

Acculturation and Perceived Social Distance among Arabs and Saudi Arabians in an ESL Situation

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceived social distance among a small Arab community residing in a college town in the Midwest of the USA. The study examines its possible impact on the process of learning/acquiring English as a second language (ESL). It draws on the findings and contentions of the acculturation model as outlined by Schumann (1978). Three data collection procedures were employed: personal interviews, field observations, and a questionnaire. Five members of the aforementioned community were interviewed: three Saudi Arabians, and two other Arabs. The interviews were mapped against the social factors of the model as summarized by Brown (2000). Then a sum of 17 Saudi Arabian informants (graduate students) responded to a questionnaire. The findings suggest that different Arabs acculturate differently in accordance to their future plans. The persons who intend to reside in the target language (TL) culture acculturate (perceive smaller distance from the TL group) much more than those transient residents who intend to live there for a specific purpose and leave after finishing their business. The permanent residents' self-perception of their English proficiency is higher than the temporary ones.

Keywords: acculturation, anthropolinguistics, applied linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Many second language acquisition (SLA) theories have been devised to account for the process of learning/acquiring a second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Some of them have been criticized for being incomprehensive to account for what goes on in the mind of the second language (SL) learner like the behaviorists' stimulus-response theory (Johnson, 2004). Some other theories, on the other hand, were attacked because they did not acknowledge the social aspect of SL learners like the universal grammar theory (UG) and the comprehension hypothesis outlined by Krashen. (2004). Upon reflection on the various theories of SLA, it could be realized that each one has its own merits and cannot be ignored altogether. For example, the role of the environment in the stimulus-response theory cannot be undermined. For the same reason, the role of SL learners' mental processes may not be considered irrelevant. Both arguments are equally relevant and crucial to the understanding of the SLA processes.

1.1 *The Acculturation Model*

The acculturation model is considered one of the influential theories in SLA (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1997; Norton, 1998). The model was first devised by Schumann in 1978 (Gass and Selinker, 2008). It downplayed the mental processes, but it did not deny their role in the overall acquisition. Historically, the model emerged after the innatists' movement started in the late 1950s and 1960s by Chomsky and his contemporaries. Later, Krashen developed his monitor model (1977), and then his input hypothesis (1985). Schumann's stance in the social, psychological distance acknowledged the innatists position, as if he were saying acculturation with everything considered is about the degree to which an SL learner perceives the distance between him/herself and the target language (TL) group: the smaller the distance the better SLA occurs (Schumann, 1986). Acton (1979) as cited in Brown (2000, p. 186) initiated the notion of perceived distance instead of Schumann's actual distance as a given situation might warrants. Thus, the learners' perceived psychological distance could be interpreted in light of the affective filter in Krashen's hypothesis in which he identified anxiety as a major factor. Thus, the acculturation model, as I understand it, does not contradict the role of SL learners' mental processes but rather accounts for the conduciveness of the learning environment to SLA.

1.2 Previous Studies on Acculturation

Three major studies were found in the literature that provide a clear picture of what might deter linguistic growth among members of minority groups. Schumann (1978) did the first study; Schmidt (1983) conducted the second; and Ioup (1994) carried out the third. The three studies are case studies of second language learners who acquired their TL at different levels of proficiency. The disparities are ascribed to different social and psychological factors. The social distance as described by Ellis (1994) deals with the degree to which an English as a second language (ESL) learner identifies with the members of the TL. The psychological distance "is the extent to which individual learners are at ease with their TL learning task" (Ellis, 1994, p. 231).

