

Adjustment of Foreign Professors during Interaction with SMEs in Seoul, South Korea

David A. English¹

Abstract

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of foreigners during interactions with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Seoul Metropolitan Area, using the constructs of intercultural communications and consumer language, to understand their difficulties during service encounters. In-depth interviews were used to collect data with a purposeful sample of 10 participants from a sampling frame of 62 foreign professors. MAXqda software was used to identify the emergent themes pertaining to foreigners: verbal and non-verbal coping skills, cultural adaptation, and preference to use Korean. The first implication is the ability of foreigners to adapt using various coping skills, and the ability to adapt culturally. The second implication is the interaction between foreigners and Koreans leads to a better understanding of Korean culture. Recommendations for practice include improving communication and culture classes offered to foreigners, and improving technology to aid in communicating with SMEs. A recommendation for future research is a study to examine the convenience level of foreigners using Korean in low- and high-involvement service encounters.

Keywords: Intercultural communications, foreign consumers, small- and medium-sized businesses, consumer language, South Korea

1. Introduction

Between 1995 and 2013, the number of foreigners in South Korea has increased from 110,000 to 1,500,000 due to the easing of Immigration laws (Kim, 2010; Korean Immigration Service, 2013) and the number of foreigners is projected to increase to 2.53 million in 2020 and to 4 million by 2050 (Kim, 2010). Foreigner professors (also referred to in literature as self-initiated expatriates) are individuals from one country who voluntarily choose to work in another country on either a short-term or long-term basis (Froese, 2012). By their very nature, foreigner professors who live and works in South Korea are consumers who buy goods and services from local businesses. From this point forward, foreign professors will be referred to as foreign consumers, which are individuals who are active participants in a service encounter where products or services are bought (Holmqvist, 2011). Interaction between foreign consumers and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) occur on a regular basis; thus, communication and cultural issues can affect those transactions. A foreign consumer is a person who is an active participant in a service encounter where products or services are bought (Holmqvist, 2011). SMEs are businesses that have of fewer than 300 employees (Small and Medium Business Corporation, 2013). Some examples of SMEs businesses are mom and pop grocery stores, dry cleaners, medical clinics, pharmacies, and restaurants.

The lack of a common language between a foreign consumer and SME during a service encounter can result in communication problems (Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2012). A service encounter occurs when the consumer is an active participant in the buying of a product or service from a business (Holmqvist, 2011). Bilingual consumers prefer to use their native language (Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2012). In view of the role of language during a service encounter--a situation where a consumer purchases a

¹Assistant Professor, Global Center, Gachon University, 1342 Seongname Daero, Seongnam, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea, Gachon University

product or service—it is important to examine the communication and cultural issues that may exist between SMEs and foreign consumers (Froese, 2012; Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012). A service encounter occurs when the consumer is an active participant in the buying of a product or service from a business (Holmqvist, 2011).

The objective of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of foreign consumers during SME service encounters with regard to intercultural communication and consumer language in the Seoul Metropolitan Area and to determine practical and future recommendations for research. Native language is a person's first language and the one that they speak the most fluently (Holmqvist, 2009). Consumer language is the language used by a consumer during the course of buying products or services (Holmqvist & Gronroos, 2012). Intercultural communication is when people from two or more different cultures try to find a common meaning vis-à-vis cultural differences during an oral interaction (Ting-Toomey, 2012).

Previous business research (Froese, 2010; 2012; Froese et al., 2012; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012) on foreigners in South Korea focused on the adjustment issues of employment with little interest given to the topics of intercultural communication or consumer language. The conditions under which bilingual consumers are willing to use a second language during a service encounter were examined by Holmqvist (2011), Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012), Holmqvist, Van Vaerenbergh, and Gronroos (2014), and Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2013). The contribution of this study is to gain new insight into the experiences and perceptions of foreign consumers who interact with SMEs in the Seoul Metropolitan Area on a day-to-day basis and the ways in which they adjust when language and culture present a barrier to communication.

2. Literature Review

Prior research on foreigners living abroad has been fragmented into areas that were investigated by Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011) and Froese (2010) on the acculturation issues of foreign immigrants, Froese (2012), Froese et al. (2012), Lee and Sukoco (2012) and Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) on the adjustment issues of foreign immigrants. Additional areas of research were investigated by Holmqvist (2011), Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012), Holmqvist, et al. (2014), Van Vaerenbergh and Holmqvist (2013) on the language preference of bilingual consumers, and Sharma, Tam, and Kim (2012), Ladhari, Pons, Bressolles, and Zins (2011) on service encounters and cultural values. This literature review section was divided into four sections: (a) acculturation of foreign immigrants, (b) adjustment of foreign immigrants, (c) language preferences of bilingual consumers, and (d) service encounters and cultural values.

• Acculturation of Foreign Immigrants

According to Berry (2009), acculturation is the manner in which an individual or a society adapts to changes in culture. Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011) examined whether the variables of acculturation and personality had an effect on the psychological adjustment of a foreign immigrant. The purpose of the research was to investigate whether the traditional indicators of acculturation were connected to psychological adjustment; whether the distance between cultures affected psychological adjustment; and whether the acculturation strategies explained the variances in psychological adjustment beyond personality variables (Ahadi & Puente-Diaz, 2011). According to Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011), extroversion was strongly related to positive traits of psychological adjustment, while neuroticism was strongly related to negative traits of psychological adjustment. Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011) confirmed that the psychological adjustment of an immigrant was related to the traits of being open to new experiences and conscientious in a second study. Cultural resistance by immigrants affected their psychological adjustment. This maladjustment led to problems such as depression and distress (Ahadi & Puente-Diaz, 2011).

