transcribers who prepare their own transcripts are too familiar with the interviews and are likely to become frustrated (pp. 41-42). For some very specific reasons McCraken's advice was not followed. First, transcribing experience had been acquired in the pilot study resulting in our being aware of the possible frustrations that could occur.

Second, the participants possessed varying levels of English proficiency. Unusual pronunciation or grammar usage could have caused difficulty in transcribing for someone who did not understand the context of the interview or who had not had prior experience with the students. Additionally, in the focus group interviews the students often talked over each other and the researchers were better able to know why this was happening and to understand what was said. Finally, the researchers were able to fill in important nonverbal actions used by the students to either support or take the place of verbal communication.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Introduction

As is usual in qualitative research, analysis was a continual process that began during data collection and the transcribing of interviews, and intensified during the categorizing of data and development of findings (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). While some researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996) propose that the process of gathering and analyzing data be completely integrated, Darlene and I chose to follow Seidman's (1998) guidelines that limits one to mentally working with the data as the interviews are conducted, but leaving the "in-depth analysis" of the data until the interviews are completed (p. 96).

Darlene and I approached the analysis process both individually and as a team: analysis of the data was completed individually while as a team we conferred and discussed the categories and findings that we had discovered. We continued to work jointly and individually throughout the analysis process.

Open Coding and Category Development

In the initial development of categories, we set aside our research questions and attendant theories in an effort to lessen our forcing passages to fit any previously derived themes we had in mind. From a phenomenological perspective this approach was most appropriate as we looked to our data to tell us what the categories were and the subsequent labels they would be given. We sought to discern the students' experiences and the meaning they made of them, and then to make connections among

students with like experiences (Seidman, 1998, p. 110).

Data were coded following Seidman's (1998) guidelines of studying and reducing the text by reading through the interviews separately and doing open coding of each (p. 100). Open coding consisted of reading the data vertically (each interview separately), marking with brackets those passages which were of interest, and making comments to the side about the content (p. 100). This data reduction, according to Wolcott (1994) (cited in Seidman, 1998), allows the researchers to initially begin to present, analyze, and interpret their interview material (p. 101). By marking those passages of interest we were beginning to differentiate that data which would be included in further analysis.

After the reduction of the data, Darlene and I met to determine the categories we saw emerging from the data. We discussed the main ideas within each interview transcript, and then began to analyze the data horizontally. Lu (1992) relates that the first purpose of horizontal reading is to compare data to discover commonalties among respondents, and the second is to examine whether a particular category is appropriate (p. 54). The horizontal reading resulted in our reducing the data to those 21 categories we found consistent, and deemed appropriate, across the interviews.

Following the identification of categories, transcript excerpts were then filed into any and all applicable categories. As excerpts were pulled from the original transcripts we labeled each passage using a notation system adapted from Seidman (1998) which allowed us to identify the passage's original place in the transcript so

that we could return to it, check its accuracy, and replace it in its full context

(p. 108). We continued with this notation system throughout the write-up of findings,

but made slight alterations in this final written report in order to aid readers in

understanding the sample population as they read the findings. The notation system

reads as follows: the first letter indicates whether the excerpt is from a (F) focus group

or (I) individual interview. The second letter signifies the sex of the individual; (M)

male, or (F) female. Finally, the third letter refers to the participant's native country;

(A) Australia, (J) Japan, (SA) Saudi Arabia, or (Y) former Yugoslavia. An example of

the system is as follows: [FMSA] F-focus group interview, M-male, and SA-Saudi

Arabia.

Interpreting the Categories

A number of analytic approaches aided in the interpretation of data. First,

Lofland & Lofland's (1995) social domain approach was deemed appropriate for

addressing: (a) the university as a hierarchical institution; (b) the rules attached to the

behaviors of the student/teacher roles; (c) the emotions felt, and/or meaning

understood, by students in the classroom as revealed by their social practices; (d) the

rules that occur in the encounters between students and teachers; (e) the emotional,

cognitive, and hierarchical aspects of the student/teacher relationship; and (f) the

experience of being an international student in the communication classroom.

A second applicable approach to the analysis of data was Luborsky's (1994)

thematic analysis. According to Luborsky, *themes* are "the manifest generalized

statements by informants about beliefs, attitudes, values, or sentiments." Themes come from the respondents themselves in the form of frequently repeated statements or especially significant remarks, and are found in the words, clauses, and stories that the informants use to present their point of views. Words can mark "especially intense or meaningful events and thoughts" (pp. 195-199), while clauses can be used to evaluate events or topics, and finally stories can portray an "informant's way of organizing and interpreting" his/ her life as meaningful (p. 201).

Luborksy believes that one of the many notable benefits of thematic analysis is its ability to represent an individual's own point of view and describe his/her experiences, beliefs, and perceptions (p. 190). Such an approach is supportive of a phenomenological perspective that seeks to understand and present the other's experience.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Introduction

This section discusses the relevance of reliability and validity, and how each was addressed in this study. LeCompte & Goetz (1982) stress that "the value of scientific research is partially dependent on the ability of individual researchers to demonstrate the credibility of their findings... in all fields that engage in scientific inquiry, reliability and validity of findings are important" (p. 31).

<u>Reliability</u>

Reliability, according to LeCompte & Goetz (1982), represents the replicability of scientific findings, and is addressed both in terms of external and internal design. External reliability questions whether the same phenomena or constructs of a study could be found in similar settings (p. 32). LeCompte & Goetz relate that while a study can not be duplicated exactly, the recognition and handling of the five following problems can enhance the external reliability: (a) researcher status position; (b) informant choices; (c) social situations and conditions; (d) analytic constructs and premises; and (e) methods of data collection and analysis (p. 37).

The external reliability in this study was enhanced as the researcher status position, informant choices, and analytic constructs and premises were recognized and properly addressed. First, the researchers were clearly acknowledged as being student researchers in the university. This permitted an insider ability to attain and understand the data. Secondly, those who could be participants met previously discussed, and strictly followed, guidelines. Additionally, the analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis were greatly detailed in the final write-up of this study.

Internal reliability is concerned with the degree to which other researchers would be able to match previously generated constructs with data in the same way as did the researcher (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). Internal reliability is accounted for in this study in two ways; through the use of multiple researchers, and the use of

low-inference descriptors. First, as a research team Darlene and I discussed the meaning of the interview data until agreement was reached. The congruency of meaning, remark LeCompte and Goetz (1982), reflects on interrater reliability and therefore on internal reliability. Second, low-inference descriptors also insure internal reliability and are included in the final thesis. These descriptors are verbatim accounts of what people said as well as accounts of their behaviors and activities (p. 42).

Validity

Validity, explain LeCompte & Goetz (1982), is concerned with the accuracy of the findings. Internal validity refers to the extent that observations and measurements are representative of reality (p. 32). A study high in internal validity means that the following threats to that validity have been addressed: (1) history and maturation; (2) observer effects; (3) selection and regression; (4) mortality, and (5) spurious conclusions (p. 44).

History and maturation refers to the extent to which phenomena observed at entry or at other initial occasions are the same as those observed subsequently (LeCompte & Goetz , 1982, p. 44). In this study, due to the limited time between the focus group and individual interviews, and the congruency of interview data, the data were considered to have remained stable over time. Observer effects, the effect that the researchers can have on the participants, were diminished by the researchers' acknowledgment of their own biases and their assessment of the participants' reactions

to the researchers.

Selection and regression were resolved in this study through the sampling procedures. Informants meet some very general requirements that were only restricted by their status (e.g., international students and undergraduates) and the department in which they were taking their classes.

Mortality pertains to losses and gains in group membership. In this study there was not a prestructured group with which the researchers had to contend, rather the students were individuals who, for the most part, had never met before and whose only interaction was within the researcher designed focus group at the beginning of the study. The loss of informants was an expected part of the study, of the eight who agreed to participate in the focus groups, only six were interviewed individually, and two participated in member checks. The researchers did not perceive there to be any changes in the study as a result of the decrease in informants from the individual interviews.

Spurious conclusions refers to the postulation of associations among phenomena without eliminating alternative explanations (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 50). Spurious conclusions were accounted for first through the use of alternative sources of data as a supplement to an efficient retrieval system. Second, the researchers were attune to their own sources of biases which may have influenced the interpretation of the data (p. 50). Third, the researchers conducted "member checks" with selected participants and asked for their verification that the findings were

interpreted correctly.

External validity concerns the degree that the representations of reality can be compared legitimately across groups (p. 32). LeCompte & Goetz (1982) say that there are four factors which "may affect the credibility of a study for cross-group comparisons: selection effects, setting effects, history effects, and construct effects" (p. 51). Selection effects refers to the ability to compare constructs of one group to another based on the group(s) the researcher has selected. Due to the diverse mix of nationalities in this study, the ability of the researchers to compare this group of international students with another is limited.

Setting effects refers to the investigator's influence in the context. "Constructs generated in one context may not be comparable in others...," say LeCompte & Goetz, because of the interactive dynamics of the researcher and the participants (p. 52). The researchers in this study were not participants in the classroom context, but were considered a part of the context of the interview. The researchers accounted for setting effects by detailing in their field notes the dynamics of the interviews and being sensitive to other researchers' influences in any studies they believe to be comparable.

A third factor that limits the cross-group comparison of constructs is history effects: the influence of the "unique historical experiences of groups and cultures" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 52). The researchers in this study were cautious about making comparisons not only between their group of informants and others, but also

about making comparisons within their own group of informants. Any themes that are found to be common between the participants should be noted as being common to individuals within a specific time and place, not to being commonalties between individuals from diverse cultures.

The final factor that influences cross-group comparison is construct effects, how "the effects of observed phenomena are construed" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 52). This was accounted for in this study in the following ways. First, the researchers operated as a team both in interviewing the informants and in analyzing the data. This served as an "audit to ensure that interpretation of mundane phenomena are examined rather than assumed" (p. 53). Second, the researchers not only gathered data from focus group interviews and individual interviews, but also cross-checked their interpretations with selected informants to ensure that the data were interpreted correctly.

Accounting for the many factors that influenced reliability and validity has been the goal of this section. A variety of strategies have been discussed which enhanced the study's credibility. LeCompte & Goetz stress though, that "attaining absolute validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research model" (p. 55).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The international students interviewed in this study were asked to talk about their experiences as students in international education and, more specifically, within communication classes at PSU. The chapter is divided into six major sections: the first two sections present participant background information: (a) participant demographic characteristics; and (b) participant educational backgrounds. The next four sections discuss data specific to the participants' educational experiences: (a) the situational context of international education; (b) the relational context of the teacher/student; (c) uncertainty in the communication classroom; and (d) approaches to managing uncertainty in the communication classroom.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Introduction

For purposes of this study, the sample was limited to undergraduate international students who had taken at least one communication class from a white, female, U.S. native instructor at PSU. Because the study was not limiting in terms of student characteristics (e.g., sex, race, nationality), and because of the limited number of students who agreed to participate, it should be noted that these students are not

representative of PSU's international student population except in instances of coincidence.

Demographic information (see Appendix C) was obtained from the students at the beginning of each focus group interview. Students were not required to answer any of the questions but all did so. The following demographic features are presented below: sample size, age, gender, nationality, first language, years of English study in native country and U.S., length of time living and studying in the U.S., Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, major, and number of classes taken in the Communication Department at PSU.

Corresponding information is organized into tables for quick reference. Information within a single table coincides horizontally, but information does not correspond horizontally from table to table. For example, the male from former Yugoslavia (line 1 of Table 1) is not a native English speaker (line 1 of Table 2). The tables were deliberately made incongruent in order to better protect the identities of the participants.

Participant Biographical Characteristics

A total of eight students participated in the study; three males (37.5%) and five females (62.5%) (see Table 1). Japanese students represented 62.5% of the sample population, while the students from Australia, Saudi Arabia, and former Yugoslavia each accounted for 12.5%. This sample did not reflect PSU's total international student population exactly but it was "typical" (Honigmann, 1970, p. 270). The

majority of international students at PSU (19.3%) were from Japan, while students from the other countries were all minorities: Australia and former Yugoslavia both represented less than 1% of the international student population (.3 and .7 respectively) and those from Saudi Arabia accounted for 4.8% (P.S.U. Student FactBook Fall 1998, Winter 1999).

TABLE 1

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Gender	Age	Native Country	First Language
Male	25	former Yugoslavia	Serbian
Male	22	Saudi Arabia	Arabic
Male	24	Japan	Japanese
Female	23	Japan	Japanese
Female	31	Japan	Japanese
Female	22	Japan	Japanese
Female	24	Japan	Japanese
Female	17	Australia	English

Participant Study of English and TOEFL Scores

Seven students studied English as a foreign language in their native countries for an average of 7.57 years, three of whom also studied English after arriving at PSU (see Table 2). All of the students, except the native English speaker, had passed the TOEFL with an average score of 542, with one student unable to remember his score. Non-native English speakers are required to have a minimum score of 527 in order to be admitted as undergraduate international students at PSU.

TABLE 2

PARTICIPANT STUDY OF ENGLISH AND TOEFL SCORE

NC Study Time	US Study Time	TOEFL
Native Speaker		
3 years	10 weeks	515
5 years		-
6 years	20 weeks	533
9 years		550
10 years		534
10 years		575
10 years	10 weeks	547

Note. Dashes indicate data were not obtained (student unable
to remember score). NC = Native Country; US = United States;
TOEFL = Test of English as a Foreign Language.

Participant Time in U.S.

Time in the U.S. averaged 2.34 years (see Table 3). Six participants had been

students for the duration of their time in the U.S., while 2 had spent a brief period of

time in the U.S. before beginning their studies.

TABLE 3

PARTICIPANT TIME IN THE US

Time in US	Time as Student in US
0.2 years	0.2 years
0.6 years	0.6 years
0.8 years	0.5 years
1.0 years	1.0 years
2.5 years	2.5 years
2.6 years	1.6 years
4.0 years	4.0 years
7.0 years	7.0 years

Note. US = United States

<u>Participant Major and # of Communication Classes Taken</u>

The students came from a variety of departments and had taken a varied

number of communication classes (see Table 4). Only three of the eight students

(37%) interviewed were majoring in communication.

TABLE 4

PARTICIPANT MAJOR AND # OF COMMUNICATION CLASSES TAKEN

Major	Communication Classes
Communication	6
Communication	6
Communication	6
Computer Science	2
Administrative Justice	2
Management Information Systems	2
Applied Linguistics	1
Undecided	1

PARTICIPANT EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

<u>Introduction</u>

This section briefly discusses the educational systems of the four countries

from which our participants originated; Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and former

Yugoslavia. This discussion does not illustrate the individual experiences of each

student but serves to explicate (a) the place of education within the greater society,

and (b) the goals of the educational system within each nation. An introduction into

these educational systems may be helpful in understanding the findings.

Australia

Education and Society. According to Cowen (1984), "the system in Australia is an example of education in a new pioneering country. It was based on the systems of Europe, especially those of England and Ireland, but has demonstrated the influence on education of an egalitarian democracy and the growth of central and State control" (p. 47). As a contemporary industrial urban society, Australia is similar to North America in regard to its federal system of administration and federal system of education (p. 37).

Responsibility for schooling, remarks Reynolds (1994), "is shared between the six States, two Territories (Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory) and the Commonwealth Government." Constitutional responsibility for the provision of schooling to all school age children lies with the State Ministers of Education, not the Commonwealth Government. While the Commonwealth does work in cooperation with the States in addressing resourcing, equity, and quality issues, the Commonwealth is specifically responsible for Aboriginal peoples and migrant populations (p. 3).

Goals of Education. Education, relates Reynolds (1994), is structured as a twelve year program that is normally completed at age 17. Compulsory education begins at age 6 and is completed at age 15 (at the end of the sophomore year). The final two years of school are not compulsory, but are completed by most students

(pp. 4-5). The broad purposes of education, says McKenzie (1995), change as one moves through the education system.

> In the compulsory years of schooling the major emphasis tends to be on fostering individual development and general socialization. At the upper-secondary and tertiary levels, broader economic and social goals tend to become significant (p. 41).

Japan

Education and Society. Education, contends Wary (1999) "has been a permanent, central concern of Japanese society since the beginning of the modern period" (p. 48). In order to have a competent work force, Japan created a system for sorting, selecting, and shaping human resources through the use of entrance examinations, school ranking, and a centralized, standardized education system (p. 289). The result of such an organized and focused system is an orderly society and an economic giant with an educational system that is focused on entrance examinations (pp. 131, 289).

Admission to all the top universities, says Fiske (1983), is an intense and rigid process dependent solely on one's score in that particular university's entrance examination (p. 28). While entrance examination systems eventually result in the recruitment of the best talent for industries and bureaucracy, they also aid in the formation of the character of the Japanese as they pass from childhood to adulthood (Wary, 1999, pp. 132-133). Learning, to the Japanese, is not a product of ability, but rather the product of effort, perseverance, and self-discipline (Becker, Silver, Kantowski, Travers, & Wilson, 1990, p. 13).

In addition to the regular public schools, students can also attend private schools or profit-making schools called juku (cram schools) (Becker et. al.,1990). Attending a juku can aid in one doing well on the entrance exam to a secondary or tertiary school, and eventually to the attainment of a good job which is the ultimate objective (Weisman, 1992, p. 1).