Schumann's case is a longitudinal study about a learner by the name of Alberto, a thirty-three year old Costa Rican. Over a ten-month period of observations, testing, and assessment of linguistic development, Alberto showed little improvement. Schumann tried to account for this lack of development by studying the social context in which Alberto lived. As a result of close scrutiny of this case, Schumann developed his renowned model of acculturation. His contention is that "the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates" (Schumann, 1986, p. 379). Central to the concept of acculturation are social factors (similarities and dissimilarities) that exist between two groups, the TL group and L2 group, which can enhance or inhibit linguistic development. Schumann (1976, p. 136) as cited in Brown (2000, p. 185) summarized these social factors in the following five parameters:

- 1) *Dominance*. In relation to the TL [target language] group, is the L2 [second language learning] group politically, culturally, technically dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate?
- 2) *Integration*. Is the integration pattern of the L2 group assimilation, acculturation, or preservation? What is the L2 degree of enclosure-its identity separate from other continuous groups?
- 3) *Cohesiveness*. Is the L2 cohesive? What is the size of the L2 group?
- 4) *Congruence*. Are the cultures of the two groups congruent- similar in their value and belief systems? What are the attitudes of the two groups toward each other?
- 5) *Permanence*. What is the L2 group's intended length of residence in the target language area?

To Schumann (1976), based on these five parameters, the learning situation would be either good or bad. A bad situation would feature perceived dominance by both groups: TL and L2. They would not integrate with one another due to, probably, national pride. They are different and hold negative attitudes towards one another. The L2 community would be large and cohesive and the learner does not intend to reside in the TL for a long time. On the other hand, the good language learning condition would be the opposite. First, a perceived dominance of the TL group. L2 learning group yearns to assimilate into TL culture. Their L2 community is small and not cohesive, and lastly the L2 learner intends to remain in the TL culture area for a long time.

After testing the case of Alberto against the social distance parameters, one can see that it is rather a bad learning situation. This subject acquired what linguists call the basic variety-- about enough English for him to function. He fossilized right after that point. The social factors did not help him to improve any further. Being from Costa Rica and being among very large group/community of Spanish speakers stop him from acquiring more sophisticated English that neither his job nor his daily live requires.

Despite serious criticism of the acculturation model for being empirically un-testable because there are no validated and reliable instruments for measuring acculturation (Ellis, 1994; Hansen & Liu, 1997; Saville-Troike, 2006), the model explains many of the difficulties facing L2 learners. An example of what is meant to be against the acculturation model is a similar case that is studied by Schmidt (1983). He studied the linguistic progress of a Japanese immigrant by the name of Wes. Wes was able to acquire English over three years. His English was considered good because he managed to function well in many social situations. However, after three years, he failed to speak grammatically correct English. To Schmidt (1983), Wes is an example of a highly acculturated person who acquired English as an L2. Yet, this learner failed to achieve high proficiency level as predicted by the five parameters of the acculturation model.

However, I believe that Schmidt's study provides further evidence to the acculturation model. Wes, like Alberto, acquired enough English to function as an artist whose job required dealing with customers in English. Therefore, his English was not grammatical. He did not need much grammar to communicate. It is important to know that the Japanese community in Hawaii is large and cohesive, and this supports the basic assumptions of the model. Furthermore, Wes kept visiting Japan over the three years and expressed his feelings about being homesick. Hence, we can conclude that Wes is like Alberto, and that they both acquired the basic variety (enough English) that allows them to function in their respective jobs. Alberto's job, menial work, did not require as much English

as Wes, who needed much more English to communicate ideas about his art as well as marketing his products to native speakers of English.

The third study by Ioup, G.; Boustagui, E.; El Tigi, M. & Moselle, M. (1994) presents a case of native acquisition of L2, as claimed by the researchers. Though some might have some reservations with regard to the extent of acquisition described in the study, I still have no doubt that the case of this study has acquired a phenomenal degree of proficiency. Julie, the subject of this study, is a British woman who got married to an Egyptian. She moved to live with him in Cairo for more than twenty years at the time of the study. Her in-laws, children, and friends all spoke Arabic. She did not have a community of her own, no L2 group. Her life circumstances required her to speak Arabic as natives do, and she managed to do so.

In line with the acculturation model, like Alberto and Wes who acquired just enough English for them to function, Julie's life demands a native-like proficiency. She did not have a community of English speakers living in Cairo. Therefore, many of the items of the acculturation model would reflect a perfect L2 learning situation. Nevertheless, Julie's situation proves that a large, cohesive L2 group constitutes an impediment to the perfection of a second language.