Froese (2010) provided insight into his experience as a German-Korean immigrant who coped with acculturation issues. The purpose was to chronicle how foreigners dealt with feelings of ambivalence and discrimination in South Korea (Froese, 2010). In contrast to the findings by Ahadi and Puente-Diaz (2011),

Froese (2010) indicated that a foreigner's ability to adapt to a new environment was influenced significantly by his or her attributes, like age and position, which supported prior research by (Berry, 1997; Cabassa, 2003). Froese (2010) found that the way a foreigner acculturates depends on his or her stage in life and willingness to relate with others, adaption, and the changes within him or herself or the country (Froese, 2010). Acculturation of foreigners can be shaped by their personal experiences with Koreans. Although Koreans have shown enthusiasm about participating in foreign culture, foreigners still experience frequent discrimination in South Korea (Froese, 2010). Examples of the types of discrimination include difficulties opening a bank account or obtaining a cell phone.

- **Adjustment Issues of Foreign Immigrants**

Froese (2012) and Froese et al. (2012) examined how foreigner immigrants adjusted to life in South Korea. Froese (2012) explored the motivation and processes of expatriates to adjust to life in South Korea. Froese et al. (2012) investigated the influence of intercultural communication on the cross-culture adjustment of foreign workers in South Korea. In addition, Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) examined the impact of expatriate personality traits on cross-cultural adjustment in Japan. Lee and Sukoco (2010) explored the effects of cultural intelligence (CQ) on expatriate performance.

Froese (2012) focused on the motivation and processes that were used by expatriates who came to South Korea. The types of adjustment examined by Froese (2012) included general, interaction, and work. Factors that motivated expatriates included work conditions international job experience, family, and labor market conditions (Froese, 2012). The limited language proficiency of a foreigner had a negative influence on his or her general adjustment (Froese, 2012). The daily life of a foreigner was limited and complicated by communication issues that created difficulties in buying goods and services in South Korea (Froese, 2012). Differences in the socialization patterns between foreigners and Koreans complicated the interaction adjustment of expatriates (Froese 2012). Work adjustment depended on the type of organization at which the expatriate was employed. For example, foreigners employed by global organizations or universities had a higher level of adjustment (Froese, 2012).

Similar to the study of expatriate motivation by Froese (2012), Froese et al. (2012) examined the impact of intercultural communication, and cross-cultural adjustment, and work attitudes on expatriates in South Korea. Cross-cultural adjustment is the ability of someone to adapt to a new culture and work attitudes is the attitude an employee has about their work environment. Froese et al. (2012) focused on how English was used in the workplace, the foreigner's host-country language proficiency, whether the frequency of foreigners' social interactions with Koreans had a positive or negative influence on foreign workers and their communication styles. Froese et al. (2012) found that the language proficiency of a foreign worker had a positive effect on his and her interaction and work adjustment, but not on the general adjustment. On the other hand, the use of English in the workplace had a positive influence on foreigners' work adjustment (Froese et al. 2012). The conflict style and indirect communication of a foreigner had a positive effect on his or her job satisfaction and had a negative influence on turnover, but had no effect on turnover intentions (Froese et al., 2012). Froese et al. (2012) supported the findings by Froese (2012) regarding the differences of socialization patterns causing interaction difficulties, in that regular social interaction between foreigners and host-country nationals were found to have a positive effect on the foreigners' work, general, and interaction adjustment (Froese et al., 2012).

In situations where a Korean staff member has limited English language skills and works with foreigners, the amount of available information in English is restricted; and foreigners are (or become) frustrated (Froese et al., 2012). The finding by Froese et al. (2012) supported the finding by Froese (2012) that the language barrier between staff members and foreigners affected the work adjustment of an expatriate depended on the type of workplace of the foreigner. According to Froese et al. (2012), foreigners had a higher level of general and interaction adjustment and a lower turnover intention the longer they lived in South Korea.

In contrast to Froese (2012) and Froese et al. (2012), Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) examined the personality traits of expatriates in Japan and their impact on cross-cultural adjustment. Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) focused on the influence of traits including open-mindedness, social initiative, cultural empathy, emotional stability, and the flexibility on the interaction, general, and work adjustment of expatriates. Cultural empathy shows the ability of an expatriate to consider the thoughts and feelings of people from other cultures and shows a willingness to adapt to a different setting (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). According to the authors, open-mindedness was positively related with interaction adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). The positive relationship between open-mindedness and interaction adjustment indicates that expatriates were more likely to adapt to the cultural differences and establish a harmonious environment. Cultural empathy and emotional stability were associated positively with the general adjustment of expatriates (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). An expatriate's cross-cultural adjustment was partially predicted by his or her emotional stability. High emotional stability among expatriates indicates the ability to cope more easily with stress and find meaning in life (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012).