Goals of Education. Japan's educational system, relates Fiske (1983), is run by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, otherwise known as the Mombusho. The Mombusho is not only responsible for determining the curriculum that every elementary, junior high, and senior high school in the country will follow, but it also makes educational policy, and decides standards for such things as textbooks, courses of study, teachers' qualifications, salaries, building specifications, and university entrance examinations (Wary, 1999, pp. 30-31).

The Mombusho, relates Kanaya (1995), was also significant in determining the goals of Japanese education:

> Education shall aim at full development of personality, at rearing a people, sound in mind and body, who love truth and justice, esteem individual values, respect labor, have a deep sense of responsibility, and are imbued with an independent spirit as the builders of a peaceful state and society (p. 482).

The goals strive for a balance between the individual and society, but the educational system itself actually emphasizes social order and uniformity, which Wary (1999), says has led to a "subtle, oppressive conformity and collectivism" (p. 89).

Saudi Arabia

Education and Society. According to The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (1991), four underlying principals shape Saudi Arabia's unique educational system: total state financial support, comprehensive national educational policy, central importance of Islamic studies and separate but equal education for male and female students. "Education is seen as the best insurance for the continuing development of the nation's most precious resource - its citizens - and the present system offers a synthesis of the most modern educational resources and a uniquely Saudi character" (pp. 12-14).

Islam is significant to the discussion of education in Saudi Arabia because the tenets of the Islamic faith are inseparably intertwined with the history of education itself. According to Islam, "seeking knowledge" (talab al-ilm) is an integral part of individual, community and religious responsibilities and an obligation for every man and woman. The foundation for modern Saudi education therefore has been laid by the heritage of Islamic belief (p. 2).

Goals of Education. The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (1991) reports that educational programs and resources in Saudi Arabia are overseen by four government agencies. While the Ministry of Education primarily oversees males' general education from kindergarten to secondary levels, it is the Ministry of Higher Education that supervises males' post-secondary education. Females' general education and post-secondary training, on the other hand, are both managed by the

General Presidency of Girls' Education, while the General Organization for Technical

Education and Vocational Training supervises training in industrial, trade and

agricultural programs (p. 15).

The educational system in Saudi Arabia, says Al-Baadi (1995), is set within

the national development effort, and is charged with three objectives:

1. to provide at least basic education for all citizens
2. to provide students with the skills that are required by the changing needs of the economy
3. to educate students in the beliefs, practices, and values of the Islamic culture (p. 837).

The merging of religious and civic duty in combination with "the infusion of Islamic

sensibilities into secular pursuits, forms the backbone of the modern educational

system in Saudi Arabia" (The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1991, p. 6).

Today, Saudi Arabia boasts over 15,000 educational institutions and a

nationwide educational system which "provides free tuition, books, and health

services to students at all levels, and offers stipends and subsidized meals and

transportation to those who study away from home" (The Saudi Arabian Cultural

Mission, 1991, p. 5).

Former Yugoslavia

While recent conflicts have altered much of life in the former Socialist Federal

Republic of Yugoslavia[1], this discussion focuses on the educational system as it

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[1] The US view is that the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has dissolved and no successor state represents its continuation. Serbia and Montenegro have asserted the formation of a joint independent state, but this entity has not been formally recognized as a state by the US (U.S. Department of State, 2000).

existed when our participant lived there.

Education and Society. Yugoslavia was described as a nation of astonishing heterogeneity in which six republics and two autonomous provinces were joined in an essentially voluntary confederation (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OCED], 1981, p. 35). The socialist ideology upheld by the Yugoslavs embraced a society that was self-managed, without the power and governance of the state (p. 35). Thus, the principle of self-management resulted in the highly decentralized control of education; local control existed over what was taught, budgeting was based on the free exchange of labor, and workers participated in setting programs and policies (pp. 5, 47).

While self-management was one distinct mark of Yugoslavian education, an equally distinguishing characteristic was that it was fully bilingual. Kornhauser (1988) contends that the multicultural, multinational country of Yugoslavia had been exemplary in providing bilingual education as every nation and nationality had the opportunity to be taught in the mother tongue (pp. 729-730). The OCED (1981) states that a child might have been taught in one of eight official mother tongues and also have had the opportunity to learn the other languages of his/her environment (p. 24). Primary school, as example, had "about 1,600 schools with about 13,400 departments offering different forms of bilingual education" (Kornhauser, 1988, p. 730).

Goals of Education. According to Kornhauser (1988), the goals of the educational system of Yugoslavia were to link a lifelong development of the

intellectual self with a development of community and productive employment (pp. 729-730). An extensive amount of institutions existed that served to meet the goals of the system resulting in education that was not only for the young, or for those seeking academic knowledge, but also for the workers who could receive training specific to their profession (p. 730-731).

THE SITUATIONAL CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Introduction

The communication class, though the focus of this study, was not the only class referred to by the students, nor is it the only class discussed in this section. The students made comparisons and shared experiences of classes across the PSU campus, and from schools in their native countries. In order to understand the students' perceptions of their uncertainties in communication classes, it is important to understand the relationship of those classes to other classes within international education.

Based on the data in this study a typology of three class types was developed to explicate the international students' experiences in international education; *The Base Class, Expanded Class,* and *Communication Class* (see Figure 1).
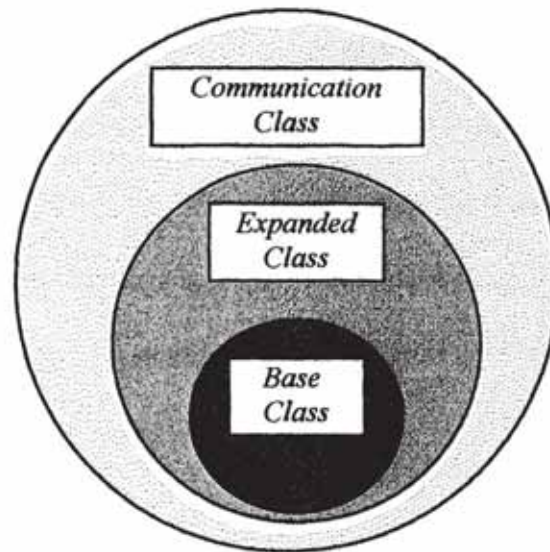
Figure 1. Institutional Classes in International Education

The *Base Class* represents the core of the other classes because of the activities enacted and the approach taken to the transfer of knowledge. The *Expanded Class* and the *Communication Class* extend beyond the *Base Class* by including additional activities and approaches to the transfer of knowledge.

The Base Class

The *Base Class* is so named because its components are at the center of most classes described by the students within institutionalized education in the U.S. and in their native countries. The components of the *Base Class* are activities and an approach to knowledge transfer that can be found to be incorporated in most classes at some point in time. The components include (a) the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students through (b) lectures. These *Base Class* components constituted much of the classroom experience of our participants in their native countries.

Lectures. Knowledge in the *Base Class* is directly transferred from the teacher

to the students by lecture, and was the only approach mentioned by the students when

speaking of their experiences in their native countries. The format of the class was

such that the teacher would lecture and the students would take notes and memorize

what they were told. Students described it as follows:

> the teacher is the only one who speaks, he just gives information, and students
> are always just taking notes and just be quiet [FFJ].

> in Australia more the lectures up there he's telling, he or she is telling you
> what, what it is and you just sit there and take notes and that's it [FFA].

> I think I'm more active toward learning in, in the States where I'm doing the
> learning. Whereas in Yugoslavia I was kind of, I wasn't necessarily doing the
> learning, I was made to learn. It was not the learning I, I didn't get to the
> knowledge myself willingly, because I was interested. It would be expected on
> me or it was not as fun [FMY].

In their native countries, the students were the passive recipients of subject matter

determined by the teachers, and were merely expected to learn that which was

conveyed through lecture.

While the lecture approach was most often discussed in reference to classes in

the students' native countries, it was also referred to at times when the students spoke

of classes at PSU. Either due to class size, the type and amount of content conveyed,

or one's teaching style, lectures are utilized to varying degrees at PSU. One student

reported that she believed the lecture approach was utilized in her business class

because of the amount of students in the class, "about a hundred," and the type of

class content being conveyed.

> I think in the other classes [in comparison to communication classes at PSU] the teachers are mainly there to teach us a specific substance or whatever. Like they're, well the business teachers are there to teach us business, like things to do with business and so teachers just sort of stand up there with overheads and explain all about business [IFA].

The student perceived that lectures at PSU served a specific purpose and she could even rationalize when one instructional approach would be used rather than another.

Listening to lectures and taking notes may be smaller elements of classes like those in communication that incorporate lived experience and communicative activities into learning, but the *Base Class* activities still occur and knowledge is still seen as being transferred. The following quote, given by one student, illustrates the importance of the *Base Class* activity of lecturing and, in this case, the *lack* of knowledge being transferred in a communication class.

> It was very easy class, but I didn't think I learned in that class. I just, it was just too general, general, and I can't remember the instructor's name, it was just…her lecture wasn't that great, for me, and well, that was the main thing [FFJ]

In this example the student expresses an inability to attain knowledge from the teacher because the class was too general and the lectures were not "that great". Knowledge is still discussed as being necessary to the student's experience, as is the acquisition of that knowledge via the instructor.

Knowledge. In the *Base Class*, knowledge is narrowly defined as the subject matter that is conveyed by the teacher in lecture. Teachers are expected to be knowledgeable of their subject matter, and to have more knowledge than the students. One student related that teachers are,

...the person to, to contact or ask, or cite whenever something is said and about the subject and then there's always relating to this instructor who is totally oriented toward that particular thing that they are teaching [FMY].

Due to the fact that knowledge was specific to the subject matter, opinions, personal experiences, and critical analyses were not types of knowledge noted as being shared. In reference to a lack of personal examples being used by teachers in Japan one student explained that,

> we really don't know the teachers as a person, just they are giving us information about the subject, so, we really don't know them [IFJ].

Additionally, the students noted that while in their native countries the task of the teacher was to impart knowledge, the student's task was to take notes and correctly learn what was taught. The correct retention of knowledge was particularly important as incorrect responses to questions were unfavorably received. As one student reported, "In my country if I get wrong answer they [the teachers] scorn me" [FFJ]. Knowledge then came from the teacher in the form of a subject matter which needed to be accurately learned by the students.

Summary. The term *Base Class* refers to a class type in which teachers lecture to students, and then test the students' knowledge retention. This class type can be its own separate entity, or it can form the core of other classes in which lecturing, the transfer of knowledge, and testing occur. The *Base Class* components, therefore, are relevant to the following discussions of the *Expanded Class* and the *Communication Class*.

<u>The Expanded Class</u>

The second type of class is the *Expanded Class*, which, according to the students, seemed to be representative of many of the classes at PSU. The components of the *Base Class* are still present, but other elements are added that result in a more interactive process of learning. The components of the *Expanded Class* include (a) students asking and answering questions during discussions, and (b) knowledge being openly exchanged between students and teachers in the form of personal comments and opinions, as well as text references.

<u>Class Discussion.</u> Class discussion was a new teaching approach for the international students who all came from countries in which lecture was conventional. Because they were unfamiliar with the class discussion format, the pattern of discussion was easier to define than it was to participate in. One student described the typical class discussion as a game of ball.

> The teacher speak and then student speak and then they are doing like a catch, catch ball.... There is a rhythm [FFJ].

The "rhythm" though, was unfamiliar to the student and difficult to become part of when she was more familiar with taking a passive listening role in the classroom rather than participating in an active verbal exchange.

While the use of class discussion was new to the students, overall, it was an approach that they were receptive to, and positive about because discussions gave a sense of openness and flexibility to the class and those involved in the class. As the students reported,

They're [U.S. teachers] so flexible, they accept our opinions, they seek our opinions [FFJ].

People are willing to talk to you (pause) and they peoples feel like that's their duty to, to be that way. That open [FMY].

Teachers, in particular, were perceived differently because of the interaction that occurred in discussions: asking questions and responding to others made the teachers and the classroom atmosphere appear to be open. Even though conversing may have been seen as a "duty," it was still perceived in a positive way.

While class discussions positively affected students' perceptions of teachers, there was often a different response when the international students spoke of their classmates. Students who questioned the teacher during class were at times perceived negatively, as being disrespectful of the teacher, and causing interruptions to the lecture. One student related that in his culture there "was more respect of the teacher. We never stop him when he's talking, till he's done... it's more like respect, more than anything else" [FMSA]. Thus, it was expected that students would show respect to the teacher by not interrupting.

International students' perceptions of class discussions not only varied, from positive to negative, but changed. One student related how her view of student responses in class discussions changed from positive to negative over time.

Well, in the beginning I was like wow, they are great, American students are great, asking questions, and having their own opinions, and you know, speak up their minds in the classroom, but like, I gradually realize that they're not saying that GREAT thing, I mean, at the, at the beginning I just thought WOW they're asking questions in the class which we never do in Japan, so that was it, I thought that they were much better students, American students, much

better, and more, more serious, and, and eager, and, but, now I just realize that, just that's the, the way they are, just have to say what they are thinking at that point…but sometimes they just are not making any sense. [FFJ].

This student's account of class discussions reveals that while her perception of native U.S. students has changed, her perception of what a class serves to do, has not. A class, whether it follows a lecture or discussion format, should convey knowledge and "make sense."

Knowledge. In the *Expanded Class*, discussions change the students' perceptions of what constitutes knowledge, and who is able to hold and transfer knowledge. Instead of being transmitted from teacher to students in a lecture format, knowledge is viewed as being openly exchanged *between* the teacher and students through discussion. Many students made remarks similar to the following,

> …they [teachers in the U.S.] listen to student idea and sometimes they ask, well, often they ask question, I mean opinion to the students [FFJ].

Knowledge in the *Expanded Class* is more than text based understanding of the subject; it can also be one's opinions and comments on the subject. Rather than giving rote answers to questions, students explicate their understanding of the subject by offering comments as well as asking questions to further their knowledge. When referring to a communication class a student made the following remark about his interaction with the teacher in the class,

> I usually have something to say in her classes as far as, as she's talking about I have some feedback, it depends, sometimes I'm confirming to myself, and sometimes I think it's a little clever idea so I want to show off and I, I just say it, and, and she always nods her head, and then, and then has something to say back to confirm that there is some substance in what I said [IMY].

Class discussion then, allows the students to share their own knowledge in the form of questions, comments, or opinions. Also, as illustrated in the previous quote, it allows interpersonal communication to occur in which students can receive immediate feedback from the teacher that confirms that their comments are valued and valuable.

Summary. The term *Expanded Class* refers to a class which may include some lecturing by the instructor, but for the most part it is an interactive process in which the teacher and students are mutually responsible for discussing the subject matter. Knowledge is transferred between students and teachers in discussions, and extends beyond the subject matter to include one's own personal comments and opinions.

The Communication Class

The third type of class evident in this study was that of the *Communication Class*. This class incorporates the same components found in the *Base Class* and the *Expanded Class*, but what makes the *Communication Class* distinct is: (a) the inclusion of communicative and reflective activities; (b) the extension of types of knowledge shared; and (c) an atmosphere that is often perceived as more diverse and friendly than in other classes.

Communicative and Reflective Activities. Communication classes are distinct in that students learn more about what they already know and practice in their daily lives - communication. The class activities then are also distinct by being more self-reflective and communicative than in other classes; the discussions require students to be able to articulate, discuss, and analyze their own thoughts and experiences.

Additionally, the activities involve their participation in communicating with others, in this way they are actually practicing better communication. Group projects and presentations, for example, involve students in the practice of communication. One Japanese student related that the speaking opportunities given in her communication class aided in her being able to gain confidence,

> I have many chance, chances to speaking up in her class, so everybody already knew I'm, my pronunciation is not good. I'm international students. So I'm not so scared…But in many other classes, presentation is the only chance to speak in class….so scared [IFJ].

The activities in the class (e.g., group projects, discussions) involved the student in the act of communication and strengthened her confidence and communication skills. Particularly important, though, was the fact that the communicative activities were repeated which implies that it is the *practice* of communication that is directly linked to the student's confidence in communicating.

While communicative practice can strengthen personal confidence and communicative skills, it is self-reflection that can strengthen cognitive skills. One participant said that students in communication classes are learning to think at a "meta-level" [IFJ]. The students are not only learning concepts and theories through lectures and class discussions, but they are acquiring their own understandings of theories and concepts through reflection on their communication acts. Journals, collages, and even discussions can help students reflect on themselves and their own communication patterns. One student found that the communication class allowed him the chance to think about and develop his own ideas. He said,

I think I came to more ideas on my own in her class [communication class], than in CS [Computer Science] classes...I had to, like, in other classes, I was trying to understand concepts, concepts, that were given to me, and in her class there was that too, but more, just coming up with my own, own conclusions of how things are. And that would reflect my understanding, or my understanding of the concept would help me come to those conclusions, but it seems like more a complete circle [IMY].

In communication classes the students are not only learning about the class content, but also about how they understand themselves and others. This means that what they are learning in the class is often directly linked to their immediate lives. The experiences of international students in particular seem to relate to intercultural communication classes. They are learning about themselves and others simply by being in the system of international education. Their understandings of a concept such as "culture shock," for example, have been acquired through their own experiences as international students, as one student reported,

We are here being a foreigner in a foreign country, so we have been through those, you know, culture shock or in stages so the information we got in the class wasn't something new for me... [IFJ].