These studies provoked some questions about an Arab community in a Midwestern college town in the USA. Thus, the present study further explores the acculturation model and its role in SLA. It draws on the findings of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic research that has been conducted mainly to explore reasons for difficulties of effective linguistic growth in an ESL learning environment by this group.

Also, it would be interesting to know if different groups of Arabs would acculturate in accordance to their plans. Some of them would be staying in the TL culture for a lifetime, and some others are there temporarily. The Arab community is a part of a larger Muslim community. Muslims gather from one to five times a day in the local mosque (Muslims' place of worship). The community consists of 400 to 500 Muslims; around 40-50 of whom are Arabs. Some of the Arabs are permanent residents and the rest are students attending a major university. Saudi Arabian students were largely represented and were of close interest to this study. My questions are as follows:

- 1) To what extent do Arabs and Saudi Arabians in particular acculturate? (as measured against the social distance factors in the acculturation model)
- 2) How would they rate their English language competence?

To answer these questions, I conduct the ensuing study.

2. Method

2.1 The Study

For this study, I employed three types of data collection: interviews with five Arabs, field observations of Arabs in the local mosque, and then a questionnaire was given to the Saudi Arabian group. Unexpectedly, it was difficult to convince people to participate; I planned to distribute the questionnaire to as many Arabs and Saudi Arabians as possible. Only Saudis were willing to share their views and support me in this study (real-world evidence of the cohesiveness of the Saudi community, as I am a Saudi Arabian myself). I also planned to interview more than five, but unfortunately, I could not have the consent of many. Interestingly, enough, three out of five were from Saudi Arabia. The three Saudis were of special interest to the present study since the findings would shed some light on the possible difficulties that Saudi Arabian expats face when they pursue their studies in the USA. Each interviewee was asked eight questions. The results are hoped to yield some pedagogical implications for Saudi Arabian students in Saudi Arabia.

About the observation procedure, I paid close attention to Arabs among the larger group of Muslims. I monitored how they interacted with each other, and how they mingled with other various linguistic groups. I also watched how they formed their groups. The observations were conducted over four consecutive Fridays, as Muslims gather for the Jumu'ah prayer. They would always have a social gathering afterwards on those days.

2.2 The Participants in the Interviews

The participants were five Arab men who were active members of the Muslim society of a college town in the Midwest, the USA. As could be seen in Table 1, Participant 1 (P1) was 41-years old. P2 was 43-years old. P3 was 31-years old. The three go to the major university in town pursuing their doctoral degrees. They are from Saudi Arabia. P4 is an assistant professor at the same university. He came originally from Palestine. P5 is a medical doctor working for the local hospital who was originally from Egypt. P4 and P5 are naturalized US citizens. These two are not planning to go back to their original countries; their children and their lives are all in

the USA. However, the three doctoral students are planning to go back to Saudi Arabia as soon as they obtain their degrees. All participants are married and considered middle class according to American standards of living. All of the participants are proficient English users (the enrolled students had TOEFL scores of 550 as a condition for admission, and P4 and P5 graduated from USA universities).

Table 1. Background information about the participants

Participant	Age	Length of stay in years	Education/ occupation	Marital status
P1	41	8	Doctoral student	Married with 5 children
P2	43	5	Doctoral student	Married with 4 children
P3	31	4	Doctoral student	Married with 1 child
P4	48	22	Ph.D.	Married with 3 children
P5	52	25	Medical Doctor	Married with 3 adult sons

2.3 Interview Questions

The questions for the interviews were devised in accordance with the five parameters as explained in Brown (2000) to measure perceived social distance. Table 2 shows the questions and the specific parameter that each question is intended to cover. It is meant to ask only one question about the four parameters because the answer is expected to be short and to the point. For example, for the permanence question the answer would be either I will stay or I will leave. In addition, too many questions would be a kind of negative imposition on the informants. The purpose was to make the interviews simple and to the point. The integration parameter was given three questions because it is the most important of the five. It is the only one where learners perform actions in the real world to shorten/enlarge the social distance. The other four parameters are somehow static and do not involve real actions. The eighth question was meant to elicit if the perceived social distance would have had an impact on the perceived language competence by the participants.