Consistent with the literature by Peltokorpi and Froese (2012), Lee and Sukoco (2010) explored the psychological aspects of an expatriate to determine how cultural adjustment, cultural effectiveness, and expatriate work performance are effected by cultural intelligence (CQ). CQ includes motivation, cognition, and the score indicates the level of adaption that an expatriate has to different cultures (Lee & Sukoco, 2010). The dimensions of CQ had a direct and significant influence on the cultural effectiveness and cultural adjustment of expatriates is and was mediated the by positive effect of CQ on his or her performance (Lee & Sukoco, 2010). The findings by Lee and Sukoco (2010) are similar to those by Peltokorpi and Froese (2012). In contrast Peltokorpi and Froese (2012), where social initiative was positively related to work adjustment, Lee and Sukoco (2010) found that cultural effectiveness had a significant and positive influence on expatriate performance and mediated the positive effects of CQ on their performance. Prior international work and travel experience by expatriates mediated the effects of their CQ on cultural adjustment and effectiveness (Lee & Sukoco, 2010).

• **Language Preferences of Bilingual Consumers**

A meaningful dialogue between individuals requires communication. The outcome of a service encounter depends on good communication and depends on whether the consumer feels comfortable speaking the language of the service provider (Holmqvist, 2009). In order to communicate, the consumer and consumer should speak a common language (Holmqvist, 2011). Holmqvist (2011) examined the language preferences of bilingual consumers during a service encounter to investigate the importance of the use of a consumer's native language. Participants placed a greater level of importance on the use of their native language during a service encounter, especially during high-involvement service encounters like a medical visit, banking, or buying insurance (Holmqvist, 2011). In exchange for a small price reduction, bilingual consumers were willing to change service providers (Holmqvist, 2011). Consumers who chose speaking their first language either: for comfort reasons or they wanted a greater price reduction if the service provider did not speak their native language (Holmqvist, 2011).

Similar to Holmqvist (2011), Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012) explored the importance of bilingual consumers being served in their native language in high- and low-involvement service encounters and if gender and age were moderating factors. The perceived importance of the use of a participant's native language for six services (buying an etching, buying groceries, visiting a café, negotiating a bank loan, having a medical visit, and negotiating insurance) in this study were measured in four languages (English and French or Finnish and Swedish). Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh (2012) validated the past research by Holmqvist (2011) on the importance of bilingual consumers using their native language during a high-involvement versus a low-involvement service encounter. Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2011) determined that the findings from the second study were consistent with the findings of the first study in terms of the perceived importance of using a bilingual consumer's native language during a high-involvement service encounter (Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2012).

In contrast with Holmqvist (2011) and Holmqvist et al. (2012), Holmqvist et al. (2014) conducted a study to determine the willingness of bilingual consumers in a bilingual market to use a second language during a service encounter. The purpose of the study by Holmqvist et al. (2014) was to determine if the language perception of consumers differed, depending on whether they were in the linguistic majority or minority--Dutch as the majority language in Belgium and Swedish as the minority language in Finland (Holmqvist et al., 2014). Bilingual consumers were asked questions about the nine types of services they often used: to buy an etching, to visit a doctor, to buy electrical installations, to negotiate insurance, to book a holiday online, to negotiate a bank loan, to visit a café, to visit a hairdresser, and to buy groceries. The perceived control of a bilingual consumer during a service encounter led to a greater willingness on their part to communicate in the second language (Holmqvist et al., 2014). The influence of language is different for consumers depending on the particular market. Therefore, it is important to understand the use of the language in an international context (Holmqvist et al., 2014). Even though a consumer is bilingual, he or she may not be willing to interact during a service encounter in both languages (Holmqvist et al., 2014).

• **Service Encounters and Cultural Values**

Ladhari et al. (2011) examined the influence of cultural and personal values on the perception of service quality with French-Canadians and English-Canadians. Ladhari et al. sought to discover whether cultural values had a significant effect on the perceived service quality in a cultural group and whether personal values were independent of culture. Ladhari et al. (2011) found that culture influenced the perception of service quality. This statement supported prior research by Laroche, Ueltschy, Abe, Cleveland, and Yannopoulos (2004), Ueltschy, Laroche, Eggert, and Bindl (2007), and Witkowski and Wolfinbarger (2003). The authors found that personal value had an impact on the perceived service quality level confirming previous research by Jayawardhena (2004), Koo, Kim, and Lee (2008), Pitts and Woodside (1983), and Shim and Eastlick (1998) (Ladhari et al., 2011). Personal values were found by Ladhari et al. (2011) to be independent of culture supporting the prior research by Cleveland and Laroche (2007).

In contrast to the research by Ladhari et al. (2011) on cultural and personal values, Sharma et al. (2012) explored intercultural service encounters to investigate the possible inconsistency in the strength of various relationships based on service roles with Chinese customers and employees in Hong Kong. The negative influence of the perceived cultural difference on inter-role congruence and the positive influence on interaction comfort on perceived service level were stronger for customers than for the employees (Sharma et al., 2012). The positive influence of inter-role congruence on adequate service level intercultural competence was stronger for employees than customers (Sharma et al., 2012). The negative influence of the perceived cultural distance on interaction comfort was weaker for customers and employees with high intercultural competence and stronger for customers and employees who had low intercultural competence (Sharma et al. 2012). The adequate service level had a negative influence on satisfaction for customer and employees (Sharma et al., 2012).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of foreign consumers during SME service encounters in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. Two constructs were used as an embedded unit of analysis (Yin, 2013): consumer language (Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2012; Holmqvist et al., 2014; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013) and intercultural communications (Froese, 2012; Froese et al., 2012).