This student may not have known the term "culture shock" before she took the class, but she was quite aware of the experience, an experience which many others in her class may not have known and have needed to participate in a game or simulation in order to begin to understand the concept. She stated the following,

The class I took wasn't informative for me, it was, a bit of more informative per-, yeah, informative to American student who have never been to world or never had contact with other stu-, people from other countries [IFJ].

Knowledge. Reflective and communicative activities are not the only features that make communication classes distinct, additionally, what constitutes knowledge in such classes differs from what constitutes knowledge in most other classes. For example, in the students' native countries knowledge was specific to the subject matter being taught, while in classes at PSU the knowledge exchanged was at times in the form of personal opinions or comments. Specific to the communication classroom was a recognition that the knowledge acquired or shared was more often: (1) experiential knowledge; or (2) cultural knowledge.

Experiential knowledge is knowledge based on one's own experiences, both in and out of the classroom (Lederman, 1992). The communication classroom is a distinct place in which personal experience, and the analysis of that experience, enriches the understanding of the subject matter. Students' experiences within and outside of the university are relevant and pertinent to the class as they communicate repeatedly throughout their lives. The students come to these classes with knowledge of the subject developed within their personal experiences, as one student related, "...most of the stuff that's being discussed I felt like I knew but I haven't had a chance to articulate, and put it together as my own definition" [IMY].

Another aspect of the students' experiential knowledge is linked to international education. Because these students come to the class with experience gained in different cultures and educational systems, they often expect and appreciate the opportunity to share their knowledge and learn from others. In intercultural

communication classes, specifically, they believe their experiential knowledge is valuable and worthy of sharing. One student said that she took an intercultural communication class, in part, because of her expectations of herself in the class.

> I am here international students taking that class so I could be good example or good real example in that class and so, yeah, I thought, I expected that [IFJ].

The sharing of experiential knowledge is often an occurrence in the classes which serves to support the students' expectations and results in their appreciation as one student reported,

> And that class, she [teacher] would talk about it [referring to cultures], and even international students sitting there would talk about it too, so you get it from the people themselves. Which is really good [FMSA].

The students' knowledge gained from life experiences is not only validated in the class, but is also supported by the teachers and other students. Their experiences in international education are shared in the same context that subject matter from a text or lecture is shared. Experience therefore is considered a type of knowledge in communication classes.

The link between knowledge and experience also exists in the expectations the students have of the teachers. The first expectation is that *the teacher of communication is skilled at communicating.* Teachers were thought to be qualified and capable of teaching the subject of communication if they were experienced at communicating. One student remarked that his teacher was very easy to get along with,

she's different than the other instructors that I have, but I was not actually surprised because having, having been a Speech class or in the Speech area I would expect someone to, to be, more skilled in interacting with people... [IMY].

A second expectation is that *the teacher of communication is knowledgeable of the subject in part because of her personal experience.* While teachers in every class are expected to know their subject matter, the communication teacher is also expected to have lived many of the communication experiences discussed in class. Teachers of intercultural communication, for example, were considered skilled in the subject area if they had experienced intercultural encounters in their own lives. The experience one instructor had living in a foreign country was important to understanding the students' perception of her and her qualifications to teach the subject. As one student reported,

> Cause, she was teaching us about intercultural communication and if she, her, she had the year of that, you know experience about the intercultural communication so, I, oh, I see her, she is a real teacher of intercultural communication. She's, she's a person who can really teach us intercultural communication because she, she experienced it" [FFJ].

The knowledge that this student spoke of is based on experience, and is something beyond the imparting of subject matter from a text. One student said her teacher knew a lot because she had "lots of personal examples" [IFJ]. In communication classes personal knowledge is relevant whereas in many other classes, such as history or science, knowledge based on experience would not necessarily be as relevant or even attainable. The only additional department mentioned in which a

student felt that a teacher's knowledge based on experience was as important was in applied linguistics. The student related,

> I can trust and respect experienced teacher not only information from the book but from, from their own experience in life. So, my field is linguistic…so I can trust or respect their [teachers'] opinions because they have been to the world and taught English there and know what it is like. So. Yeah, it's good when, like when they give us their real examples from their experiences. We can trust their information much more than, than those teachers who get information from, only from the book [FFJ].

Having knowledge based on experience adds a new dimension to a class; personal experience is considered a type of knowledge and is expected of the teacher by the students.

In addition to experiential knowledge, the second type of knowledge specifically expected in communication classes is *cultural knowledge*. For the teacher this means a knowledge of international students' cultures and/or countries. In intercultural communication classes the textbooks and discussions offer examples from different cultures and countries. One of the students commented that she wanted the teacher "to know about, about truth more, the real things in each international country, international student's country" [FFJ]. This was in response to ideas that the student had found in the class textbook that she thought were very biased. These "stereotypes" as the student called them, could be portrayed as "truths" if the teacher did not have sufficient knowledge beyond the text's readings, simply having knowledge of the subject matter which reflected the text's readings was not enough. The teacher was expected to have knowledge beyond the text that reflected reality,

"a truth" which was the student's cultural-specific reality.

A second type of cultural knowledge was found to be exhibited by teachers in communication classes and that was knowledge of the students' experiences as international students. When teachers recognized that the experiences of international students were different from native U.S. students it was noted and appreciated by the students. One student confided that,

> ...there are some teachers who don't really care about anything about international students, they really don't pay attention to international students, so, that kind of, that, that makes the class harder for me. So, intercultural communication, the communication class was, the teacher was very, more dedicated toward international students, it was more special attention [IFJ].

The attention that was given by the teacher consisted of small acts which served to support and help the student, yet did nothing to alter the course's content, class activities, or method of grading. After class the teacher asked the student if her speed of speaking was appropriate for understanding, if the student was able to follow the lecture, and she also mentioned in the class that others should be understanding of non-native English speakers. This communication teacher, and others, showed that they were conscious of international students' experiences by doing these things which took note of the students.

While special attention to international students was not acknowledged by all the students as being needed, or having occurred, the Japanese consistently stressed the importance of receiving extra attention from teachers. Why this desire for attention was more specific to the Japanese is not known, but one possibility is that

the Japanese were more conscious of their language proficiencies and consequently worried about their ability to perform in the class.

The student from Australia who spoke English as her first language never mentioned encountering extra attention from her teacher, or a desire to have such attention. The other two students, one from Saudi Arabia and the other from former Yugoslavia, also never mentioned that they wanted, or received any special attention from a teacher because they were international students. The later two students however, were very proficient in English, even though it was their second language.

While desiring attention from teachers was an area of difference for the Japanese and non-Japanese students, there were similarities shared in most other areas. All of the students, for example, found that their cultural knowledge of the U.S. was limited and often resulted in their not understanding everything that was said in the class as examples specific to the U.S. were often used as well as idiomatic language. While teachers needed to be knowledgeable of the students' cultures and countries, the students found that they needed a cultural knowledge of the U.S.; uncertainty was at times directly related to the absence of such knowledge (see pp. 93-105, this text, for a more detailed discussion of uncertainty in the classroom).

Class Atmosphere. The third component that makes the communication class distinct is the communication environment; that is, the atmosphere and interaction with the classroom. Our participants reported that (a) the students in these classes

were friendlier, (b) the teachers were kinder and friendlier than in other classes, and

(c) that there was more diversity among students in communication classes.

First, interactions within the classrooms were most often described by the

students as friendly.

> You can tell the people who take this kind of classes [communication], they really more friendly [FMSA].

> I think people are more friendly, friendlier, in communication department... Because we are studying communication, communications, and, so it is not so competitive like a business [IFJ].

Such friendliness was not only found to occur in the classes, but it was also an

expectation that the students took to the classes because of their understanding of

what a communication class should be in comparison to other classes. One student

said that she took an intercultural communication class because it,

> sounded like fun, that intercultural communication, also, I expected, expected that teachers, teacher and students in the classroom would be more friendly, than in other classes. Because our subject is intercultural communication" [IFJ].

Communication classes were expected to include, and usually did, students who were

more communicative and friendly. International students reported that other students

often asked them, "Are you doing Ok?" or "Do you need any help?" [F2M0922].

Students also remarked that communication teachers were kinder and

friendlier than teachers in other classes. One student said that his departmental

instructors knew their subject matter and had good conversational skills but he found

his communication teacher to be "friendlier, and closer and more available... she's

willing to help and she doesn't seem very distant, as some of the instructors…"

[IMY]. Continually, students commented on the friendliness and approachability of

the teachers in communication, and how they were seen as treating all of the students

with equality. For example, one student described his teacher as follows,

> She is, she seems to treat everyone equally, and she's give everyone equal
> attention…She doesn't show any signs of discrimination among the students.
> (pause) She's not one of those rude instructors that don't let students interact
> with instructors, she seems easily accessible to anyone in the class… [IMY].

Approachability, friendliness, openness, and equal treatment were characteristics that

the students saw in their communication teachers and that added to their impression of

the class as a friendly place.

The diversity of the student population was another aspect of communication

classes which the international students thought to be different from other classes. For

the Japanese students, the diversity was in terms of the number of foreign students

who were taking lower division classes. In particular, the intercultural

communication classes were spoken of the most often in relation to their cultural

diversity. Students reported the following,

> I was more, I guess I was more active in *Xxxxx's* class because I'm more
> confident… You know, like in a group discussion, I never took leadership
> (laughs) but in *Xxxxx's* class…I actually took leadership in the group
> discussion…I never done that in any other class, because, (pause), cuz many
> times I was only international student in the group and everybody just kept
> talking and I don't have any chance to talk…Because, what they talk change so
> fast… [IFJ].

> They have many international student, native speaker only seven, five, or six
> native speaker…Many, many of them were Vietnamese (pause). Cuz they
> have same looking, (laughs) I feel really safe (laughs)…they have black hair

and they, they have like simil-, not similar, but they have accent in English [IFJ].

The Japanese students recognized and identified with others at times who were most like themselves, and this identification was especially possible in the intercultural communication classes. The diversity of the class made the students feel more comfortable and at ease in speaking as one student related,

> I didn't get tense to speak in a class. Because there were some international students who, (pause) who also spoke English as second language. So, I feel I didn't have to speak fluently. Cause really made me sick [IMJ].

In other communication classes where there was less cultural diversity there was still considered to be a degree of diversity for those students who were from technical fields such as Computer Science. The diversity in this instance was related to gender, as one student said, in communication classes "there were a lot more girls than CS [Computer Science] classes" [IMY]. There were no remarks by the students from such fields though as to how the gender mix of the class influenced their experience or behavior in the class.

Summary. While the *Communication Class* incorporates components from both the *Base Class* and *Expanded Class*, two additional components are distinguished. First, as students participate in reflective activities they come to a better understanding of their communication behaviors and relationships. Additionally, by taking part in activities such as group discussions, presentations, and/or interviews; they are able to improve their communicative abilities.

The *Communication Class* is also distinct in the types of knowledge conveyed and in the atmosphere of the class. Knowledge in the class is often experiential or cultural. Experiential knowledge is knowledge based on one's experiences in life, while cultural knowledge is a knowledge of the other's culture and/or country. Both of these are thought to be necessary for the teachers and students.

Within the model of the university class, the *Communication Class* is viewed as different yet never completely removed from the other classes within the model. One similar component found in all class types was the teachers' conveyance of knowledge by lecture which makes it possible to see that international students' experiences in *Communication Classes* are not at extreme odds with their experiences in other classes. This is not to say that there are not profound differences in the classes, but that there does appear to be some common ground. The *Base Class*, as discussed by the students, is not at one end of a continuum but is the core of all classes within institutionalized international education.

THE RELATIONAL CONTEXT OF TEACHER/STUDENT

Introduction

This fourth section addresses data findings specific to teacher/student relationships. Based on the data, a three part typology was developed to explicate the students' perceptions of teacher/student relationships; (a) in their native countries, (b)

at PSU, and (c) in communication classes. The different features of each category are common in that they all reflect on the scope and boundaries of the relationships.

Native Country

In the participants' native countries, teacher/student relationships were consistently perceived as formal and distant, and teachers as strict and powerful. Distinct attitudes and behaviors of the teachers that led, in part, to these perceptions were (a) the absence of self-disclosure, and (b) the patterns of control utilized in the classroom.

Teacher Self-Disclosure. Teacher self-disclosure was referred to as a rare or even nonexistent practice in the students' native countries. Referring to his teachers in former Yugoslavia, one participant remarked that,

> they [the teachers] were never going to give personal example like that [pause] it's none of your business' [FMY].

> it was supposed to be this ah, serious atmosphere where you know there's gonna be some theory's gonna be discussed and you come to class to, to listen to the instructor. There isn't that much interaction and then you leave. [FMY].

An absence of personal self-disclosure helped maintain a distance between the teacher and the students. The students knew little to nothing about the teacher as a person and had a strictly formal relationship with the teacher. Additionally, the students perceived the teacher as exhibiting self-control by removing his/her personal life from the classroom. One student explained that,

...Japanese teachers they are just, they are in the box, I mean in their cage or whatever. I feel like they're in the cage and never show their personalities or in the classroom. Yeah, so, it's rare for them to talk about, to bring up their own experience, or examples in classroom, they don't do that often, as much as they do here, American student, American teachers do. So, so, I, we really don't know the teachers as a person, they are giving us information about the subject, so, we really don't know them, don't know of them, or know them [IFJ].

Patterns of Control. Control in the classroom that limited teacher/student interaction was often exhibited through the teachers' regulation of speech. In Japan, students commented,

teacher seems not, not to want ah, questions or opinions. Yeah, he, he talk, talk by, by himself [FFJ].

teacher talk, and then teacher ask student, but the student doesn't speak out until teacher point out to students, 'Ok, next' like that and then [pause] then I, I can say something [FFJ].

By physically pointing at a student, and verbally telling him/her when to talk, the teacher was able to control who could speak when and about what specific topic. Important to understanding the control that the teachers demonstrated is a need to acknowledge that while teachers had the ability based on their status and/or position within the class to determine patterns of interaction, students were found to nurture those interaction patterns by refraining from making comments and/or asking questions in class. There was an understood cultural norm that students were to listen to teachers and not interrupt. This norm was unspoken, but yet known and adhered to, as students explained,

I never taught to not to ask questions, but nobody did that... [FFJ].

It's not that you can't [ask questions], but you just don't [FFJ].

The absence of teacher/student classroom interaction in the students' native countries was reflective of the participants' descriptions of the unequal and restrained relationships between teachers and students. Teachers were referred to as being "up there," being from "the teaching plane above," and as "looking down at the student."

Teachers in the United States are like a friend of student. But teachers in Japan are like, are the relationship between teachers and students are professor and student. So yeah, yeah, I, I like I said before, it's not equal in Japan [FFJ].

The instructors [in former Yugoslavia] seem to, they seem to be on a different plane and have, have and they seem to have a lot more power. They seem [pause] scarier than here [FMY].

Portland State University

Teacher/student relationships at PSU were usually described as being equal, that is, teachers were believed to be at the same, or a similar level with the students. In large part, the sense of equality that the students felt was derived from the discussion approach to instruction which allowed for, and even encouraged, student/teacher interaction. While the practice of discussion was considered in the previous section (context of international education) as an influencing factor on students' perceptions of teacher openness and flexibility, it is considered here in terms of its influence on students' perceptions of teacher/student equality.

Discussion. In the U.S., the international students discovered that they were usually able, and even expected, to ask questions and make comments in class, as well

as approach teachers after class; either personally, by e-mail, or phone. Because teachers listened to and asked questions of the students, there was a perceived equality in their relationships, as these students reported,

> Yeah, I also think teacher is like similar, similar to us, that relationship is very similar, relationship is very close [FFJ].

> I prefer American style. Equality. Yeah, because we can exchange more information more, I can take more information from the teachers. So that's, that's great [FFJ].

Communication Classes

While the teacher/student relationship within the communication classroom was addressed briefly in the previous section the topic is further elaborated here, specifically in relation to teacher (a) verbal self-disclosure, (b) recognition and acceptance of students, and (c) friendliness.

Verbal Self-Disclosure. While teacher verbal self-disclosure in the communication classroom influenced the students in various ways, this discussion focuses on its ability to somewhat level the asymmetrical relationship of teacher/student, thus allowing students to believe that the distance between themselves and the teachers was lessened. The teacher was seen as "human" and the relationship more of a "friendship." Such behavior was new to the students, but it was well received and liked by the students, as well as influential in their perception of how they could relate to the teacher. Students remarked that,

> It's a good way to teach because I feel closeness…to, to her…because she told her story, her own story. And I, I feel like she is a human being, not authority [term used to refer to teachers in his native country] [IMJ].

It was a bit unusual to have, like, the teacher, instructor to sortof relate something personal about them to the students. That seemed unusual but, I think it, it it made me feel sort of more comfortable. As though, you know I could relate some of my experiences to the class like cuz she was doing it, so yeah, made me feel more comfortable that I could do it and, that we're more like on a friendship kind of basis and she wasn't so, sort of like powerful and sort of up high and I was like down low, sort of more level, which made it better for me to enjoy the class more and sort of enjoy learning it more. I think it was good that she used a personal example. Cuz, made me feel more comfortable. It seemed strange, but it was good [FFA].