Table 2. The five parameters of the social distance and their correspondent questions

The parameter	The question
1. Dominance	1. Do you consider the American culture/society dominant/superior to yours?
2. Integration	2. How well/often do you socialize with English native speakers?
	3. Do you exert a conscious effort to interact with native speakers of English?
	4. What types of problems do you experience when speaking with native speakers?
3. Cohesiveness	5. Do you consider your community cohesive?
4. Congruence	6. Can you recognize any shared values with the American culture?
5. Permanence	7. Do you plan to stay in America for a long time?
	8. On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is very poor and 10 is native-speaker level), how would you rate your English language competence, oral and written?

3. Results

3.1 The Interviews

P1 provided the following answers. The answers are numbered in the order they were asked and shown in Table 2.

Dominance

He said, "No, I do not think the American society is better than ours. On the contrary, the American society is suffering from fatal diseases. I feel sorry for them." I asked if he would consider the American society dominant, he replied with yes since they are the majority in their own country. We will be the dominant society when we go

back to our country. I wondered if he would consider the American society to be dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate. He chose non-dominant.

Integration

To this question he replied, "I always feel the distance from my American best friend." I asked whether he had an American best friend and he said, "Yes, I have been here for almost eight years. My best friend is one of my classmates who is originally from Chicago. But he is different at the personal level". I asked if he would adapt his own behavior so it would match his friend's and he said, "Absolutely not, I would never change my lifestyle to anybody else's. He and I respect each other and accept each other differences."

He said, "During my first two or three years...yes I wanted to improve my language." I wondered if his English is good now, and he said that he attained the required TOEFL score and is doing well now in his doctoral studies.

For this question he said, "I feel stupid when I talk to people because they do not seem to understand me." I wondered what he would do, and he said that he would go to the Masjid or Saudi club and joked about it with his fellow Saudis.

Cohesiveness

He answered this question by saying, "what community, the Muslim, Arabs, or Saudis?" I told him to choose whatever group he affiliates himself with, and he said, "Saudis are fine, I like my fellow Saudis; they are very helpful." We also get together in the Saudi Club and have many functions going on. He said that their families also had their portion of this socialization and shared activities.

Congruence

To this question he replied, "Well, I do not know, we are different. Different in everything, you know. Our lifestyles are completely different; I respect this difference, like I said with my Chicago friend."

Permanence

He answered this question by a long laugh and said, "I will be on the first flight after I get my transcript."

Perceived English competence

He gave himself (5) on the scale.

P2 gave the following answers:

Dominance

He answered this question by saying, "in what way... I do not think that they are superior to us. They are as good as any other culture in the world. I asked how he would describe it as dominant, non-dominant or subordinate and he said non-dominant.

Integration

He inquired about this question and I explained to him that I was asking about the degree of assimilation into the American culture and he said, "I do not integrate with them, I am a student and I just care for my academic progress." I asked if he had American friends, and he said that he had a few good classmates, but they never had a chance to socialize outside the classrooms.

He said in response to this question, "I would like to talk with them, but they try to avoid me." He mentioned one incident as an example when he found two of his American classmates, and they deliberately avoided him.

He said, "All sorts of difficulties...they always ask me to repeat my sentences...I had to shout sometimes and that offends them."

Cohesiveness

To this question he replied, "Yes, my community is cohesive and robust." Having the answers of P1 in the back of my mind, I wondered about what community he was referring to, and he said, "The Saudis!" He found my question strange.

Congruence

He answered this question by saying, "I cannot think of any... maybe honesty?" He elaborated by saying that the two cultures were dissimilar but he liked the system and the respect that people had for the law.

Permanence

In answering this question, he asserted that he would not stay any longer after his graduation.

Perceived English competence

He smiled and said, “two if not zero...well, four maybe five, I do not know.”