The research questions were as follows:

- 1) What are the experiences and perceptions of foreigners with consumer language and SMEs in the Seoul Metropolitan Area?
- 2) What are the experiences and perceptions of foreign with intercultural communications and SMEs in the Seoul Metropolitan Area?

An interview guide was created based on the research questions and the two study construct. The interview questions for Research Question 1 were as follows: 1) What is your experience in interacting with SMEs in South Korea? 2) What is your perception of using your native language during a service encounter with SMEs in South Korea? 3) How does your level of Korean fluency influence your interaction SMEs in South Korea? The interview questions for Research Question 2 were as follows: 1) How would you describe your experiences with intercultural communication during a SMEs in South Korea? 2) What are your perceptions as a foreigner of intercultural communication with SMEs during a service encounter in South Korea? 3) How has your experiences with or knowledge of Korean culture influenced your communications or interactions with SMEs during a service encounter in South Korea? The six interview questions were open-ended (Yin, 2013) to allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions when necessary.

• Research Method and Design

A qualitative case study design (Yin, 2011, 2013) was used for this research as it is appropriate when the research questions are explanatory, when the focus is on present events, and the participant's behavior does not need to be altered (Yin, 2011, 2013). The selection of a qualitative case study was due in part to the flexibility the methodology offers in two areas.

First, a case study is appropriate when the boundaries are unclear between the phenomenon and the context. Second, a case study is appropriate when comparing the results in different cases to identify the needs of the group (Yin, 2013). The unit of analysis in a case study allowed the case boundaries to be well defined (Yin, 2013). A quantitative study would not have offered as much in-depth detail as a case study and other types of qualitative studies would have not allowed for the cross comparison of data from different cases.

• Population and Sample

The sample population was the Seoul Metropolitan Area in South Korea, which consists of Seoul, Incheon, and Gyeonggi-do Province. As of 2013, the population of the Seoul Metropolitan Area was 23.5 million (Korea Statistical Information Service [KSIS], 2013). In 2013, the number of foreigners living in the Seoul Metropolitan Area was 608,000 and the number of SME was 1.59 million (Small and Medium Business Administration, 2013, Statistics Korea, 2013).

A purposive sampling method was used to select 10 participants from a sampling frame from a roster of 62 foreigner professors who were employed by (*redacted*) University in South Korea. The sample size needed for a multiple case study is at the discretion of the researcher (Yin, 2011, 2013). A sample size of ten was chosen because that size would allow enough information to be collected across the sampling frame to adequately represent it and at the same time would be manageable enough amount of data in which to analyze. Data saturation was believed to be achieved after the 10th interview, at which point any new data collected would have been redundant. Professors were chosen as a group for the interviews as they are highly educated and articulate as well as more likely to have day-to-day contact with SMEs in Korea. The inclusion criteria were that the participant must be a native speaker of English and live in South Korea for more than one year. On the other hand, the exclusion criterion was that the participant must not be of Korean lineage. If a person has Korean lineage, he or she might be more familiar with the language and culture than those persons with no Korean lineage.

Foreigners in the sampling frame were sent an email that invited them to participate based on a faculty roster furnished by the university. Two follow-up emails were sent out in order to recruit the required number of participants. Potential participants who replied were sent a copy of the informed consent; and an inquiry was made as to their availability. When the researcher and participant agreed on a day, a reminder email was sent out 24 hours in advance.

The demographic characteristics of the participants were collected and divided into the following categories; age, gender, education level, marital status, nationality, length of residency in Korea, and resident status (permanent resident or non-permanent resident). The majority of the participants were male (80%),

ages 31-40 years old (80%), and had a master's degree (80%). The majority of participants reported having American citizenship (50%), Canadian citizenship and British citizenship made up 30% and 20% respectively. Participant's length of residency was reported to be 4-7 years (30%) and 8-10 years (30%), five of the ten participants reported being married to a Korean citizen, and less than half reported having permanent residency (40%). The participants were asked to self-rate their Korean fluency level using a scale of 1-10, with 1 having no fluency and 10 being completely fluent. Participants reported a fluency level of 2-3 (30%), and a level of Korean fluency from 3-5 (50%).

- **Instruments**

A semi-structured interview guide was used to talk with participants during the in-depth interviews (Barlow, 2010; Yin, 2013). The interview guide consisted of six open-ended interview questions, three for each construct (Yin, 2013). An embedded unit of analysis (Yin, 2013) was used that consisted of two constructs: consumer language and intercultural communications. A field study was conducted with three foreign professors to establish the validity of the questions to determine whether the questions measured what they were intended to measure and whether they addressed the research question (Persund, 2010). Professors used in the field study were not included in the study sample (Persund, 2010). Each interview question was reviewed and modified as recommended prior to the interviews.

- **Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis**

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with foreign consumers (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). The interviews were conducted in a conference room on campus and were recorded with the consent of the participants. A brief introduction was provided followed by an explanation of the informed consent. Participants were informed that their confidentiality and privacy would be protected, that the transcripts would be de-identified, and that the data collected during the study would be destroyed after a period of five years. Once consent was obtained from the participant, the formal part of the interview began using questions from the interview guide. When the interview was concluded, the participant was asked if he or she had questions; additional information about the research was provided. The participants were given 10,000 won gift card from Starbucks in return for their time for both the interview and member-checking.