Recognition and Acceptance of Students. A distinct aspect of the

teacher/student relationship in communication classes was that the teachers were

perceived as individually acknowledging students. Teachers' communication

behaviors that made the students feel welcome, comfortable, and valued were those

that recognized the students as individuals and as international students. A variety of

behaviors were exhibited by the teachers to achieve this end; touching students,

smiling at students, remembering students' names, being available, using the

blackboard, asking specific questions of the students, and acknowledging students

with a nod. The following students' comments exemplify these behaviors.

She always asked internationals students specific questions about their own cultures... [FFJ].

She remembered my name...and she, that surprised me. There was thirty-five people there and she already knew that I was there from first class [IFJ].

.She was very friendly, and she always smiled. She, she use blackboard. I think that's very important for international student, cuz sometimes it's very difficult for us to take notes. [IFJ]

These communication behaviors, that seemed to support the students and make them feel recognized, were behaviors that the students discussed specifically in connection to communication classes. These patterns of interaction that seem to lessen the distance between teachers and students may be somewhat distinct to this discipline as topics of students' cultures and/or personal relationships are relevant to class discussion and the understanding of subject matter.

Friendliness. As was previously discussed in this text, communication teachers were expected to, and perceived as, having a different attitude than teachers in other departments, or countries. Students commented that communication teachers were thought to be more personable, friendlier, nicer, and more skilled at interacting, than teachers in other classes. As one student related,

> [That teacher would be nicer to IS] I wasn't surprised but, well I can, I wasn't surprised because I expected that [IFJ].

The fact that the students perceived the teacher/student relationship to be friendlier in communication classes than in other classes at PSU or in their native countries, does not alter the fact that the relationship was still asymmetrical. Even though the teacher was liked and seen as a person, the student was able to recognize and describe the distance that existed between himself and the teacher.

> She's [teacher] she will (pause) she seems very outgoing. She, if she wasn't a instructor, and is she was not on that side of the classroom. If she was a, a neighbor. I mean, she, I would love to have her as a neighbor because she's so friendly [FMY].

Another student spoke of this in terms of power, "I definitely don't think it would be ok for the student to sort of pretend that or think that they're sort of, have more power than the instructor..." [FFA].

Summary

International students described their perceptions of teacher/student relationships in their native countries, at PSU, and in the communication department. Their discussions focused on the differences in perceived distance between teachers and students, and factors which they believed partially accounted for those differences. A degree of interaction in the classroom, whether through discussion or disclosure, seemed to support a teacher/student relationship that was less asymmetrical, and which reflected on teachers as being friendlier and more likeable.

While the previous section revealed the similarities that the students found between classes, this section described differences the students encountered in their relationships with teachers. Both the similarities and differences are significant to discussions of URT which follow.

UNCERTAINTY IN THE COMMUNICATION CLASSROOM

Introduction

International students' experiences of uncertainty are described and explicated here in terms of: (a) *definition* - what uncertainty is understood to be; (b) *sources* - what the sources of uncertainty are; (c) *self/others* - how uncertainty reflects on the

self in comparison to others; and (d) *occurrence* - how often uncertainty is experienced in the classroom.

Definition

Berger and Bradac (1982) assert that "uncertainty is determined by the number of alternatives that could occur in a given situation and the relative likelihood of their occurrence; as the number of alternative increases, uncertainty increases" (p. 6). The intent, according to the theory, is that one will seek to reduce uncertainty and therefore be able to explain and predict one's own and the other's behavior. Clatterbuck (1979) explains that URT is derived from attribution theory and that the authors "intend to make uncertainty reduction a construct based primarily on the flow of and interpretation of information (p. 147).

It is important to revisit the original definition of uncertainty in order to realize that the students' understanding of uncertainty is their own and distinct to the context of international education and the communication classroom. When speaking of their experiences in the classrooms the students did not speak of uncertainty in terms of a "number of alternatives," but as *a lack of knowledge or understanding of specific information*. Uncertainty to these students not only occurred in interaction with the teachers, but also in relation to the structure of the class, and their being speakers of English as a second language.

Sources of Uncertainty

The students' experiences of uncertainty are discussed here in terms of the

class, the teacher, and the self. The examples given vary among the students: some

experiences are similar among the students, while others are distinctly individual.

Individual experiences are given equal representation here because they not only

reflect on the students as individuals but they also illustrate the complexity of

uncertainty and how difficult it is to limit its source. The ensuing figure (see Figure 2)

is a visual representation of the students' sources of uncertainty, with the dotted lines

between categories illustrating the fluidity of uncertainty; more than one type of

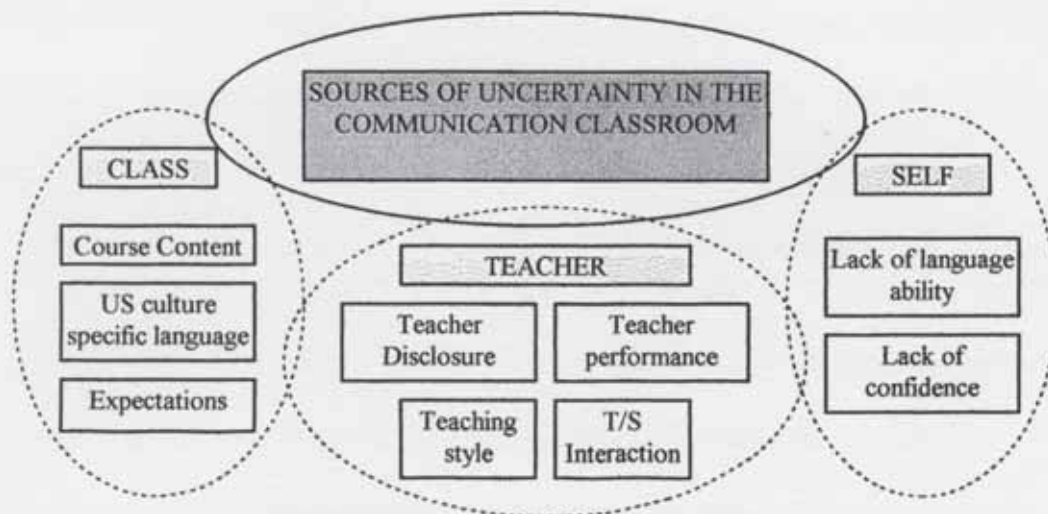uncertainty can be experienced at the same time.

Figure 2. Sources of Uncertainty
Note. US = United States; T/S = Teacher/Student

The Class. Uncertainty in the class was experienced by the students in relation

to the course content, the cultural specific examples that were used, and their

performance or grade in the class. First, class content refers here to language that is

used in the classroom that is subject specific, and to the types of examples and questions that are offered. Course content naturally includes new terminology and topics. At times, the terms and words used may be just as unknown to the U.S. students as they are to the international students, but what is significant is how the international students perceived their lack of knowledge in relation to others. One student reported that she believed that the course content, and the related questions, were more difficult for her because she was an international student.

> There are many questions that I just can't answer, or I just don't know, or just don't have the answer immediately…But in other American students can answer those questions immediately…" [IFJ].

In comparison, another student expressed the belief that his lack of understanding was unrelated to the fact that he was an international student. He saw little difference between himself and others, even in the manner that he handled the uncertainty, as he stated,

> Not necessarily related to the, for me, me not being from around here. It's and I just do the same thing as everyone else, I just ask questions" [FMY].

Even though there was variance among the students as to whether their lack of knowledge of course content was in part derived from their being international students, there was unanimous agreement that they lacked knowledge of some of the terminology, concepts, examples, and topics discussed in the classroom. As one student noted, "sometimes the topic, the topics were not familiar with me" [IMJ].

Students also experienced a lack of knowledge and therefore uncertainty of U.S. culture specific language and/or examples used in class. Language that is culture

specific refers not only to vocabulary words but also to idioms and jokes. A person

needs more than an understanding of the language as jokes and idioms are culturally

based and can differ across cultures. One student, for example, related that,

> I can not understand sometimes jokes. People are laughing but I can not laugh.
> (laugh) They are laughing, like that, yeah [IFJ].

Culture specific examples are examples of people, places, or activities that are

specific to the U.S. culture, and are verbally shared in class; either between students,

or between the teacher and the students. As one student aptly noted, when speaking of

references made by the teachers in class,

> some are a little harder [to understand] because there is an entire culture
> behind it, that, that, it's, it's some experience is required for it" [FMY].

Another student reported sharing a similar experience in relation to classmates,

> they could all relate to em and go like "yeah," like "I ate macaroni and cheese
> when I was growing up" and stuff like that and sorts of games that they played
> as kids or different things like high school songs and stuff that were around
> when they were in high school and that and I, sort of like, like I didn't
> experience any of those things and sort of all the class is going, "oh yeah" you
> know and sharing stories and stuff and I was sort of, well I don't, I don't know
> any of that stuff..." [FFA].

Lack of familiarity with class examples constituted uncertainty because the

history behind the people, places, and things being discussed was unidentifiable, and it

was the history that was significant to the example.

The third area in which the students experienced uncertainty related to

expectations. The students lacked a knowledge of the appropriate "script" (Abelson,

1981) for communication classes in the U.S., and therefore were uncertain as to what

was expected in the classroom, as one student shared,

> Well when I first was there [in the class], sort of I didn't really speak in class, I didn't really, cuz, you know I wasn't, I wasn't sure sort of how much participation she wanted from the students and sort of, what our boundaries were, what we could say and sort of like how much like opinions, whether she wanted like personal experiences or like what, you know,… sort of what the limits were, or what other students were sort of doing as well [IFA].

Even though the students had prior experiences in various classes in their native countries, they recognized that this class was different and therefore their performances would have to be different. Uncertainty though is not necessarily linked to the recognition of difference, rather, uncertainty lies in the students acknowledging that none of their past experiences had prepared them to know what to expect from others, or what was expected of them, in this new classroom.

A second aspect of expectations was that of grades. Due to the fact that participation in class activities (e.g., presentations, group discussions, class discussions) is often relevant to grades in communication classes, the students were concerned that they knew what they needed to do in order to receive a particular grade and what they should avoid doing in order that their grade not be lowered. One student stated his uncertainty as,

> I don't know when, whether she'd [the teacher] let me present if I didn't have that [a specific paper] or whether she would be very unforgiving as far as my score on the presentation because of not having that… [IMY].

First, the student was uncertain of the teacher's response, would she let him present if he did not have the required paper, and second, if she did let him present would she be "unforgiving" and reflect it in her grading.

Due to the structure of the class the students not only experience uncertainty in not knowing their own and the teacher's actions, but they also experience uncertainty in not knowing how those actions may affect their grades. Students seek rewards (i.e., high grades) in their relationships with teachers, but they must also be aware of, and avoid, that which may cause punishment (i.e., low grades).

The Teacher. Uncertainty related to the teacher was not only concerned with student/teacher interaction, but also with teacher disclosure, teacher status, teaching style, and teacher instructional clarity. First, uncertainty of student/teacher interaction reflected on the students' lack of knowledge of what to expect as one student related,

> I don't know anybody in the classroom, I don't know about the teachers, so everything was new to me, I couldn't expect what would uh, what would, what would happen... [IFJ].

Again, as was previously determined, without a classroom script specific to the context, a student can fail to know what to expect. For the student quoted above, previous knowledge of teacher/student interaction patterns in Japan was not even considered to be applicable to the current interaction with the communication teacher. Because scripts often rely on previous experience, those who fail to have the necessary knowledge can experience uncertainty.

Another area in which the Japanese students, in particular, experienced uncertainty in their student/teacher interactions related to respect, specifically, a lack of knowledge in how to show their respect to teachers. One student clearly explained,

> In my first language, there is a, there are some words for showing respect. So, I know when I use these words, it showing respect for teacher but in English everything's same, so I don't know how, how to speak to teacher with respect [IFJ].

In this quote, the student relates that she is uncertain of how to properly address a teacher with respect which could possibly influence the student's desire to interact with the teacher, at least until the appropriate form of address and respect had been acquired.

Verbal disclosure was a second feature of uncertainty which related to the teacher. While teacher disclosure usually led to feelings of liking and equality, there was one instance in which uncertainty, rather than liking, resulted from teacher disclosure. In this instance the student experienced uncertainty as to what was, or was not, acceptable to say in the U.S. As he explained,

> One day she told us that she was Jewish, I thought that was big self-disclosure. Cause, the Jew people were so discriminated...Oh, I thought, "Is it OK to say that in the U.S.? [IMJ].

The teacher's disclosure did not so much reflect on the teacher as a person or even the appropriateness of the disclosure in the classroom, but rather it seemed to make the student feel uncertain because of how it was perceived relative to what he knew of the U.S.

Teachers' teaching styles constituted a third area of teacher related uncertainty. At first, students may not know what to expect in the classroom, or they expect the teaching style to be similar to what they were familiar with in their native countries. One student, for example, who expected a lecture approach to teaching was

uncertain about her own ability to keep up with the lecture. She said, "I was worried, 'ah, what if I can't keep up with the notes and stuff' you know" [IFA].

Her uncertainty at that time was of her own performance but after the first class her uncertainty, she said, shifted to the teacher's teaching style; "she didn't really teach that first day, so I didn't, I didn't really know what exactly her teaching style was gonna be..." [IFA]. While initially relying on her own knowledge as an indicator of what to expect in the class, the student quickly learned that she did not have the requisite knowledge needed to predict the teacher's teaching style. Even when a student is knowledgeable of the teaching style (lecture) however, s/he can still experience uncertainty of the teaching style. For example, one student commented that,

> Sometimes, you know, we don't click with the teacher, cause they got different lecture and their way, the way they behave and the way they do it, it's just, it's too (snaps) fast, or just, you can't even get it [FMSA].

Fourth in this category, was uncertainty of class instruction due to the teacher's lack of clarity. While usually more often noted in other departments, one student remarked that poor instructional clarity also occurred in her communication class;

> Sometimes her instruction is not clear, because she doesn't, I think she can not spend a lot of time to write instruction...I ask my clas-, classmates what does this mean (laugh), and then my, my classmate also wondered, 'What is this?' (laugh) [IFJ].

Significant here is a recognition that the uncertainty was shared by other student(s) and that the teacher's lack of clarity was attributed to outside factors, lack of time, rather than personal characteristics such as lack of interest or ability.

The Self. Previous sections have highlighted uncertainties experienced by the students due to class structure and teachers. In this final section, the discussion centers on the self - the students - as the source of uncertainty. First, students often acknowledged that their uncertainty in the classroom was a reflection of their speaking English as a second language, even for those students who were the most proficient in the interviews they still reported that language was at times connected to an their inability to understand.

> Most time for me, it's, it's problem of my English, I just can't understand [FFJ].

> Well, it [not understanding] oftens, often happens to me. It's English, because, just, I just don't understand it. Maybe because of language problem [FFJ].

> Yeah, it [not understanding] happens sometimes, but not regularly, actually, once in a while... Maybe language problems, problems, you know, because my language is different [FMSA].

Lack of self-confidence was another source of uncertainty. One student in particular, mentioned that in higher level classes her uncertainty of what teachers were saying was connected directly to her level of confidence. "Ah, my self-esteem is very low and sometimes, well, I can not understand what the teachers are talking about" [FFJ]. Her performance in classes, she said, was also related to her uncertainty in her self and in her ability to participate.

> I don't want to speak, I don't want to speak in front of, in the class cause I don't be sound stupid, so, I don't have confidence yet, not confidence yet in the class [IFJ].

The student was unsure of how she would be perceived by others when speaking and therefore didn't want to participate orally. Language declares the student,

> is very important, uh, I feel that I am a baby, sometimes, and then I'm not sure
> I'm, I'm using appropriate word and then, well in the class we learn
> terminologies and then theoretical words, so, my English is mixed, I'm talking
> like a child and then sometimes I use sophisticated words which I learned from
> class so probably it sounds strange for American people I think sometimes
> [IFJ].

The student was not uncertain of her own speaking ability, but rather how her speaking would be perceived by others. She wanted to be well perceived but believed that her mix of English (child like and sophisticated) might have sounded strange to others. Being perceived as speaking childlike was difficult for a student who was in a higher level class with a majority of native speakers, and especially for a student who remarked that she wanted "to be looked like American. I want to talk like American" [FFJ].

The Self/Others

This section discusses how the students perceived their uncertainty in relation to others. Uncertainty to these international students was very much an individual and personal experience, even in those classes which were very diverse (e.g., intercultural communication), the students still referred to their lack of understanding in terms of "I," and rarely as "we". Lack of knowledge was not described as characteristic of international student's experiences in general; rather uncertainty was experienced individually even though there may have been other international students in the classes who felt a similar uncertainty in relation to the same events or statements.

One student, when referring to a TV sitcom clip that she watched as part of her final, specifically focused on the fact that her lack of knowledge was very individual;

> If I had a, more of a, a background of what the relationship exactly was between the characters and maybe I could understand better how they were relating to each other on the show... [IFA].

Not only is it significant that the students chose to speak of themselves in the first person singular, but that they usually spoke of the other people in the class as being separate from themselves in regard to what they knew. The "others" in the class were perceived as having a common knowledge not shared by the participants and therefore were referred to as a cohesive group in terms of their labels of "they" or "all the class." For example, one student remarked,

> Yeah, I noticed that lots of, of the concepts or things, or cultural things, that the class talked about sort of, the people that had been living in the states like, they knew what was going on and I was sort of like, I don't really understand the significance of that [FFA].