P3 provided the following answers:

Dominance

He replied indignantly, “No! No society is superior to ours.” I calmed him down by assuring him that I was just conducting interviews to get his perception not to offend him, and then I wondered if he would adjust his answer, and he said, “It is still no.” I asked him if he saw the American culture as subordinate then, he said no. He thought that the American culture and the Saudi Arabian culture are equally good with their specific pros and cons.

Integration

To this question, he replied, “not much... when I first came here, I planned to immerse myself in the culture... laughing... having been single and looking for love, you know. After I got married those immersion fantasies stopped.”

He answered this one by saying, “not really... I do not plan to talk with native speakers... I only talk with them when I had to.”

He said, “I have one problem; sometimes when I speak with someone I struggle with vocabulary” I asked him if he would think of something else, and he said no.

Cohesiveness

He answered this question by saying, “Yes, I think we are fine here... we care for each other regardless of our differences.” I wondered about the group he associated himself with the most and he said the Saudis.

Congruence

To this question, he told me a few stories about his old American friends before he got married. The part of his answer he allowed me to report is the following, “many Americans are hearty like us... my host mother reminded me with the warmth of my real mother.” I wondered if he was still in touch with her, and he said that she had passed away two years earlier.

Permanence

As for this question about permanence, he said, “no.”

Perceived English competence

He gave himself (5 to 6) on the scale.

P4 answered with the following:

Dominance

He answered the first question diplomatically by saying, “I am an American.” I explained to him that I meant his Arab community versus the native speakers’ community, and he said, “I would not say native speakers are superior or Arab communities are better...both have their appeals.” I asked him to give me a definite answer. He insisted on the same philosophy by telling me about the richness and diversity of the American culture, and how Arab culture fits in the overall picture of the American culture. I asked if the culture of the country he came from would be characterized as subordinate, and to my surprise, he said “yes”.

Integration

To this question he replied, “I socialize with native speakers very well... I do not have problems with anybody... we work, live, and cooperate with each other.” I asked him if he had native speaker friends, and he said, “Yes, of course... all my colleagues are my friends... I also have many friends who are not in the university... remember I have been here for more than twenty years.”

He confidently answered this question with no since he interacted with native speakers naturally as part of his daily routine.

To this question, he affirmed that he did not have any difficulty when speaking with native speakers.

Cohesiveness

In answering this question, he inquired about what community I was referring to, and I told him to choose the immediate community to himself either Muslim or Arab community. He said, “The Muslim community is

cohesive and supportive... I believe we are here closer to each other more than similar communities across the country.” I wondered if he associated himself more with the local Muslim community or with his American friends outside the Muslim community, and replied to that by saying that the Muslim community was his affiliate group.

Congruence

To this question, he replied, “the Muslim community has many shared values with the American general public... he asserts that Islam in America as a religion and as a culture is American like any other religion... he reminded me that there were millions of American Muslims who implement Islam as a way of life.” I asked him to answer my question within the intended scope, and he refused to separate Muslims' culture from the American culture based on the fact that Islam is a represented culture within the general American culture.

Permanence

He answered this question by saying, “I am an American and my children are Americans... I do not plan to go anywhere... maybe to Florida after my retirement.”

Perceived English competence

He rated his English competence to be (9), with displayed modesty.

P5 provided the following answers:

Dominance

He said, “If you mean the family structures and how they *deal* with each other, I do not think they are superior. But if you mean legal and work conditions they are definitely superior to many systems in the Arab world.” I asked if he perceived the American culture in general terms to be dominant, non-dominant or subordinate. He chose dominant for an answer.

Integration

To this question he replied, “I do not socialize very well because my relations with native speakers are confined within the hospital and very few social gatherings... I would love to integrate much more, but at times I am too busy to think about these things.”

He replied to this question that he would not really make a conscious effort, but he would not mind interaction. He assured me that because of long working hours, he interacted with his American colleagues/friends more than he did with his family members.

To this question, he replied that he could not think of any specific difficulties.

Cohesiveness

He said in answering this question, “Muslim or Arab?” I said the community to which he considered himself most affiliated. He said, “the Muslim community is good and cohesive... the problem is that there are many Muslim students who leave us every now and then... I hate goodbyes.”