After the interview, the audio recording was transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and double-checked for errors against the original recordings. Transcripts were de-identified in order to ensure confidentiality and then entered into MAXqda database. Each of the interview transcripts was read three times and then codes were created by the researcher based on the research constructs and questions (Yin, 2013). The codes were used to identify key phrases in the interview and those phrases were color-coded. The phrases were then put into categories, after which similar categories were consolidated until as few categories were left as possible. A cross-case synthesis was used to compare data across all of the cases and to identify emergent patterns and themes (Yin, 2013). Emergent patterns where a minimum of six participants identified the same phenomenon were deemed major themes and emergent patterns where a minimum of five participants identified the same phenomenon were deemed minor categories. Member-checking was used to ensure accuracy, increase construct validity, avoid bias, and avoid misrepresentation of participants' self-reported views (Yin, 2011, 2013).

4. Results

The results of the study and an evaluation of the findings will be discussed in this section. The two major themes in this study were verbal and non-verbal coping skill and foreign cultural adapt and the one minor theme was foreigners preference to use Korean.

Research Question 1: Consumer Language

The study construct of consumer language was explored in Research Question 1 with one major theme and one minor theme found. The major theme was verbal and non-verbal coping skills used by foreign consumers and the minor theme was the preference for the use of Korean language by foreign consumers (see Table 1). Both themes were concomitant and addressed Research Question 2 as well.

Table 1: Research question 1 themes

Theme	Frequency	Percent
Verbal and non-verbal coping skills	7	70.0
Preference for use of Korean language by foreign consumers	5	50.0

Note. N=10.

Major theme 1: Verbal and non-verbal coping skills

During a service encounter with SMEs, the experiences of a foreigner with consumer language can lead to the development of verbal and non-verbal coping skills when a linguistic barrier exists. An example of verbal coping skills was illustrated by Participant 6 who stated, “So what I’ll do is I’ll change English into Korean pronunciation. So I’ll stand there speaking English with a Korean sound.” Similarly, Participant 2 said, “When I’m in a situation that is beyond me linguistically in Korean, I try English or I try to use broken Korean with English and see where that gets me.” The concept of non-verbal coping skills was illustrated by Participant 1, who said, “I do my best to take precautions . . .the precautions [sic] that I can know what I’m looking for in Korean as best as I can. . .to try to know the word or translate it if I’m looking for something in particular.” Another example of non-verbal coping skills was provided by Participant 2 who stated, “Occasionally it comes to looking up words in the dictionary and a lot more hand signals.” Additionally, Participant 3 said, “A lot of times I use the strategy of getting a Korean, or trying to find out how to write it in Korean . . . and that’s really helped, in finding what I want.” A foreigner may not have the required vocabulary when purchasing an item that requires a high-level of consumer participation as in the situation of Participant 8 who stated, “I had a lot of questions about the product . . . so there was a lot of negotiation for meaning on that went on both sides of the conversation.” The use of non-verbal coping skills was best illustrated by Participant 6 who said, “I’m willing to bend the rules of communication. I don’t speak Korean and you don’t speak English, but we can do it. So you make some face or smile. Something to sort of—like to build a rapport.”

Minor theme 1: Preference for use of Korean language by Foreign Consumers

A reoccurring theme mentioned by half of the participants was the preference to use Korean during an interaction with SMEs instead of their native language. Participant 9 said, “I always initiate conversations in Korean,” and Participant 4 stated, “I do what I can to try to speak as much Korean to them as possible.” Participant 8 illustrated the preference for speaking Korean instead of his or her native language when interacting with small- and medium-sized SMEs owners most poignantly, “I don’t think my language should or needs to be used. I expect to use Korean in a store in Korea.” Participant 5 stated, “So I typically, depending on where I’m at, but in most areas I try to start the conversation in Korean, whether I’m at a shopping mall or at a restaurant or what have you.”

Research question 2: Intercultural Communications

The study construct of intercultural communication was explored in Research Question 2. One major theme, based on Research Question 2, Major Theme 2, was foreign consumer cultural adapt (see Table 2). Major Theme 2 was concomitant with Research Question 1.

Table 2: Research question 2 themes

Theme	Frequency	Percent
Foreign consumer cultural adapt	7	70.0

Note. N=10.

Major theme 2: Foreign customer cultural adapt

A foreign consumer's ability to live in Korea is influenced by their experience and knowledge of Korean culture. The appropriate use of language was discussed by Participant 2 who stated, "I'm always aware if I'm talking to someone older than me I should use the politest version of Korean I can." Participant 6 declared, "If someone bows, I bow back." The subject of who is responsible for the check at a restaurant was mentioned by Participant 7 who said, "Whereas in western culture, we might divide it [the bill] up or go Dutch, whatever you want to call it. In Korea, sometimes the oldest member or the senior member pays the bill." The awareness of living in a foreign country was another concept that was emphasized by Participant 7 who stated, "I'm more conscious of the fact that this is a different country, and there are often different ways of doing things. I have 11 years of having to do that." The participant continued saying "I'm okay with lots of the challenges I face. Not because I understand Korean culture, but because I understand that there may be differences between how we behave or express ourselves." Participant 4 declared, "I always remember I'm the foreigner." Participants who had been in Korea for longer than four years indicated that they were comfortable living in the country. Participant 4 stated, "Honestly, so many things have become normal that it's hard to think about that. . . . You've lived here so long, that it's become so normal that you don't remember what it was like when you first got here." Similarly, when asked about the level of cultural adoption, Participant 5 stated, "It all rolls together after a certain amount of time."