In the few instances in which the students did recognize that there were others who did not understand, there was most often an acknowledgement that first, they themselves did not have the knowledge needed, and second, that there were other students who also experienced uncertainty. As one student reported,

> Um, that was very difficult for me to follow [the class]. At first I didn't know what I was doing there, and the other students also felt like that [IMJ].

Occurrence

A final aspect of this discussion on uncertainty relates to how often uncertainty was experienced in classes. While one would expect that any student might

experience some uncertainty in the classroom, uncertainty for the international student may be distinct. At no point did the students say that they *never* experienced uncertainty; rather, they acknowledged that uncertainty occurred with varying frequency using such phrases as "all the time," "often," or "sometimes." While examples were given by the students of specific times that they experienced uncertainty, of particular interest were comments which revealed that feelings of "not knowing" or "not understanding" were experienced continually. One student had even become so accustomed to feeling uncertain on a regular basis that she remarked, "I'm just used to it" [FFJ].

Summary

The foregoing sought to explicate the sources of students' uncertainty (not knowing or understanding) in terms to the class in general, the teacher, and the students themselves. Regardless of the source of the uncertainty, the feeling of being uncertain was very much an individual experience; students continually saw their lack of knowledge mirrored against others in the class who appeared to be knowledgeable.

APPROACHES TO MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

Introduction

This final section of Chapter IV considers the students' approaches to managing uncertainty through the use of specific strategies for either coping with, or reducing, uncertainty. The specific difference between the two types of strategies