Congruence

In response to this question, he said, “we are all human beings; of course there are shared values”. I interrupted by asking him to leave out what he considers universal and concentrate on the relation between the Muslim community in his town and the native English speakers. He teased me by saying, “we have many Muslims who are native speakers in our Muslim community!” then he acknowledged that he got my intended question, and he said, “The most visible shared value is that both cultures value knowledge and inquiry... also, both cultures are open minded and welcome and tolerate differences.”

Permanence

To this question he replied, “Yes, I will stay here in my new country.”

Perceived English competence

He awarded himself a score of (8 or 9) on the perceived competence scale.

Table 3. Summary of the interviews results

	TL Dominance	Integration	Cohesiveness	Congruence.	Permanence.	Perceived competence
P1	No	Poor	Yes with Saudis	Little	No	5
P2	No	Poor	Yes with Saudis	Little	No	4/5
P3	No	Poor	Yes with Saudis	Little	No	5/6
P4	Yes	Excellent	Yes all Muslims	Lots common	Yes	9
P5	Yes	Excellent	Yes all Muslims	Lots common	Yes	8/9

3.2. Observations

I had a number of observations about the Muslim community in this small Midwestern town. The first is that groups are formed in three overlapping circles. The bigger circle represents the larger Muslim community, a smaller circle represents a language group, yet another smaller circle represents different dialects, and an even smaller circle represents regional dialects of the same country.

In general assemblies, people speak to each other in English; when main speeches finish and people start socializing, all language groups somehow get together. Four general assemblies on four consecutive Fridays were observed intentionally for this study. Those events were a sort of get-together parties. Typically, after performing a congressional prayer, the president of the society would deliver a speech welcoming everybody. Next, the social coordinator would make few announcements. Then everybody would be invited to a well-prepared dinner. People took their plates and sat in groups. Interestingly enough, each group shared the same linguistic background. Turks sat together, Arabs in three groups, Pakistanis in a couple of groups, and Indians in other groups. White and Afro-Americans sat among the Pakistanis and the Malay linguistic group. The four social events lasted about two hours each.

My concentration was on the Arabs in general and on Saudi Arabian informants in particular. People from the same Arab countries tend to sit/hang together. Saudis from different parts of Arabia sat together. It is important to note that people from the west of Saudi Arabia speak a different dialect from the one in the middle and the one in the east. They would usually tease each other about their regional dialects.

3.3 The Questionnaire

One night, the Saudis were toying with English by speaking it in their regional Saudi dialects. Two of the three whom I interviewed earlier were there. There were 17 men (around 60% of the general Saudi population in that town). All of them were married and pursuing their graduate degrees at the local university. Their ages range from 29 to 41. The bulk of them were in their mid-thirties. All of them had their tertiary education in Saudi Arabia. They obtained the required TOEFL score for admission to the graduate school (minimum of 550).

I sat with them, told them about my research, and asked them to respond individually to a questionnaire that was based on the eight interview questions. The questions were converted into a questionnaire format where each question provided quantifiable choices. For the first question, I asked them to characterize the TL culture as dominant, non-dominant, or subordinate. For the three questions of the integration parameter, I asked for a score from 1 -10 where 1 is never and 10 is always. Then cohesiveness was assigned the same scale 1-10 where 1 is not cohesive at all, and 10 is 100% cohesive. The congruence parameter between the two cultures is given 1-10 scale where 1 is completely different and 10 is identical. The perceived competence is also given 1-10 scale where 1 is not competent at all, and 10 is a native speakers' competence. The permanence parameter was given the binary choice either yes or no. Table 4 summarizes their responses.