5. Discussion

Based on the two study constructs, consumer language and intercultural communication, two major emergent themes will be interpreted: two major themes that were generated from the study were verbal and non-verbal coping skills and foreign customer cultural adapt. The emergent minor theme was the preference of foreign consumers to use Korean. The major and minor themes answered the two research question.

Evaluation of Findings

The limited Korean proficiency level of foreign consumers led to use verbal and non-verbal coping skills during a service encounter (Major Theme 1). Examples of verbal and non-verbal coping skills included looking up words or phrases in the dictionary, the use of hand gestures, writing words down in Korean, and sounding out words slowly. Similar to Major Theme 1, Froese (2012) found that the lack of fluency in Korea had a negative effect on communication issues like purchasing goods and services. Froese (2012) noted specific problems that foreign consumers face during a service encounter, while Major Theme 1 offered solutions, such as improving technology to aid in language translation.

Closely related to Major Theme 1, Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) established that the traits of open-mindedness were positively related to interaction adjustment and emotional stability. Additionally, cultural empathy was positively associated with general adjustment. The use of verbal and non-verbal coping skills was found by Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) to reduce the tension between a foreign consumer and a SME. Alternative forms of communication require open-mindedness, which was aligned with interaction adjustment (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012).

The preference of a bilingual consumer to use Korean (Minor Theme 1) was contrary to the research conducted by Holmqvist (2011) and Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012) in which the authors indicated that foreigners preferred to use their native language as opposed to a second language in a high-involvement service encounter. Foreigners preferred to use Korean for the purposes of convenience issues in service encounters with low-involvement to reduce tension during an interaction with SMEs, and because the use of Korean resulted in better success locating a product or service (Minor Theme1).

The sample chosen for the current study may be one of several reasons for the conflict in findings with Holmqvist (2011) and Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012). Participants in this study consisted of university professors who may be more open to learning a second language due to their higher educational level, compared with the university students who participated in the studies of Holmqvist (2011) and Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012). Another possible reason for the conflicting findings is that the research by Holmqvist (2011) and Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2012) were conducted in bilingual countries, unlike Korea, which is a monolingual country.

The ability of foreign consumers to adapt culturally indicated that they used several methods to adjust, including the most polite version of Korean when speaking to someone who is older. Another form of cultural adoption is being consciously aware as a foreigner who lives in a country other than their own, as reflected in Major Theme 2. The ability of a foreign consumer to adapt culturally and live in Korea could be influenced by his or her knowledge of Korean culture (Major Theme 2). Berry (2009) developed four acculturation strategies that can be used by individuals to adapt to a new culture, which include: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Integration is the highest form of acculturation and occurs when a person is able to maintain his or her own cultural heritage while seeking relationships among groups. Assimilation occurs when an individual adapts the host-country culture while not seeking to maintain their own cultural identity (Berry, 2009). Separation occurs when an individual wants to maintain their own culture and to avoid interacting with others (Berry, 2009). Marginalization occurs when a person has no interest in maintaining their own culture or interacting with others (Berry, 2009). Foreigners who integrated were shown to combine their own cultural ways and those of the adopted culture. Similar to the acculturation strategies of Berry (2009), foreigners in the current study who were able to learn Korean culture and to adapt using techniques such as bowing, the use of the highest honorific form of Korean when speaking to the elderly, and to display an awareness of the cultural differences between Korea and their own country were able to better adjust (Major Theme 2).

Implications

There are two implications for Major Theme 1: 1) the ability of a foreign consumer to adapt using verbal and non-verbal coping skills; and 2) the effect that positive personality traits had on the interaction and general adjustment of foreign consumers. The first implication was that foreign consumers have the ability to cope if they apply the right skill set during a service encounter with a SME. Even though a foreign consumer's lack of fluency in Korean had a negative effect on communication issues during interactions with SMEs (Froese, 2012; Froese et al., 2012; Selmer & Luring, 2015), he or she was able to find ways to adapt using verbal and non-verbal coping skills. Froese (2012), Froese et al. (2012), and Selmer and Luring (2015) examined the ability of expatriates to adjust to living abroad including the use of everyday skills that are needed in their respective studies, the findings of which was extended by Major Theme 1.

The second implication of Major Theme was that facilitating foreign consumers who have the traits cited by Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) was easier than those foreigners who do not have those traits. Open-mindedness among foreign consumers led to their adjustment and a convenient life in Korea: those persons who perceived themselves as culturally empathetic and emotionally stable were able to more easily interact with Koreans (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012) (Major Theme 1). The language barriers were overcome and adaptation was made by foreigner consumers who were open-minded, culturally empathetic, and emotionally stable by using verbal and non-verbal methods of communication during interactions with SME owners and employees. A foreign consumer who is open-minded and culturally empathetic demonstrated the flexibility and willingness to consider perspectives outside their own ethnocentric view. The emotional stability and the ability of a foreign consumer to cope with stressful settings were noted in Major Theme 1 (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). Major Theme 1 filled a gap in the literature on the traits of expatriates in South Korea by extending of the applicability of the literature by Peltokorpi and Froese (2012) on expatriates in Japan to those in South Korea.