relates to the generation of knowledge; strategies for reducing uncertainty generate knowledge, while strategies for coping with uncertainty do not generate knowledge. It is significant to note that while the two approaches of managing uncertainty are discussed separately in this section there were instances in which they were used conjointly. Often time, when strategies used for the reduction of uncertainty did not succeed, the students would employ strategies for coping with the uncertainty. The model (see Figure 3) below explicates the process for managing uncertainty with the dotted lines representing the interaction of the two types of strategies.

```
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │     UNCERTAINTY      │
                    │     EXPERIENCED      │
                    └──────────────────────┘
        ┌────────────────────┬────────────────────┐
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   ┌ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─┬ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┐
   │ Strategies for reducing │ Strategies for coping │
   │      uncertainty        │   with uncertainty    │
   └ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─┴ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ─ ┘
        │                              │
   ┌──────────────┐            ┌──────────────┐
   │ UNCERTAINTY  │            │ UNCERTAINTY  │
   │   REDUCED    │            │ NOT REDUCED  │
   └──────────────┘            └──────────────┘
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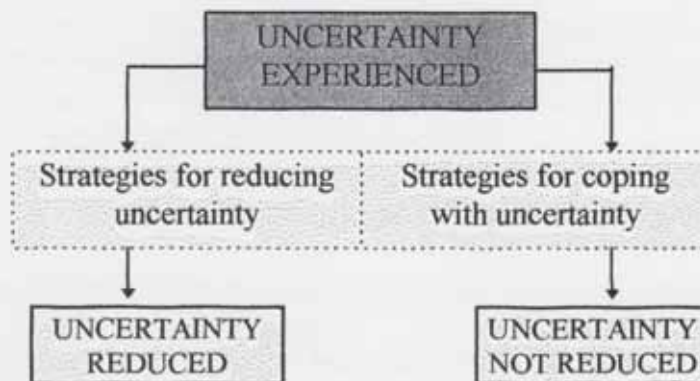
Figure 3. Approaches to Managing Uncertainty

Strategies for Coping with Uncertainty

While the reduction of uncertainty has been assumed to be a primary concern of people when they first meet (Berger & Calabrese, 1975, p. 100), the students in this study related that uncertainty was experienced beyond the initial encounter, and that the reduction of uncertainty was not always a necessary or primary concern. Rather, the ability to cope with uncertainty was as important as reducing it which leads to this

discussion of the students' strategies for coping with uncertainty: (a) pretending (giving the appearance) it does not exist; (b) ignoring; and (c) using to one's advantage.

Pretending. Pretending as a strategy involves a student acting as "if" s/he understands, that is; while feeling uncertain on the inside, the student gives an outward appearance of understanding and certainty. When referring to idioms used in class that were not understood, one student shared that,

> sometimes I write down [the idioms] on my notes and ask my friends. And then sometimes I pret-, pretend I understand like, "yes, that's funny" like that (laugh) yeah (all laugh). I'm good at pretending (all laugh). Then it's gonna be, sometimes it's become very big problem…Because I misunderstood. Yeah…I'm watching other students' facial expression if it a funny or, or ironic things or, yeah. So I always guess it is a positive meaning or a negative meaning. Looking at peoples. People. [FFJ].

While this was only mentioned by one student, it is relevant for three reasons. First, the student discussed "pretending" as an approach to coping with uncertainty that she used repeatedly (sometimes). Second, it was an approach that she used even though the consequences were sometimes negative (very big problem). Third, while possibly having reduced uncertainty as to whether something was good or bad, the student may still not understand the meaning of the idiom that initially led to the uncertainty. Uncertainty then, is not reduced and when the student finds out that she misunderstood she may feel increased, or renewed, uncertainty.

Ignoring. The most frequently mentioned strategy for coping with uncertainty, was that of ignoring it. The students would let go of the feeling and do nothing to

generate knowledge about the uncertainty, as is illustrated in the following student comments;

> When I got part of it, I ask. And I, if I got a part of the information I want to know the whole part, the whole information…But if I didn't get any of the whole information I just ignore it [FFJ].

> I just kind of let them go, like I sort of didn't really do much [IFA].

> I often, yeah, I often ignore things I didn't get. Didn't get the notes [FFJ].

In most instances, the students discussed the strategy of ignoring uncertainty without emotion, it was just something they did. This was not the case for one student however who said;

> I just keep quiet and then I feel, "Oh I hate myself" (laugh) "Oh, I'm so stupid" (laugh)….oh, if I really need to understand, I ask teacher and friends. Yeah. Classmate…But not for everything [FFJ].

Unable to consistently use interactive strategies (e.g., asking questions) to reduce uncertainty because of her own low self-confidence, the student seemed to feel forced from within to ignore some things. Ignoring uncertainty is not what she would choose to do, nor does it increase her self-worth.

Significant to this discussion is the need to note that while one student may ignore uncertainty because of a lack of self-confidence, another student may choose to selectively ignore uncertainty. When students selectively ignore they decide which uncertainties they will address and which they will not. One student, for example, related that he would avoid uncertainty not by letting go, but rather by choosing what he would understand, "I just go in and listen, and I understand what I, what I you

know, I wanna understand or whatever, may be easy for me" [FMSA]. Because the student is focused on understanding, he appears able to ignore to some extent that which might make him feel uncertain.

Applying to One's Advantage. When uncertainty is applied to one's advantage, it allows the avoidance of interaction with others. Particularly in situations where a student may feel pressured to talk, s/he can avoid interaction by saying, "I don't understand," as one student illustrated with the following comment;

> Pretend that I didn't understand the lecture…so sometimes I didn't have to say my opinion (laugh)…Some classes we have to discuss the topics…And sometimes the topic, the topics were not familiar with me…Then I could have, "What is this?" [IMJ].

The student initially relates that uncertainty is something he can pretend to feel in order to avoid interaction. Later in the quote, the student acknowledges that the actual experience of uncertainty can also be turned to his advantage as an avoidance tactic. For this student, uncertainty has its positive aspects and can be invoked when needed.

Whether a student is pretending to be uncertain or is actually uncertain is not the point here; what is important is that a student understands uncertainty as an experience that can be used to his/her advantage. Thus, uncertainty is viewed as an opportunity rather than a primary concern. Although this strategy is only exemplified in this single instance in the data, it is an interesting approach to coping with uncertainty.

Strategies for Reducing Uncertainty

In keeping with Berger's (1979) original theoretical framework, strategies "generate knowledge and understanding," and are what "persons use to *find out things about others* [italics added] in order to reduce their uncertainty about them." Strategies for reducing uncertainty, contends Berger, are one of three types; passive, active, or interactive (p. 134).

Due to the fact that the uncertainties experienced by the students concerned more than their interactions with the teacher, the strategies discussed here include more than those which "find out things about others." The labels of passive, active, and interactive are retained, however, because they do reflect the underlying communication approaches students took to reducing uncertainty.

While each strategy is addressed separately below, it is important to recognize that strategies were frequently used concurrently instead of independently. Quotes therefore used to exemplify one type of strategy will often be found to include other types. The following figure (see Figure 4) illustrates the students' strategies for reducing uncertainty with the dotted lines between each group of strategies reflecting the fluidity of their interaction.
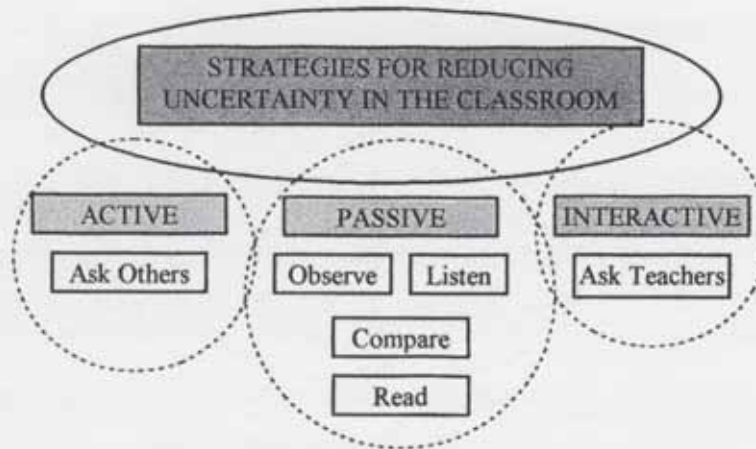
Figure 4. Strategies for Reducing Uncertainty

Passive Strategies

Passive strategies are an unobtrusive means of reducing uncertainty; they do not require any form of direct verbal or nonverbal intervention (Berger, 1979, p. 134). The passive strategies discussed by the students included: observing, reading, comparing, and listening.

Observing. Observation of other students and teacher/student interactions in the classroom aided in reducing students' uncertainties. Several students commented that they learned how to address teachers by observing others, "At first I, I didn't know how to call them [teachers], so I watched other students" [FMJ]. Another student said that she learned the classroom "script,"

> by watching other students…Ah, and listening to sort of what they were saying or what, and just saw how the class was going. How the interaction went with the teacher and students. Just sort of sitting back and being, sort of, working out what was going on then, and then eventually I got participating [IFA].

This quote is significant as a first example of the simultaneous use of strategies; it depicts observing, as well as listening.

Reading. Reading as a strategy may be somewhat unique to the context of education. Because the material conveyed in the class may be a source of uncertainty, going to a textbook and reading more about that subject may reduce the uncertainty by giving the students additional information. For example, in discerning course material that was not understood, one student said, "oh, it goes away or I read the text book again" [FFJ]. The textbook serves as an easily accessible resource when uncertainty is specific to class material. Another student commented that he usually reads the textbooks before using interactive or active strategies such as questioning.

> I will go, this is how it is, most of the time, what I do is I, I read it, I didn't understand it, I will go through the book, I didn't get it, I will go to the teacher. Teacher, teachers, assistants, I will go [FMSA].

Comparing. One previously discussed source of uncertainty was that of U.S. culture specific examples (see pp. 95-99, this text). If students lacked experience or background of an example, they could be uncertain of the example even though they may have understood the concept being explained. One way of reducing uncertainty in this case was to compare the context or experience described in the example, to a similar and more familiar context or experience from their own backgrounds. This was not always an applicable approach, but "sometimes" was helpful, as one student related.

> Sometimes I relate to what I do in Australia and try and compare something similar. So I sort of can relate something that I do to something that is sort of similar sorts things I can understand. "Yeah well so that's like that" so I can understand what you're talking about in that context [FFA].

> If there is a reaction that I wouldn't expect that this instructor is talking about from a particular example, then I would spend more time thinking about that reaction and how that's different from the reaction of the people in Yugoslavia [FMY].

Listening. Listening as a strategy means that the students either listen to what is said during class lectures and discussions, or what they are told by others outside of class. Listening can reduce uncertainty of class examples and material, but for one student it was believed to be somewhat dependent on having enough time to figure out what was being said. He confided, "If we spend more time talking about it then I most, mostly figure out from the conversation" [FMY].

Listening is also discussed here as a passive strategy that is often conjoined with other passive (observing) strategies, or active and interactive strategies such as asking questions as the following illustrates.

> Ah, I just pick up by watching other students and, and just people have like, some people have told me, you know well if there's a problem you know go and talk to the teacher whatever in a sense, that's... that's OK, you know [FFA].

> Anyway I tried to listen very carefully... And, you know there's, there was a break, right, long class so could I ask my classmates, "What did she, what did he say?" (laugh). You know. And gradually, like, I could understand what I was doing, and what the class was [IMJ].

Active Strategies

The second group of strategies are called active strategies, the word "active" signifying some effort is required to be put forth in order for uncertainty to be reduced; some type of verbal or nonverbal message must be sent and responded to by another. The students in this study identified only one active strategy which was; asking questions of others.

Asking Others. The strategy of asking for information involved the students in direct contact with a variety of others. Frequently, the students spoke in very general terms when referring to those with whom they interacted;

I usually try and ask someone to explain it to me [FFA].

I tried to ask someone to like feedback on "what happened? Give me a bit of a background here" [IFA].

At other times, the students were somewhat more specific about who they would ask for information;

Or ask other students, my friends [FFJ].

I just ask them [U.S. roommates] to explain stuff, and they say "oh yeah" and then they start talking [FMY].

And if there were some international students then I could ask them, but if I was the only international student, maybe, I didn't ask other student, so I would ask the instructor [IMJ].

Interactive Strategies

Interactive strategies involve direct communication between the one who experiences uncertainty and the person perceived to be the source of uncertainty. The

interactive strategy in the instance was the students' questioning of the teacher. While the teacher was only one of three sources of uncertainty identified in this study, she was uniquely able to not only aid in the reduction of uncertainty concerning herself, but also the class.

Asking the Teacher. In their native countries, the students were unaccustomed to asking teachers questions, therefore, responses varied as to when they would ask questions in the U.S. Students first required an understanding of the classroom script before they felt prepared to ask questions during class. Part of understanding the class process was knowing which behaviors, such as questioning of the teacher, were appropriate. Students, for example, remarked,

> I feel more comfortable now, asking questions towards the instructor cuz I sort of, I've picked up that that's what lots of students do and I feel that it's encouraged more here…I would have been a bit scared to do it in Australia um, but I feel comfortable doing it here because I need to understand things [FFA].

> I just ask questions…Other students who are, or just ask questions in the class if that's appropriate [FMY].

While the data revealed that all students understood that questioning was appropriate during class, the Japanese in particular found it to be more appropriate for others than for themselves. They understood the communication class norm of questioning the teacher, but chose for a variety of reasons, or at specific times, to not follow the norm. Instead these students would seek out the teacher after class to ask their questions privately, as the following student comments relate.

So, I, I'm just used to it [not understanding what is said]. I just, write them up and I just ask other students, other student or go to ask her [the teacher] after class. I just, I'm just, I just can't as-, raise a hand in class, ask the questions in lecture in the class. I just, I just can't do it. I will do it later after class [FFJ].

I notice that it's, depends on my self-esteem again... Yeah. I'm, when I'm very conscious I don't ask teacher anything but, but when I am confident, I raise my hand and then, "excuse me what is that?"... Yeah, I, I ask so, yeah. Depends on my self-esteem [FFJ].

Summary

The data revealed that students managed their uncertainty through the utilization of specific strategies. At times, uncertainty was reduced when students were able to generate necessary knowledge through passive, active, or interactive strategies. At other times though, the students coped with their uncertainty instead of reducing it.

SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the major findings of the study. It opened with a description of sample characteristics including previous educational backgrounds, this served to aid in understanding the students' experiences as they relate to international education and uncertainty. Next, this chapter described the students' experiences in international education, their perceptions of teacher/student relationships, sources of uncertainty in communication classrooms, and approaches to managing uncertainty.

The data revealed that even though there were great variations in the classes and the students' cultural backgrounds, there were also similarities found within the

students' international education experiences. Out of their discussions developed a typology of international education that was composed of three types of institutional classes; the *Base Class*, *Expanded Class*, and *Communication Class*.

A second typology was developed to illustrate teacher/student relationships in the students' native countries, at PSU, and in communication classes. Particular teaching approaches and communicative behaviors influenced the students' perceptions of the teacher and the distance between teacher and student.

Due to the nature of international education and teacher/student relationships, the students' experiences of uncertainty were distinctly unique. The original definition of uncertainty was juxtaposed against the students' explication of their experiences of uncertainty and a new definition was contrived. Further, the three sources of uncertainty (class, teacher, and self) were explicated.

Related to the previous were the students' strategies for coping with, or seeking to reduce, uncertainty. The students' strategies for coping with uncertainty were to pretend it did not exist, ignore it, or use it to their advantage in avoiding interaction with others. The strategies for reducing uncertainty appropriately fit Berger's (1979) previous theoretical framework and included three strategy types; passive, active, and interactive.

The next chapter discusses the study's findings and limitations and offers recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapters I and II, there has not been any research found to date that has considered the theory of uncertainty reduction in relation to international students' experiences in communication classrooms in the U.S. This case study therefore attempted a first step toward filling that gap in research by inquiring into the students' perceptions of their experiences. The specific questions which focused this exploration were: What are the students' perceptions of the teacher/student relationship? Do international students experience uncertainty in communication classrooms? If uncertainty is experienced, what is its source(s)? If uncertainty is experienced, do students seek to reduce it, and if so, how?

Based on the findings discussed in Chapter IV, this chapter further analyzes and discusses the data in relation to prior research. This chapter also discusses the limitations of the study, implications of the findings for education, and possible topics of future research.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN
COMMUNICATION CLASSROOMS

<u>Introduction</u>

The initial goal of this study was to explore the efficacy of URT in

communication classrooms by discovering whether international students experienced

uncertainty in such classrooms and if so, how they dealt with that uncertainty. Based

on the findings it became apparent that uncertainty was experienced but that

preconceived definitions and understandings of URT had to be set aside in order for

the students' perceptions of uncertainty to be understood.

New interpretations of URT are discussed as follows: (a) uncertainty and

uncertainty reduction are no longer *defined* as had been previously postulated; (b)

context is considered a *primary* influence on sources of uncertainty and strategies of

uncertainty management; and (c) approaches to *managing* uncertainty are more varied

than had been previously discussed. These findings are discussed in more detail in the

following sections: *Uncertainty Defined*; *Knowledge and Context*; and *Approaches to

Managing Uncertainty*.

Uncertainty Defined

Berger and Bradac (1982) say that communication plays various functions in

the development of relationships. The communication function they chose to

investigate further was that of "*uncertainty reduction*; that is, how communication functions to help us attain knowledge and understanding of ourselves and others" (p. 5). If the reduction of uncertainty occurs then through the attainment of knowledge and understanding, it seems logical that uncertainty would mean the opposite: the experience of lacking knowledge or understanding. However, this is not the definition of uncertainty that has been put forth in URT.

According to Berger & Bradac (1982), *uncertainty* derives from information theory (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) and "is determined by the number of alternatives that could occur in a given situation and the relative likelihood of their occurrence. As the number of alternatives increases, uncertainty increases" (p.6). This definition assumes that there is some knowledge (a number of alternatives), that uncertainty is a result of too many alternatives, and that the reduction of uncertainty is knowledge of *which* of the alternatives is most likely correct and most likely to occur.

While numerous studies have considered the efficacy of various axioms and theorems developed from the theory of uncertainty reduction (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985; Gudykunst, 1986; Nelson, 1992), none have discussed whether the definitions of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction were valid.

This study was similar to other studies in that it sought to explore the efficacy of URT, and although it never intended to question the extant definition, the findings suggest that conceptual concerns exist as Berger and Bradac's (1982) definition of

uncertainty was found incompatible with this sample's experiences. When the international students spoke of uncertainty, it was rarely in regard to the number of alternatives they had for explaining and predicting behavior, rather they stressed that they usually had a lack of a cultural or situational knowledge which resulted in their being unable to generate even one possible alternative that would aid in prediction or explanation, and therefore, the reduction of uncertainty.

The data in this study, consequently, suggest that uncertainty arises from a lack of alternatives, as well as an overabundance of alternatives, for predicting and/or explaining behavior. While URT researchers have recognized the latter definition of uncertainty, none have acknowledged the prior, even though both classes of uncertainty were discerned by Dewey (1916) almost a century ago. Gabella (1995) remarks that central to Deweyan pragmatism is an acknowledgement that doubt, or uncertainty in this case, can either occur when there are multiple possible alternatives, or when an individual is ignorant of what is to be (p. 237). The second interpretation thus accounts for the uncertainty experienced by the students in this study because their uncertainties specifically related to their lack of knowledge.

An additional concern related to Berger and Calabrese's (1975) original definition is their emphasis on the need to reduce uncertainty about others' *behaviors and attitudes* in order to order to predict one's own behaviors. In view of the data, it is suggested that uncertainty is not always related to the behaviors and attitudes of others and oneself. Rather, uncertainty in the context of the communication

classroom in international education could just as well be linked to subject matter or class processes as it could be linked to those who interact within the context. Because previous research of URT has examined uncertainty as though it were "a single bit of behavior," the broader context in which it occurred was either ignored or minimized. According to Sarett (1984), behaviors in communication research are often perceived as the property of the individual, rather than part of a "larger, ongoing communication system (of which the individuals are a part)" (p. 209). Similar to Sarett. this study suggests that it would be particularly difficult to understand the students' experiences of uncertainty without understanding the contexts in which the students interact. As Mishler (1979) relates, "human action and experience are context dependent and can only be understood within their contexts" (p. 2).

As a result of this study's findings, a new definition of uncertainty is generated and reads as follows:

> *Uncertainty is a lack of knowledge or understanding of specific information that is relevant to those within the context. Knowledge which, were it available, could possibly lead to the reduction of uncertainty.*

The emphasis on knowledge in this definition is not without justification because even Berger and Bradac (1982) note that the reverse of uncertainty is knowledge, and that knowledge is something we either have or do not have (pp. 8-9). While a discussion of knowledge is not included within Berger and Bradac's (1982) definition of uncertainty, they do relate a lack of knowledge to uncertainty within their book Language and Social Knowledge (1982). Additionally, Clatterbuck (1979)

relates that individuals face uncertainty when information (knowledge) is less than optimal and therefore control is less than optimal. However, when information is provided that is perceived as adequate for making decisions within the interaction, uncertainty is reduced (pp. 147-148). Clatterbuck emphasizes the need for adequate information which can be likened to a need for relevant information. The importance is placed on the quality of the information rather than the quantity.

Uncertainty, within the new definition then, could be of other's behaviors, attitudes, and/or thoughts as well as activities enacted or information relayed by others. Particularly important is that the information which is linked to one's uncertainty, must be information that is relevant to that person. If information is unknown, but not relevant, there will not be uncertainty. If what is unknown is relevant though, there is uncertainty. For example, an international student who visits a class with a friend one day may find that she does not understand segments of the class and yet not feel uncertain because she neither needs to know, or cares to know, that which she does not understand. However, when attending a class as a student rather than a visitor, the individual may find that she has a lack of knowledge that is relevant to her being able to learn and perform in the class. Then the lack of knowledge would be linked to uncertainty and that uncertainty would be managed through various approaches; one of which may be attaining knowledge in order to reduce the uncertainty.

Knowledge and Context

In the following amended definition of uncertainty presented here, it is important to note that there are two crucial aspects of uncertainty; first, that relevant knowledge is lacking, and second, that the context may determine what information is relevant.

> *Uncertainty is a lack of knowledge or understanding of specific information that is relevant to those within the context. Knowledge which, were it available, could possibly lead to the reduction of uncertainty.*

In Berger and Calabrese's (1975) original work on uncertainty reduction, brief mention was given to the possibility that "the basal level of uncertainty a person has about a stranger can be modulated by the communication situation itself" (p. 102). No axiom or theorem was developed from this postulation, but a discussion of the communication situation, the context, is noteworthy and especially relevant to understanding international students' experiences in the classroom. Context needs to be emphasized, agrees Smircich (1983), when "attempting to understand the patterns of action that are meaningful to others" (p. 162).

Context, according to Berger and Bradac (1982), implies "that speech is embedded temporally and spatially - events occur before and after an utterance and this same utterance is 'surrounded' by a physical setting and by participants, spectators, and inattentive others" (p. 66). While Berger and Bradac have referred to the physical and relational context, there is also the situational context which is

relevant. Context therefore, relates to physical, situational, and/or relational structures that can influence individuals' experiences of uncertainty.

While a significant amount of research has considered URT in situational and relational contexts (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Gudykunst, 1985; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Rubin, 1977), little has considered the physical context (Danielson, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Nelson, 1992). Berger and Calabrese (1975) hypothesized though, that strangers who meet on the street would experience more uncertainty than strangers who meet at a political rally. The political rally would reduce uncertainty for the strangers, they believed, because the setting would allow the individuals to infer the other's background (political attitudes) and therefore conversations would focus directly on content areas related to the situation (p. 102). Due to the inferences made in the physical and situational context, the strangers at the political rally would believe they had knowledge which would aid in their being able to predict and explain the other's behaviors as well as their own.

Context, in much of the intercultural research on URT, has been considered in terms of Hall's (1977) postulation of high- and low-context cultures (Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985). "Context," as defined by Hall (1977) pertains to the degree of meaning carried in the individuals and social contexts rather than in the verbal message. In a low-context culture such as the U.S. then, the meaning of a message is carried more in the verbal message than in the context; the individuals shared knowledge and the situational cues (pp. 86-91).

While discussions of high- and low-contexts can be relevant to cross-cultural research, there was no obvious link found in this study between the international students' experiences of uncertainty and Hall's explication of the high- and low-context continuum.