Interestingly, their answers were almost the same as the three fellow participants in the interviews: none of them planned to stay after graduation (0%). Most of them perceive the TL culture to be non-dominant (88%), dominant (4%), and subordinate (8%). The integration parameter was poor as the means of questions 2 and 3 (Q. 2 & Q3) were below 5 and the perceived difficulties when interacting with native speakers of English is very high (mean = 7.82 see Table 4). All of them think that Saudis and Americans are different in many ways particularly in the lifestyles, but they are similar to some extent in the basic human values, which are shared by the two close faiths, Christianity and Islam, given that most Americans are Christians and all Saudis are Muslims. The perceived congruence was very poor (mean =2.7 see Table 4). Lastly, their L2 group is relatively small but very cohesive as they perceived its cohesiveness to be very high (mean= 8.84 see Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of general Saudi group responses

N = 17	mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Integration</i>		
Q. 2	4.94	1.8
Q. 3	3.58	1.3
Q. 4	7.82	0.79
Q. 5 Cohesiveness	8.84	0.46
Q. 6 Congruence	2.7	2.1
Q. 8 Perceived competence	4.76	0.82

4. Discussion

After analyzing the answers of both the individual participants and the general group, and in the light of my observations, I found some interesting results. First, the degree of acculturation differs greatly among Arab community members. Saudis provided similar answers to the same questions, while other Arab members answered somewhat differently. The Saudis seem to have a bad acculturation situation according to the social elements described in the acculturation model (Brown, 2000). Based on the five parameters, Saudis have an unexpected perception about dominance. They acknowledge the political, the military superpower, and technical advances of the TL culture, yet they do not seem to accept those elements as sufficient aspects of dominance. To them despite all that, they believe their country is a spiritual superpower that should surpass any other material power in the world. They deeply believe in their cultural values to be unmatched by any other cultures since they (the values) were deeply rooted in Islam. In addition, the economic strength and geopolitical status of Saudi Arabia make them feel equally dominant. Thus, the dominance parameter does not favor SLA for the Saudis.

The other Arabs did not seem to have the same perceived ideas of dominance. The two participants idolized the TL culture. As could be seen from their answers, they even come to the extent of denying their own cultures claiming that the TL culture is becoming their own. In the integration parameter, the other Arabs seem to be integrating very well with the TL culture, something Schumann and Brown termed 'assimilation'. The congruence parameter seems to become irrelevant since these two participants believe that the TL culture is their own leaving little room to think about the aspects congruent with their original cultures. It might be that they decided to embrace the TL culture knowing that they would not be going back to their respective countries. It is, therefore, wiser for them to become TL group themselves. This contention leads them to believe that they are natively like in their English competence.

On the other hand, the overt pride, which Saudi Arabians take, in their culture and the dissimilarities between the two cultures might have led the Saudis to distance themselves from integrating with the TL culture group. The degree of integration desired by them was similar to that of Wes in Schmitt (1983) and/or of Alberto in Schumann (1978). They integrate when they have to, when their studies and academic responsibilities demand it, but not for social reasons. This degree of integration hampers their linguistic acquisition. They might be subconsciously oblivious of the positive role of proper acculturation to the TL group. They just want to get by; the mastery of the TL was not a goal in itself. On top of all that, members of the Saudi Arabian community (students' community) consider their community cohesive; they have a different belief system other than that of the TL; and they do not intend to reside in the TL culture for a long time. Thus, the integration parameter has followed the dominance in not favoring SLA for the Saudi Arabian students.

The congruence factors were also of special interest to Saudi Arabians in this study. On the one hand, they are aware of the superficiality of differences between the Saudi Arabian culture and the TL one. They believe that the underlying principles of the two cultural groups are similar in the basic human values. The traditionally perceived closeness of the two faiths, Christianity and Islam, particularly by Muslims delineates the sameness/congruence between the two cultures. One of the participants claimed that the basics are almost the same if not identical. The overt differences occur because people from the two cultures are diverting from their original faiths. On the other hand, the actual witnessed facts is that the perceived congruence between the two cultures is very poor. The basics that the informants referred to are not tangible. The lifestyles and daily routines are very different as proved by the low score on this parameter among the general Saudi group (mean = 2.7).