An implication of Minor Theme 1 is that the willingness of a foreign consumer to use Korean during an interaction with an SME would not limit the type of services offered to low-involvement service encounters.

High-involvement service encounters, such as financial and insurance services, could be offered to foreign consumers in Korean. An opportunity exists for foreign consumers to study Korean through classes that are available at community centers, universities, hagwons, and language exchange programs to master Korean. The mastery of Korean can improve the interaction adjustment of foreign consumers and make it easier for accomplish day-to-day activities as indicated in Minor Theme 1 (Froese, 2012; Holmqvist, 2011). Major Theme 1 provided additional insight into the use of the language of foreign consumers, which filled a gap in the literature that had not been previously addressed.

An implication of Major Theme 2 was that the foreign consumers were able to adapt culturally because of their ability to understand the host-country culture, to integrate into their new environment, and to learn to learn the host country-language (Berry, 2009; Froese et al., 2012). Study participants who interacted regularly with host-country nationals were able to adapt to the environment more easily improving their relations with host-country nationals, and had a more positive long-term outlook about living in South Korea than those who did not have regular interaction with host country nationals (Froese et al., 2012). Learning the cultural and language helped foreign consumers adapt to life in Korea. The current research fills a gap in the literature on the integration of immigrants (Barry, 2009) and in the literature on the daily adjustment of a foreigner (Froese, et al., 2012) that were not addressed.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this multiple case study was to explore the experiences and perception of foreign consumers with SMEs in the Seoul Metropolitan Area. The two study constructs were consumer language (Holmqvist, 2011; Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2012; Holmqvist et al., 2014; Van Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2013); and intercultural communications (Froese, 2012; Froese et al., 2012). Data were collected via semi-structured in-depth interview with 10 foreign professors using an interview guide (Barlow, 2010; Yin, 2013). MAXqda was used to code each of the interview transcripts based on the research constructs and questions (Yin, 2013). A comparison of the data from all of the cases was conducted using a cross case synthesis in order to identify emergent patterns and themes (Yin, 2013). Member checking was used to test the validity of the findings to avoid bias, ensure accuracy, increase construct validity, and to prevent the misrepresentation of participant's self-reported views (Yin, 2011, 2013). The two major themes that were identified from Research Questions 1 and 2 were the ability of foreign consumers to adapt using verbal and non-verbal coping skills and foreign consumer adaptability. One minor theme was identified from Research Question 1: the preference of foreign consumers for using Korean.

Limitations

The current study had two limitations: the use of purposive sampling and the use of foreign consumers in only South Korea. The first limitation is that a specific subset of the population was chosen using purposive sampling instead of random sampling. Purposive sampling opened the possibility of bias into the study (Yin, 2011). Participants were selected who could have provided opinions that might have contradicted the premise of the study in order to avoid bias (Yin, 2011).

The second limitation was the use of only foreigners in South Korea from the United States, Great Britain, and Canada from one university. A more diverse group of foreigners from different countries (based on the Korean Ministry of Education's list of seven countries who are approved to teach English in South Korea: United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, and Ireland) and who work at public schools, hagwons, and universities may have led to different results. A future study with a more diverse group of foreigners in South Korea would allow for better generalization of the results.

Recommendations for Practical Research

Recommendations for practice will provide practical information for SME owners, the Korean Government, and other organizations to assist foreign consumers living in South Korea. Based on the

findings, the recommendations of the study include: (1) expanding the offering of Korean language and culture exchange or classes foreign community in South Korea and to inform foreign consumers of these services, and (2) improving technology that can be used to aid cross-cultural communication.

The first recommendation is to expand the offering of Korean language and culture classes to foreigners living in South Korea and to provide better information in a improved manner about the resources that are available. Language fluency and culture can help assist a foreign consumer in his or her adjustment (Froese et al., 2012). More opportunities should be offered for social interaction with host-country nationals through government and private agencies, as the interaction would assist with interaction adjustment, as evidenced by Major Theme 2 (Froese et al., 2012). Language and cultural exchanges are available through a variety of outlets including universities, community centers, and local government agencies (language classes are also available through private institutes).

The second practical recommendation was for the improvement of technology, such as computer-aided translation. Further development of new applications for cell phones would help to facilitate communication between foreign consumers and SMEs, as supported by Major Theme 1. Improvements in technology have led to Google Translate and other online websites where text can be copied and pasted into a webpage and then translated, thus allowing foreign consumers a method of translating text from their native language into Korean as a method of non-verbal communication with SMEs. Applications on smart phones can be used to translate voice, text, or pictures into the required target language. Foreign consumers can use these types of technology to help them interact and communicate with small- and medium-sized business owners.

Recommendations for Future Research

Two recommendations for future research are provided. The first recommendation for future research is a qualitative multiple case study with a more diverse sample --perhaps of people who work at public school, universities, and hagwons—and a mixed method study on the convenience level of Korean for foreign consumers. The use of a broader diversity of foreign consumers in a similar study may help to further develop the findings of the major themes of in this study.