A more applicable approach to considering context was that presented by Rubin (1977) who said that context could be discussed in terms of either being ambiguous or specific (p. 82). An ambiguous context is one that is unrevealing of situational cues that could aid the individuals in knowing something about the other person in the encounter. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) example of the city street is considered to be an ambiguous context; the average city street is a setting which would be revealing of little about an individual's attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. Additionally, it is a context in which a wider range of behaviors could conceivably be enacted.

A specific context, on the other hand, is one that is revealing of situational cues that could aid individuals in knowing information about the other person. The context itself would inform the individual of the attitudes or beliefs of the other and would therefore diminish some uncertainty about that person. Rubin (1977), for example, found that uncertainty was reduced in the specific context because there was "more information on which to base predictions about the other" (p. 90).

It is important to recognize however, that Rubin's discussion of specific and ambiguous contexts is best understood as being somewhat culture/experience specific:

one needs a background knowledge to some extent in order for the context to mediate the experience of uncertainty. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that uncertainty can still be experienced in a specific context, only the sources of uncertainty may be different than in an ambiguous context, and the uncertainty may be experienced differently than in the ambiguous context.

In this study, the contexts were considered specific: Despite the fact that students were in a different cultural context than in which they had been before, they had an understanding of the classroom itself as a context in which specific activities and behaviors would continually be exhibited, even across cultures. The specific contexts in this study were: (a) the physical context of the university classroom; (b) the situational context of the communication classroom within the international education setting; and (c) the relational context of the teacher/student relationship.

While not validating Berger and Calabrese's (1975) postulation that uncertainty is tempered by context (p. 102), this study does recognize the emphasis given by the international students to context, and the part it played in relation to uncertainty. Because context, in this study, was discussed in terms of relational and situational contexts, the following relates to these contexts specifically. Context is related to the knowledge that the students possessed, and also the knowledge they needed, yet lacked.

The Relational Context

Uncertainty reduction theory is based in interpersonal communication. While primarily used to explain communication in initial encounters between strangers, the theory has also been supportive of developed relationships, such as friends and lovers (Baxter & Wilmot, 1984; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Planalp, Rutherford, & Honeycutt, 1988). The focus of the theory then, has been on the relational context, the relationship between those involved more so than the physical or situational setting.

Although the relational context has consistently been considered in previous research, the roles of those involved has only been alluded to in terms of expectations, behaviors, or status (Danielson, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Gudykunst, 1986; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1984; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985; Haleta, 1996; McCrosky, 1998; Nelson, 1992; Parks & Adelman, 1983). In this study, the role of the teacher was especially notable. The findings revealed that the students had a fairly clear understanding of the role of the teacher in regards to attitudes, behaviors, expectations, and the hierarchical relationship. Utilizing verbal descriptions, the students were able to articulate their understanding of teachers and teacher/student relationships in communication classes, as well as in other classes at PSU, and their native countries (see pp. 87-93, this text).

The roles of the interactants are significant, asserts Rich (1974), because "...roles limit the number of unknowns we must face and hence diminish the anxiety of social interaction" (p. 67). Therefore, the more that a person can determine by

knowing the role of another, the less uncertainty they will experience in the interaction. The attainment of a certain degree of knowledge, even if it is from inference alone, results in there being less unknowns, and therefore less uncertainty. Rubin (1977) explains how roles imply a knowledge of the other person,

> Knowledge of roles tends to serve as the foundation of further knowledge about others since knowledge of another's roles provides a definition of appropriate behavior toward the person. Acquiring role knowledge, in this way, can be seen to facilitate the social inference process (p. 90).

While Rubin (1977) contends that role knowledge can facilitate the social inference process in regards to behavior, Berger (1979) relates that the high predictability in a formal role situation constrains a person when s/he wants to know more about the other as an individual. A significant difference in the discussions of Rubin and Berger is the part that "role" plays in relation to uncertainty. Role, as discussed by Rubin, can lessen uncertainty, while Berger contends that role may actually increase uncertainty when one wants to learn of the other as an individual. Uncertainty about the other's behaviors, says Berger (1979), is low due to rules and norms being followed within the role, while uncertainty about the other's cognitive state may remain high because the other is not distinguished as an individual (pp. 124-125). This assumes that it is necessary and/or desirable to: (a) know/explain the other's cognitive state; and (b) know the other person as an individual. Such assumptions, however, may not be applicable across contexts.

What is significant to understand when considering the discussions of Rubin (1977) and Berger (1979), as well as considering the findings of this study, is that

one's knowledge of another person can be delineated into three knowledge levels.

Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, and Miller (1976), posited three knowledge levels:

descriptive, predictive, and explanatory. The *descriptive* level includes statements

made about another's current behavior, attitudes, or dispositions. The *predictive* level

refers to the inferences made about the other's future behavior, beliefs, or dispositions

that are likely. And finally, the *explanatory* level refers to the generation of a limited

number of possible causal attributions for behavior.

These three levels of knowledge are significant because they explain why there

is a discrepancy between Rubin (1977) and Berger's (1979) discussions of roles and

uncertainty. Rubin's (1977) emphasis on providing appropriate behavior focuses on

the ability of one to describe and predict the other's behavior within a role, but not

necessarily explain his/her behavior. Berger (1979), on the other hand, is stressing

that when a person desires to know of the other as an individual s/he must be able to

produce explanatory knowledge about the other person. The two authors are speaking

of different levels of knowledge and therefore are focused on understanding the other

person differently.

In regards to this study, the three levels of knowledge are significant in various

ways. First, it should be recognized that, according to Berger's (1979) philosophy, the

students would not be able to explain the teachers' behaviors unless they knew the

teachers as individuals (p. 125). Based on this study's data however, it appeared that

the students were not necessarily concerned with knowing the teachers as individuals.

For example, one student related,

> I didn't pay too much attention to like, whether she actually had a brother or not, or whatever. Cuz, it wasn't really relevant to me anyway [IFA].

The students, rather, were often able to describe, predict, and even explain teachers'

behaviors and cognitive states based solely on their understanding of the teacher

within her role. Students, for example, reported that,

> Sometimes her instruction is not clear, because she doesn't, I think she can not spend a lot of time to write instructions [IFJ].

> I knew, she's thinking of me, from her, from her smile, and from, from touching...I'm thinking of you or I'm considering of you... [IFJ].

> I know that she was aware of that and sort of, you know, made sure she explained things and that, tried to help different people, so everyone would understand [IFA].

> If she didn't, sort of like, really care what happens in the classroom and didn't really care about the atmosphere or the involvement, then I don't think she would have told us [personal self-disclosure] [IFA].

Berger's assertion that a person needs to know another as an individual

in order to explain their behavior is brought into question in this study, as it was

brought into question by Goldsmith (1992). Goldsmith states that,

> Berger & his colleagues frequently assume that information based on an individual's cultural background or membership in social groups is less useful in reducing uncertainty than 'psychological' information about what distinguishes an individual from others.

> The emphasis given to the individual, she says, is reflective of a cultural code

among some U.S. speakers which assumes that people are separate, unique entities

and therefore are unpredictable and spontaneous. Behaviors have to be negotiated and coordinated through communication (pp. 11-12). The ethnographic research discussed by Goldsmith, as well as the findings of this study, reveal that there are some cultures and/or contexts though, in which interactions are enacted and relationships are developed according to social rules and roles, rather than through the negotiation of individuals.

Due to the nature of the relational and situational context of this study, students expressed little need to know teachers as individuals as Berger (1979) suggested. Even though the students felt that the teachers in the U.S., and particularly in the communication classes, were more like friends, there was still a knowledge that the relationship of the teacher/student was formal. Social distance exists within the relationship which, Wright (1997) says, can be a result of the differing ages, interests, and levels of knowledge about the subject being learnt, as well as the unequal status, unequal distribution of power, and different cultures (p. 20). Knowing the teacher as an individual was often not only seen as not necessary, but because of the social distance between the teacher and student, was often believed to be impossible.

A second relevant discussion of knowledge relates to Berger's (1979) statement that highly confident inferences can not be made about others because roles are constrained by social rules and norms. Here the findings imply that some highly confident inferences can be made when the roles themselves are thought of as operating at two different levels of knowledge; global and narrow.

First, the global-level meaning of role is thought of as independent of context which results in fairly confident inferences being made and certainty being experienced. The global-level meaning implies that students have some understanding of teacher role that is constant across contexts (e.g. countries and institutions). For example, one function of the teachers' role, says Galvin (1999), is to provide content expertise (p. 200), therefore while the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors may change from country to country, or even school to school, there is a pervasive understanding by the students that the teacher will be knowledgeable of what they teach and that they will enact certain tasks such as conveying knowledge by way of lectures.

The students in this study are similar to those described by McCarthey and Peterson (1995) who found that students who have learned to be passive in their roles place "the authority for knowing with the teacher. The teacher's role is to transmit knowledge to students who simply receive the knowledge transmitted" (p. 408). The global meaning of the role of the teacher is not linked to uncertainty, but rather to certainty. The students reported having knowledge of who teachers are and what they do.

> And there's not, there's not that great a difference between um, teachers. I mean they still go about things the same way [FFA].

> The only impression that lasts on me about instructors is whether they show me that they are in control of the, of what they teach [IMY].

> This instructor who is totally oriented toward that particular thing that they are teaching [FMY].

> We paid to get knowledge, he's going to give us the knowledge we, what we need [FMSA].

> I just see teacher as a teacher, so if she isn't a good teacher I just don't like her... [IFJ].

Second, the narrow-level meaning of role is dependent on the context leading to the possibility of less confident inferences being made and of uncertainty being experienced. This signifies that even when an individual may have a general understanding of a specific role, there may still be numerous unknowns about the rules and norms of the role within particular contexts or under certain circumstances. For example, in the situational context of the communication classroom in international education, students can be unknowledgeable not only of the rules and norms of teacher behavior (behavioral uncertainty) in the U.S., but also of teachers' dispositions (cognitive uncertainty) within their roles. The students then experience behavioral, as well as cognitive, uncertainty but neither is linked to their knowing the teacher as an individual. McCarthey and Peterson (1995) stress that,

> roles are created by participants within a social situation such as the classroom. An understanding of...roles, then, involves understanding not only the observed roles..., but also teachers' and students' assumptions and beliefs about these roles (p. 408).

What this signifies is that in some situational or relational contexts, people can experience cognitive uncertainty of a person in relation to his/her role, rather than him/her as an individual with the latter not even being a relevant source of uncertainty. Uncertainty therefore can be both of the other's behaviors and cognitive states within his/her role.

135

In this study then, it is not only acknowledged that the students experienced

uncertainty in relation to the communication teacher in specific instances, but that

they also had a reasonably clear understanding of the role of the communication

teacher and the student/teacher relationship within the classroom. It was previously

noted by Nicholson and Duck (1999) (see Chapter II this text) that trust and self-

disclosure are necessary to the communication learning environment. Additionally,

Lederman (1992) remarked that the role of the communication teacher involves more

than providing information, the teacher also facilitates a process in which students

learn about themselves and others, as well as the course content. The students'

understanding of this is exemplified in their following remarks:

> There's lots of interaction like, cuz it was a communication class, like the
> teacher wanted us to communicate within, with each other and like, it was
> really, I felt totally comfortable in that [communication] class because like
> everyone just able to communicate with everyone and the teacher was like
> involved too, so it was sort of like, like, just like a big sort of support
> group....In the communication classes, I think they're trying to, it's less
>
> structured and I think they're just trying to get us to interact and sort of, more
> practical work on what we're learning. And more interaction with each other
> [IFA].

Situational Context

In this study, the role of the teacher, as well as the situational context of the

communication classroom within international education, was found relevant to

students' discussions of uncertainty and their experiences as international students.

Tagiuri (1969) says it is the combination of information from both the person and the

situation that often allows people to arrive at judgements that are sufficiently correct

to form the basis for smooth interaction with their social environment (p. 420). The role of the other, as well as the situation, can determine how the interactants will behave and perceive each other. While the two contexts are discussed separately here, Angyal, (cited in Tagiuri, 1969), stresses that "the distinction between the person and the situation, however, is to some extent a matter of convenience, since it is admittedly a difficult problem to define the boundaries between a person and his [or her] environment" (p. 421).

As Staton (1999) stated (see Chapter II this text), the three contexts relevant to the teaching and learning environment are society, the institution, and the classroom. The three contexts are not separate entities but rather intertwined and interdependent therefore, the situational context of this study was considered in terms of the communication classroom as it exists within the larger context of international education. The context influenced the students' experiences of certainty and uncertainty. As international students, the participants in this study were knowledgeable of two educational systems; that of their native countries and the U.S. They were able to articulate their understanding of international education by comparing and contrasting their classes. Due to the fact that they were international students though, they were also unknowledgeable of specific aspects of class. Students related that they often did not understand specific cultural references and patterns of interaction that were relevant to their educational experiences in communication classes.

As discussed in Chapter IV, the students' experiences in their native counties reflected on the expectations they had of education in general, and the patterns of interaction of which they were familiar. This knowledge of routine patterns and expectations within education is what Berger and Bradac (1982) refer to as a "script." Abelson (1976), (cited in Berger and Bradac, 1982), defines a cognitive script as "a coherent sequence of events expected by the individual, involving him [or her] either as a participant or as an observer." As long as a person has the appropriate script for understanding and acting in a situation, that script can reduce uncertainty about the situation (p. 41). This would imply then that when a person is without the necessary script, uncertainty may be experienced.

When facing a particular situational context, say Abelson (1976), and Schank and Abelson (1977) (cited in Berger & Bradac, 1982, pp. 41-42), a person will (a) determine whether s/he has the appropriate script to fit the situation, and (b) if the script does exist, determine his/her role in it. In relation to the participants in this study, it was found that the students could at times report the appropriate script for the communication classroom; they were able to communicate effectively, to describe and predict patterns of interaction within the classroom, the teacher's behaviors, and they were even able to explain why certain behaviors were enacted. At other times though, the students found themselves lacking the necessary cultural and sociological knowledge to determine what script existed for the situation and therefore experienced uncertainty as to what to expect and how to behave.

Uncertainties experienced in relation to the situational context are exemplified by the students' discussions of not knowing how to address the teachers with respect, not knowing the boundaries of the class, or not knowing what is appropriate for a teacher to say or do in the classroom (e.g., verbally disclosing "I'm Jewish."). Students in the U.S. would be much less likely to encounter such uncertainties because they would have a script, a knowledge based on direct experience or observation, that would inform them of what is appropriate or inappropriate in the classroom. International students though, would often fail to have such a script that could aid in their knowing what is suitable behavior for the context.

A second consideration in this discussion of script and uncertainty relates to the uncertainty that can be experienced when the script is known, rather than unknown. Even when the students in this study understood and were able to explicate the classroom script, they still experienced uncertainty, specifically in relation to language. At times the international students felt that their experiences of uncertainty in relation to language were the same as they were for the U.S. students. They did not understand terminology, for example, that other students also did not understand. At other times, the students experienced an uncertainty that was more closely linked to the fact that they spoke English as a second language, or in the case of the Australian, spoke Australian-English. Words, phrases, and idioms were often unfamiliar to the students either because the vocabulary was academic in nature, or foreign.

Berger and Bradac's (1982) discussion of language and uncertainty relates that, "the use of unfamiliar terms should serve to increase the hearer's perception of the speaker's dissimilarity which should heighten the hearer's uncertainty" (p.57). For various possible reasons, the data in this study indicated that the use of unfamiliar terms did not affect the students' perceptions of teacher dissimilarity, but rather their own. First, because these students were studying in a foreign country they continually came into contact with teachers who were from the host country, as was most of the rest of the population. Within the context then, teachers were not the dissimilar ones, rather the international student was the dissimilar person, and the language of the teacher was not perceived as an indicator of her dissimilarity, but rather an indicator of a lack of language proficiency or self-confidence on the part of the student.

While Berger and Bradac (1982) suggest that phonetic variations (mispronunciations or speech errors) can lead to an individual attributing certain characteristics to another and thereby reducing uncertainty (pp. 62-63), there is no acknowledgement that one's *own* phonetic variations could be a *source* of uncertainty rather than an aid in uncertainty reduction. When an individual speaks a different dialect of a language though, or the individual's language proficiency is not at the level that they perceive as necessary for successful interaction within a specific environment, that difference in language can be perceived as a source of uncertainty. The students in this study, for example, declared that they often believed that their

lack of knowledge in the classroom was related to their speaking a different dialect of English, or of speaking English as a second language.

Another reason that the students may not link the difference in the teachers' language to their perceptions of teachers as dissimilar is because the teacher/student relationship is actually built on the basis of dissimilarity. The roles of each are carried out in a hierarchical relationship which means there is an established difference from the initial encounter. The teacher may be perceived as dissimilar in part because of his/her language, but more importantly because of his/her position in relation to the students. The teacher is continually perceived, and rightfully so, as the one with more power and/or status in the classroom.

Understandings of one's perceptions of uncertainty therefore are most significant when linked to understandings of relational and situational contexts. Without consideration of context, uncertainty and its management are decidedly limited in nature.

Approaches to Managing Uncertainty

The Management of Uncertainty Defined

While the initial postulation of URT asserted that the reduction of uncertainty about another was the primary concern of individuals (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), the students in this study suggested that the reduction of uncertainty about another was not always the primary concern, and/or that uncertainty, at times, was coped with rather

than reduced. These revelations bring into question underlying assumptions of URT regarding its definition and how uncertainty is actually managed when it is experienced. Specifically, relational and situational contexts need to be taken into account when studying uncertainty and/or its management.

First, due to the nature of the classroom, students may experience less uncertainty about the teacher as an individual in relation to other aspects of the class. The relational context of the teacher/student, for example, is such that the specific roles of each determine many of their expectations, behaviors, and attitudes. Additionally, the students may be less concerned about the teacher's behaviors or attitudes than their own performances and the tasks at hand within the situational context of the communication classroom. Students, for example, often sought to reduce uncertainty about those things which would specifically aid in their being able to perform and succeed in the classes.

Second, the reduction of uncertainty is not always considered to be the primary concern, or even possible or desired in some instances. Rather, it should be noted that the participants of this study indicated that they had strategies for coping with uncertainty as well as strategies for reducing uncertainty. A definition that reflects on the management of uncertainty, rather than simply its reduction, is more congruent with this study's findings and reads as follows:

> *Uncertainty is either managed through: (1) strategies for coping with uncertainty that do not acquire relevant knowledge or understanding thereby resulting in various possible effects, except, the reduction of uncertainty; or*

(2) strategies for acquiring relevant knowledge or understanding resulting in the reduction of uncertainty.

The following discusses significant findings as they relate to this definition of the management of uncertainty.

Strategies for Coping With Uncertainty

According to the data, there were various strategies utilized by the students when coping with uncertainty in the classroom; students would at times ignore uncertainty, pretend an understanding of uncertainty, as well as use it to their advantage in avoiding interaction. The reasons for using these strategies, and the implications of their use varied, what is most significant however is what the existence of these strategies has to say about the underlying assumptions of URT, and the importance of context when considering the theory.

First, URT is based in the belief that an individual's primary concern is to reduce uncertainty about another, and that this can be achieved through the use of strategies that allow one to "find out things about others" in order to reduce uncertainty about them (Berger, 1979, p. 134). This basal belief has driven much of the research on URT by defining how uncertainty, and strategies of reduction, are defined, measured, and interpreted.

As exceptions to the norm, Goldsmith (1992), and Planalp and Honeycutt (1985), contend that an individual's primary concern in interaction is not always to reduce uncertainty, rather uncertainty may be accepted, ignored, or even increased. Goldsmith (1992), for example, theorized that the endurance or cultivation of

uncertainty in some cultures is associated with respect for others. Uncertainty, she suggests, may serve social purposes (p. 23) which can only be known by examining patterns of behavior and their associated meanings within "the cultural systems in which they are embedded" (p. 21).

While this study did not examine uncertainty within one specific cultural system, it did explore uncertainty in relation to one specific context, that of the communication classroom in international education. The strategies for coping with uncertainty then were particular to the context in which the uncertainty developed, and can be understood as serving specific purposes as Goldsmith (1992) asserts can also served by uncertainty itself. For example, the student who faked and increased uncertainty, was using that experience to avoid interaction in a context in which interaction was required. In that instance, not only was the social encounter itself more of a concern than the uncertainty, but the uncertainty was even viewed as an aid in managing the main concern, that of avoiding an encounter. Context, therefore, can determine how uncertainty is perceived, whether it is actually the "primary concern," and how it will be managed; either with coping strategies, or through strategies of reduction.

Strategies for Reducing Uncertainty

In the initial postulation of URT (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), strategies for reducing uncertainty were enveloped within numerous axioms and theorems. These were further developed and explicated by Berger (1979) into three distinct classes;

passive, active, and interactive. While much of research has attended to strategies employed by strangers in initial encounters (Berger, Gardner, Clatterbuck, & Schulman, 1976; Berger & Douglas, 1981; Berger & Perkins, 1978.; Berger & Kellerman, 1983), research by Baxter and Wilmot (1984) investigated the strategies used by individuals within developed relational contexts: platonic, romantic potential, and romantic. Some of the individual strategies that they discovered were different than had been previously discussed (Berger, 1979), but they were all still befitting of Berger's class structure that included passive, active, and interactive strategies.

Similar results were found in this study, while the individual strategies for reducing uncertainty were at times different than had been previously discussed, the strategies were still found to fit within Berger's (1979) class structure of passive, active, and interactive. Of interest here, are those strategies that had been previously assumed to be relevant to this study (see Chapter II, in text), yet which were found to be limited in applicability.

Social Comparison. Berger (1979) had suggested that social comparison could aid in the reduction of uncertainty: "When known others are observed with the actor, the observer can make more confident inferences" about the other's opinions, attitudes and behaviors (p. 136). According to this philosophy, it was postulated in Chapter II that international students would most likely watch other international students in interaction with the teacher in order to learn about the teacher. The findings in this study however did not necessarily support that postulation as students

rarely mentioned watching other international students specifically. Rather, the international students referred to other "students" in general terms which implies that it was not particularly important who was watched, but rather that someone in the class knew how to interact with the teacher, understood the class process, and was able to be observed. This signifies that while social comparison may be an useful strategy in the reduction of uncertainty, it is important that the context is considered as it may determine in part, who is observed and the degree of confidence that can be given to the resultant inferences.