It is interesting to know that Schumann himself as cited in Brown (2000, p. 186) had the Saudi Arabian culture (in Saudi Arabia) as an example of a bad SLA situation for Americans living in Riyadh. Saudi Arabians view their culture to be dominant just like the Americans, the two groups prefer separation, the two cultures are not similar, L2 community is large and cohesive, and the Americans are not planning to stay in Arabia for a long time. This study echoes the same situation. The only difference is that the Saudis are the ones in the USA, and the hypothetical example of Schumann is attested to by this study. The perceived social distance in the acculturation model remains the same with the Saudi Arabians in the USA.

To sum up, the answer to the first question, then, is that Saudis do not show a desirable degree of acculturation with the TL culture. The five parameters (see Table 3) make the Saudi Arabian community distant from the TL culture group. That has led to poorer language acquisition as perceived by the three participants themselves as well as the general Saudi group. On the other hand, other Arabs are better-acculturated and therefore better English users/learners. Four of the five parameters work perfectly in favor of good language acquisition/learning situation (Brown 2000). The only parameter that does not work for the two Arab participants was the cohesiveness parameter where they perceive their community to be cohesive and large (the entire Muslim community). Even among this community, the English language is the medium of communication, which minimizes the negative effect of this parameter.

The answer to the second question conforms to my initial assumption that language learners learn just enough for them to function which also supports the acculturation model. The Saudi Arabian group of participants want to get their degrees and leave. They get closer to the TL group only to serve that purpose. Thus, their acculturation degree was commensurate with their goals, not nativelike competence but enough to fulfill their academic requirements. The other two permanent-resident Arabs acculturate much more because they need to be members of the TL group themselves. They are naturalized Americans and they want to live up to that role. Thus, better communicative skills commensurate with the degree of acculturation. The Saudi group rated themselves poorly because their acculturation rate is poor. Accordingly, the other two Arab participants are much more acculturated and consequently much more proficient in English.

It is appropriate to assert that there are many other factors affecting SLA besides acculturation. As Schumann (1986) admits, there are learners who acquired L2 despite the large social and psychological distances from the TL group. Thus, many learners learned/acquired the TL without much acculturation because of other learner factors like motivation, aptitude, and other personality factors. However, the acculturation and the degree of interaction with the TL group proved to be germane to the degree of SLA. The results of this study further support the basic assumptions of the model as well as the findings of the previous studies cited in this paper.

5. Conclusion and Further Research

The present study yields some suggestions for teachers and learners alike. First, language teachers' responsibilities will expand to cover helping their students appreciate the TL culture, in the hope that it would shorten the social and psychological perceived distances from the TL group. This should help in acquiring higher levels of English proficiency. The Saudi Arabian participants do not seem to make use of the excellent opportunity of learning English in its natural context. It is logical to assume that they need cultural guidance to enhance their English acquisition. Despite the fact that they are proud of being a cohesive community, which takes care of its members, and identifies itself differently from the TL, it is a sign of linguistic sickness rather than a healthy norm if SLA was a goal to be achieved. When I reported the results to the general Saudi group, the three participants included, they were shocked. I lectured them about the acculturation model and gave them a few suggestions to improve their chances of enhancing their English proficiency. The most important piece of advice that I felt they were willing to follow was to get involved with the TL cultural activities. This suggestion is further supported by the findings of Rafieyan et. al. (2014) when he and his colleagues reported on the constructive learning experience of a group of Iranian students in their sojourn in the USA.

Similarly, I would suggest that teachers should work closely with their students to bridge this perceived gap between the TL and L2 cultures. One way to accomplish this is to teach the target culture and raise learners' awareness of the importance and benefits of this endeavor on their acquisition of the TL. It should also work the other way around. Learners' own cultures must be valued in the classroom. Students may be invited to share their cultural traditions. When learners start to share their backgrounds with others, their self-esteem would be heightened (Brown 2000). In doing so, the learner in this situation would be in a better position to accept the other culture, find out aspects of congruence, and consequently to acquire the TL. Further research is definitely needed to consolidate the findings of this study. It would also be interesting to see if the findings and suggestions of this study would yield better acculturation rates among Saudi Arabian ESL and/or EFL learners.

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