Verbal Interrogation. An additional strategy suggested to possibly be applicable to the classroom context (see Chapter II, in text) was that of directly asking questions of the teacher in order to reduce uncertainty about her. While Berger (1979) had stressed limitations such as the number of questions one could ask, and the potential for the other to give false information, the findings of this study revealed that context and culture were also influential. The context of the classroom defined to some extent when verbal interrogation was deemed appropriate, and culture determined whether students would feel comfortable in asking questions of teachers when such practice was not the norm in their cultures.

Teacher Self-Disclosure. Another uncertainty reducing strategy that was postulated by Berger (1979), and thought to possibly be relevant in the initial formulation of this study, was self-disclosure. According to Berger (1979), self-disclosure is an interactive strategy based on the norm of reciprocity (p. 140). The

rule of reciprocity, says Gouldner (1960) (cited in Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman, & Miller, 1976), implies that when one person discloses, the other person is more "likely to respond in kind." As a strategy for reducing uncertainty then, interacting with a person who will reciprocate self-disclosure allows an individual to learn of the other's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and thereby be able to predict and explain his/her behavior.

As was earlier noted in Chapter II, the reciprocation of self-disclosure as an interactive strategy was not believed to be applicable to the classroom context, and the findings support that assumption. While some students said they were more inclined to self-disclose in the classroom if the teacher did so, there was not a link found between a teacher's self-disclosure and the students' self-disclosures in regard to the reduction of uncertainty. While it had been suggested by this researcher that self-disclosure may serve as a passive strategy, no direct link could be found in this study between self-disclosure and the reduction of uncertainty.

Additionally, it should be noted that Berger's (1979) inclusion of self-disclosure as a interactive strategy presents a very narrow view of self-disclosure in relation to other communication concepts. While reciprocity is one concept that has been linked to self-disclosure, other concepts such as liking and trust have also been associated with self-disclosure (Berg & Archer, 1983; Hosman & Tardy, 1980; Wheeless & Grotz, 1977).

In this section though, the previously studied relationships between self-disclosure and other communication concepts are not discussed[2], rather the link found between a teacher's verbal self-disclosure and knowledge is considered. Teacher verbal self-disclosure was at times not perceived as being revealing of personal information, but rather, as one student related, was perceived as a type of knowledge shared.

> She, she knows many things....she has lots, lots of personal example. (pause) Well, when I ask question, she has a answer to everything [IFJ].

The personal information that students learned about the teacher often aided in their knowing of the teacher as a teacher, as well as a person; they knew the teacher had specific experiences that were related to course content and which showed that the teacher was not only book smart but also experience smart, and this was considered important in communication classes.

This personal knowledge shared not only affected how the students perceived the teachers, but also how they understood the course concepts. Students often related that teachers' verbal self-disclosure made concepts easier to understand.

> She, she always use her examples, besides using textbook examples. It's very easy for me to understand [IFJ].

While the intent was behind the teachers' acts of verbal disclosure can not be known based on the data in this study, the way in which the students' perceived those acts of disclosure should be relevant to teachers of communication.

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[2] For further discussion, see Teacher self-disclosure from the perspective of international students in the communication classroom: A case study (Geiger, 2000).

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study contributes in various ways to research on uncertainty reduction theory, intercultural communication, and international education. First, this study was important for raising questions about the initial formulation of URT. As Berger (1986) insists, "scientific theories are constructed to be modified or discarded rather than accepted as dogma," (p. 34) therefore, a consideration of the theory within the multicultural classroom of higher education allows the theory's formulation to be examined anew.

Specifically, this study contributes to previous work in the area of URT which has been dense in quantitative research, but lacking in qualitative research (for exception, see Goldsmith, 1992). This qualitative researcher approached the study seeking to understand when and how uncertainty was experienced and reduced, that was, if it was experienced or reduced at all. By allowing categories of uncertainty to be defined during the process it was possible to elicit the "insider's meanings" of the social situation through the stance of the participant-observer, not solely the researchers (Ting-Toomey, 1984).

This study, therefore, allowed the participants to define experiences of uncertainty through their own perceptions. As a result, there was found to be a notable incongruency between the original definitions of uncertainty and uncertainty reduction, and the definitions derived by these participants. While these findings bring into question the validity of the theory's original definitions across contexts, it is

hoped that they will stress the need for research such as this, that allows the participants to define their experiences.

Second, this study extends the theory's research within the area of intercultural encounters. While many studies have investigated various intercultural encounters (Ge & Gudykunst, 1990; Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985; Sanders, Wiseman, & Matz, 1991), few have considered this theory within the educational setting as experienced by teachers and students (McCrosky, 1998; Nelson, 1989, 1992), and no studies have been found which considered the theory within the educational context experienced by international students and U.S. teachers.

Third, this study adds to current research in the field of intercultural communication. An exploration into the experiences of students who deal with intercultural encounters increases the knowledge of how effective communication between individuals of different cultures can be facilitated.

And lastly, this study contributes to research and discussions of international education. The typology of class types that was revealed in the findings presents a new approach to considerations of international education, and international students' experiences. The data suggest that there is a relationship between components of various classes (e.g., knowledge and teaching approaches) and it is hoped that this will aid in future discussions and understandings of international education.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the cross-cultural nature of this study was vital to the experience, it can not be ignored that language and culture limited the intercultural exchange. McCraken (1988) says that those who work in cultures other than their own have the advantage of a natural critical distance from which they view everything before them (p. 22). It may also be argued though, that such a distance does not allow researchers to acknowledge that which those within the culture are attuned to observing and understanding because, as Hall contends, culture "designates what we pay attention to and what we ignore" (p. 85).

In a cross-cultural exchange, such as in this study, that statement may apply to both parties in the encounter. The researchers, for example, followed a Western research design, therefore, the structure of the interviews, the interview guide, and the data analyses were all carried out with mainstream U.S. cultural overtones. Constructing the study in such a manner may have limited what the researchers allowed into the process and what was denied recognition. According to Shuter (1984), the emphasis on speech in U.S. culture and in the qualitative research method may not give nonverbal modes of expression the social and attributional significance accorded them in other cultures (p. 199).

Additionally, on the part of the students, their cultural orientation may have also defined what they paid attention to or ignored. Their interpretation of the interview process, for example, may have influenced their interpretation of the

intercultural, teacher/student encounter.

Another limitation of cross-cultural research was the language used in the research, in this case, English. While one student was a native English speaker (Australian-English), it was recognized that the others may have found questions to be unclear, or that English restricted their ability to express their thoughts. The researchers tried to lessen any difficulties connected to language by establishing an environment which allowed the students to ask clarification questions and by constructing interview guides that were grammatically simple and written without jargonistic or idiomatic language. Additionally, an extensive pilot study was conducted before the actual study in order to identify any problems with the interview guide or process.

An additional limitation might have been the specific research tools used. Focus groups, which are common in the U.S., may have been an unfamiliar process for international students. The experience was hopefully more comfortable when explained to the students before the interviews began. While it is acknowledged that some students may have been inclined to not participate in a group, focus groups were chosen as a way of increasing the comfort for the students. There was less pressure on a single student to *perform*, as there was in the long interview, especially when faced with two interviewers at one time.

Additionally, this study was limited by sample size and the population it represented. As a case study, this research involved a limited number of international

students from only one department within one university; therefore, the findings from this research cannot be generalized to other departments or universities. Additionally, this research can not be generalized to other international students, from the same or different countries, who have taken communication classes. These students' experiences were distinct to the class they took, and the teachers with whom they interacted.

Finally, the perceptions of international students were only one view of the intercultural communication encounter. The encounter also involved teachers from the U.S., but their perceptions were not included in this study. It is noted then, that the teachers' points of view on teacher intentionality and teaching style are not discussed.

Although this study has some limitations, it has accomplished its purposes and the results have answered the questions of the study: What are the students' perceptions of the teacher/student relationship? Do international students experience uncertainty in communication classrooms? If uncertainty is experienced, what is its source(s)? If uncertainty is experienced, do students seek to reduce it, and if so, how? The research design fit the purposes of the study and data obtained were rich and relevant. From the international students' descriptions of their own experiences emerged the framework through which their perceptions of teachers and teacher/student relationships were interpreted.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

The implications for education that are discussed here are derived from the data and include students' statements as support. Within the individual interviews, the researchers specifically asked what advice the participants would give to U.S. teachers who have international students in their classes. Some of that advice is shared here not only because it is significant, but also because it is powerful to read in the students' own words.

While this study was in part based on the assumption that public speaking classes are different for students than other communication classes because of speaking apprehension, the findings of this study reveal that intercultural communication classes are also perceived differently by international students. Teachers therefore need to recognize that intercultural communication classes inherently result in different expectations and experiences for international students.

Students remarked that intercultural communication classes specifically were more diverse in student population, which led to their feeling more comfortable in speaking and taking leadership roles. Seeing others who looked like themselves, and hearing others who spoke with accents, increased their comfort and confidence in participating. The students were not only learning class content, but were also learning communication techniques from other students (particularly other international students), and were gaining self-esteem and confidence which directly related to their class performance. One student confided the following,

I was very feeling good, when I'm, when I'm, when I'm with someone who, who was from Japan. And she, she's been here longer than me so she could speak English very better than me. So I think I could learn many things from her, like things she was speaking English. I think someone who can speak English better than studen, student, better than me would be very good model for me. Teacher should give us more chance to engage in group discussion. So that's where I can see her speaking English...or I could learn from students. Native speaker with me is scary. I mean when, when international student just got here, native speaker, they are very fast talking about things. So like discussion is very helpful with another international student [IFJ].

Additionally, the students believed that in intercultural communication classes

they were often more knowledgeable than U.S. students because of their experiences

as international students. They took the classes with the expectation that they would

be able to share their valuable life experiences. As one student stated,

Not, not only Japanese, but maybe all international students, love to talk about their own countries, and their own cultures [IFJ].

Classes such as these are supportive of international education then because

they allow the students an opportunity to participate on an equal level with other

students, and to even accept leadership roles in the interactions. Additionally, classes

that are not focused on intercultural communication should consider their curriculum

and allow for international student participation.

A second, and more significant way that teachers can allow international

students to participate in classes is to allow response time. For the Japanese in

particular, who represent the majority of international students at P.S.U., allowing

them time to respond within the class was the advice most often given by the

participants. Students remarked,

Well, of course we just don't speak up, so, if you, or you can, or teacher can ignore those quiet Japanese but, if you want to then, if you want them to speak up in the classroom, you have to point them, and name them, and ask the questions, and give them time to answer....I often feel that American students, or other students, or maybe teacher also might think that we don't have any opinions, or we don't have the answers, cause we just, we need, in the first few second we don't say anything so, silence means that they don't know anything in America, right? So, but, it's not, it doesn't mean so in Japan, or other cul-, cultures so I want teachers to know that fact [IFJ].

Well, international student especially, takes long time to speak, and then, we have to think in my, in our head first and then translate in English (laughs) so it's gonna take time. And then many time, I have many things in my mind that I want, I want to say but just didn't come out... You have to take time to talk to international student [IFJ].

The findings in this study are particularly relevant to an instructor's understanding of the international student's experience. Acknowledging that an international student may not use strategies such as questioning to reduce their uncertainty should put more pressure on the instructors to explain their behaviors and to make less assumptions about what is known by their student audience. Additionally, the classroom environment should be such that international students will find themselves openly received by other students who can serve as informants if international students are uncertain of, and/or unable to explain teacher behavior or classroom processes.

Additionally, experiences of uncertainty often resulted in the students feeling excluded from the rest of the class. In order to lessen the opportunities for uncertainty and exclusion to occur, teachers need to be very conscious of idioms, culture-specific examples, and activities that they use in class that can be sources of uncertainty. If

different examples or activities can not be chosen, then an effort needs to be made to insure that everyone in the class is able to understand the examples, idioms, and activities. One student advised,

> So sometimes they [teachers] just have to, I don't know, try and use different examples, or try and explain things in different words...make it easier [IFA].

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Various avenues for future research have been identified through the course of the study. First, URT needs to be qualitatively researched in other communication classrooms in different universities in order to determine if the findings are applicable in similar contexts. Various qualitative approaches should be utilized in this research, particularly that of observation which would allow the researcher to directly learn of teacher/student interaction in the classroom. These observations then, when combined with interview data, would allow researchers to better understand how meaning of such interaction is derived by the students.

Second, research needs to be conducted which compares the experiences of other international students with those in this study. It is important to not only consider students from the same countries as the students in this study, but also students from other countries in order to learn what differences and similarities exist in international students' experiences.

Third, the emphasis given to context in relation to the theory of uncertainty reduction should be investigated further. The study of other contexts would aid in

determining the scope and boundaries of the theory, as well its applicability across communication situations.

Fourth, research should focus on similar or additional strategies that individuals use to reduce their uncertainty, as well as approaches taken when uncertainties are not reduced. Again, context should be considered significant as in this study it often influenced what strategies and approaches were utilized and at what points in time.

Finally, additional qualitative research should study international education, and the experiences of international students in particular. The interviews in this study were invaluable to both the researchers and the students. While our main intent as researchers was to understand the international students' experiences and report the findings, the students aided in the research for their own reasons. The students who were interviewed expressed a sincere appreciation that two U.S. researchers were striving to understand and present international students' experiences. Telling their stories to native researchers allowed them to play the part of the teacher, to share their experiences and relate their understandings of education across countries. Additionally, the telling of their stories, said one individual, allowed the opportunity for them to relieve stress by talking about their lives as international students.

As much as we wanted the students to talk in order to help with our study and to further our knowledge, they wanted the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Additional qualitative research should support international education by taking note

of the individual lives of the university students. Not only could U.S. researchers improve their understanding of other cultures, but international students within this country would be given an opportunity to tell their stories and share their knowledge.

CONCLUSION

A phenomenological perspective aided in this study's exploration of the efficacy of URT in explaining international students' experiences in U.S. university communication classrooms. The collected data revealed that international students do experience uncertainty, but that their understanding of that experience differed greatly from the theory's original formulation. Additionally, it was found that there were more approaches to managing uncertainty than through its reduction, as had been originally postulated. These findings further understandings of uncertainty, and stress the need to consider context in future research; in this study international education and the intercultural encounter of the teacher/student were found to influence the students' perceptions of their experiences.

In conclusion, this study was important not only for bringing to light new understandings of uncertainty, but also for showing support of international education by allowing an opportunity for international students to share their knowledge and enrich the lives of others.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INQUIRY

Dear _____,   Date _____

      This letter is written so that we may introduce ourselves and invite you to be a participant in a research study about international students. Our names are Darlene Geiger and Susan Kuhn and we are both graduate students who are conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Susan Poulsen, in the Communication Department. This study is part of the requirement for our masters' degrees.

      We are interested in learning of the international students' experiences at PSU in the Communication Department. We are asking for your participation in this study because you are an international student who has taken a class in the Communication department this 1998/99 academic year.

      If you are interested in participating in this study, we will meet with you and other international students three times this term. You may participate in one or all of the meetings. The first meeting will be a group interview with several international students. The second interview will be with individual students who are available and interested. In the final meeting, we will ask you to clarify and/or confirm parts of the interview. Total time required of you is approximately two to four hours. You will not receive any direct benefit for your participation in this study, however your participation will increase knowledge, which may help others like you in the future.

      We hope you are interested in our study and wish to be a participant. Please call if you are interested. If we do not hear from you, we will call you after seven days. You are under no obligation to participate in this study and your participation, or lack of, will not affect your course grades or your relationship with your teacher.

      We are very interested in learning about your experience. We appreciate your time in reading this letter and considering our project. Please call or email any questions to one of the numbers listed below.

Sincerely,

Susan Kuhn and Darlene Geiger

Susan Kuhn may be contacted at 253-4743, or psu20533@odin.cc.pdx.edu
Darlene Geiger may be contacted at 245-0674, or geigerd@irn.pdx.edu

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, agree to participate in this
research project interested in learning about the international students' experiences in
the university being conducted by Darlene Geiger and Susan Kuhn under the
supervision of Dr. Susan Poulsen. I understand that this study is part of the
requirements for their masters' degrees.

It has been explained to me that the purpose of the study is to learn of
international students' experiences at Portland State University in the Communication
Department.

I understand that this study will consist of three interviews where I will be
verbally responding to questions asked by Susan and Darlene. The total time required
for the interview(s) is 2 to 4 hours. I may not receive any direct benefit from
participation in this study, however my participation may help increase knowledge
that may benefit other students like me in the future. Susan and Darlene have offered
to answer any questions that I may have about the study and of what I am expected to
do in this study.

I have been promised that all information I give, as well as my identity, will be
kept confidential. Darlene Geiger and Susan Kuhn will maintain the information
(tape recordings, etc.) under lock and key.

I also understand that I do not have to participate in this study, and that this
will not affect my course grade or my relationship with my instructor, or with Portland
State University. I understand that I may also withdraw from this study at any time
without affecting my course grade or my relationship with Portland State University,
my instructors or with Susan and Darlene.

I have read and understand the above information and agree to take part in this
study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____
 If you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study, please
contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Research and
Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-8182. Or
contact either one of the researchers:
Susan Kuhn, 253-4743, psu20533@odin.cc.pdx
Darlene Geiger, 245-0674, geigerd@irn.pdx.edu

APPENDIX C

PRE-INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete the following questions. This basic information will allow us to have a better understanding of the participants. If you choose not to answer a question, you may leave it blank. Any information you do give will be kept confidential.

1. Circle one: Male/Female

2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your major? _____

4. What country are you from? _____

5. What is your first language(s)? _____

6. How many years of education have you had in your country? _____

7. Did you study English in your country? Yes/No   If yes, how long? _____

8. What was your TOFEL score? _____

9. How long have you lived in the U.S. _____

10. How long have you been a student in the U.S.? _____

11. Did you study English at PSU?   Yes/No

    11a. If yes, what level did you start at PSU? Level1/ Level2/ Level3/ Level4

    11b. If yes, how many terms did you study English? _____

12. How many class(es) have you taken in the Communication Dept.? _____

13. What grade do you think you will receive in your Communication class this term? A/ B/ C/ D/ F/ Not known

14. Are there any questions or concerns that you have at this time?

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell us what it's like to be an international student at PSU. *(establish setting)*
 1a. Tell us what it's like to be an international student in the
  Communication classroom at PSU. *(establish setting)*

2. What is the role of the teacher in your country? *(student-teacher roles)*
 2a. How do you think that compares with the U.S.? *(role comparison)*
 2b. What kinds of things does your teacher say or do that are different than
  what a teacher in your native country would say or do? *(verbal and
  nonverbal SD and role)*

3. What actions do you believe are OK or not OK for a teacher to do in class? *(NV
appropriateness)*

4. Can you tell us of a time when your current teacher surprised you with what she
said or did in the classroom? How did that made you feel? *(level and content of
verbal/nonverbal SD and URT)*

5. Sometimes in class, teachers will use real-life examples to explain class concepts.
Can you tell us about a time when the teacher did use a real-life example and then,
how it may have affected what you thought about her? *(verbal affect)*

6. What kinds of things do you feel is OK or not OK for a teacher to say in class?
(verbal appropriateness)

7. Sometimes teachers say and do things that seem unclear and difficult for us as
students to understand. Can you think of a time when this happened to you? What
did you do? *(URT and strategy)*

8. What advice would you give to other international students who are about to take
the class you just took? *(closure)*

9. In thinking about what we have been talking about, is there anything else you
would like to say? *(final, general question)*

APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. In our previous interview you talked about what it was like to be an international student. About your experience as a student in the communication classroom, and about interactions with your instructors. Since that interview have you had any additional thoughts on any of those topics that you would like to add? *(reestablish setting)*

2. Why did you take the communication class that you took? *(establish setting)*

3. Do you think communication classes are different or the same as other classes at PSU? How are they different or the same? *(class context)*
    3a. What about the teacher, was she the same or different from teachers in other classes? How? *(class context and teacher role)*

4. Describe your teacher to us.
    4a. Tell us what you know about your teacher, both as a teacher and as a person. *(SD and URT)*
    4b. How does she feel about her students? *(self-disclosure)*
    4c. How do you know these things? *(verbal and nonverbal SD, and URT strategy and explain)*
    4d. What is the most surprising thing that you know about her? *(SD appropriate)*

5. If a friend of yours said they were about to take the class that you just took, what would you tell him/her to expect from the teacher? *(predict and explain URT)*

6. What kind of things are difficult about being an international student in the class you just took? What was the easiest? *(URT)*

7. What are things that your teacher does or says that are helpful to you in the class? *(decrease uncertainty)*

8. Can you think of anything that your teacher has done or said that made you like or dislike her? *(SD and Affect)*
    8a. What about what she wears: Does that influence what you think of her? *(NV SD)*

9. In the last interview we asked you what advice you would give to another international student from your country about coming to PSU Now we want to know what advice you would give to a U.S. teacher about interacting with students from your culture. *(closure)*

10. In thinking about what we have been talking about, is there anything else you would like to say? Are there any questions that you think we should have asked? *(final general question)*