The second recommendation for future research is a mixed method study on the convenience level for foreign consumers using Korean during high- and low-involvement service encounters. In the current study, foreigners preferred to use Korean for convenience purposes, but no distinction was made between the convenience levels in a low-involvement versus a high-involvement service encounter. A mixed method study would allow foreign consumers to rate their experiences when using Korean. Qualitative data is collected through interviews to verify whether a difference in convenience exists in the level of involvement.

References

- Ahadi, S. A., & Puente-Díaz, R. (2011). Acculturation, personality, and psychological adjustment. *Psychological reports*, 109(6), 842-862. doi:102466/02.07.17.20.PR109.6.842-862
- Barlow, C. (2010). Interviews. In A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research*. (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 496-500). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:10.4135/9781412957397.n182
- Berry, J. W. (2009). A critique of acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 33(5), 361–371. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.06.003
- Cabassa, L. J. (2003). Measuring acculturation: Where we are and where we need to go. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25(2), 127-146. doi: 10.1177/0739986303025002001
- Cleveland, M., & Laroche, M. (2007). Acculturaton to the global consumer culture: Scale development and research paradigm. *Journal of business research*, 60(3), 249-259. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.11.006

- Froese, F. J. (2010). Acculturation experiences in Korea and Japan. *Culture & Psychology*, 16(3), 333-348. doi:10.1177/1354067X10371138
- Froese, F. J. (2012). Motivation and adjustment of self-initiated expatriates: The case of expatriate academics in South Korea. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(6), 1095-1112. doi:10.1080/09585192.2011.561220
- Froese, F. J., Peltokorpi, V., & Ko, K. A. (2012). The influence of intercultural communication on cross-cultural adjustment and work attitudes: Foreign workers in South Korea. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(3), 331-342. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2011.09.005
- Holmqvist, J. (2009). Language influence in services: Perceived importance of native language use in service encounters. Doctoral thesis of Hanken School of Economics, Department of Marketing. Helsinki, Finland.
- Holmqvist, J. (2011). Consumer language preferences in service encounters: A cross-cultural perspective. *Managing Service Quality*, 21(2), 178-191. doi:10.1108/09604521111113456
- Holmqvist, J., & Grönroos, C. (2012). How does language matter for services? Challenges and propositions for service research. *Journal of Service Research*, 15(4), 430-442. doi:10.1177/1094670512441997
- Holmqvist, J., & Van Vaerenbergh, Y. (2012). Perceived importance of native language use: High-and low-involvement service encounters. *The Service Industries Journal*, 33(15-16), 1-13. doi:10.1080/02642069.2011.638919
- Holmqvist, J., Van Vaerenbergh, Y., & Gronroos, C. (2014). Consumer willingness to communicate in a second language: Communication in service settings. *Management Decision*, 52(5), 950-966. doi:10.1108/MD-07-2013-0364
- Jayawardhena, C. (2004). Personal values' influence on e-shopping attitude and behaviour. *Internet research*, 14(2), 127-138. doi: 10.1108/10662240410530844
- Kim, A. E. (2010). Increasing ethnic diversity in South Korea: An introductory essay. *Korea Observer*, 41(4), 497-515. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/837429635>
- Koo, D. M., Kim, J. J., & Lee, S. H. (2008). Personal values as underlying motives of shopping online. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 20(2), 156-173. doi: 10.1108/13555850810864533
- Korea Immigration Service. (2013, May). Statistics monthly report. Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.immigration.go.kr/> (In Korean)
- Korean Statistical Information Service [KSIS]. (2013). Population of South Korea. Retrieved from <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/english/index.action>
- Ladhari, R., Pons, F., Bressolles, G., & Zins, M. (2011). Culture and personal values: How they influence perceived service quality. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(9), 951-957. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.11.017
- Laroche, M., Ueltschy, L. C., Abe, S., Cleveland, M., & Yannopoulos, P. P. (2004). Service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction: evaluating the role of culture. *Journal of International Marketing*, 12(3), 58-85. doi: 10.1509/jimk.12.3.58.38100
- Lee, L. Y., & Sukoco, B. M. (2010). The effects of cultural intelligence on expatriate performance: The moderating effects of international experience. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(7), 963-981. doi:10.1080/09585191003783397
- Peltokorpi, V., & Froese, F. J. (2012). The impact of expatriate personality traits on cross-cultural adjustment: A study with expatriates in Japan. *International Business Review*, 21(4), 734-746. doi:10.1016/j.ibusrev.2011.08.006

- Persaud, I. (2010). Field study. In Neil J. Salkind (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Research Design*. (pp. 489-491). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.ncu.edu/10.4135/9781412961288.n152>
- Pitts, R. E., & Woodside, A. G. (1983). Personal value influences on consumer product class and brand preferences. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 119(1), 37-53. doi: 10.1080/00224545.1983.9924440
- Poulis, K., Poulis, E., & Plakoyiannaki, E. (2013). The role of context in case study selection: An international business perspective. *International Business Review*, 22(1), 304-314. doi:10.1016/j.ibusrev.2012.04.003
- Selmer, J., & Luring, J. (2015). Host country language ability and expatriate adjustment: The moderating effect of language difficulty. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(3), 401-420. doi:10.1080/09585192.2011.561238
- Sharma, P., Tam, J. L., & Kim, N. (2012). Intercultural service encounters (ICSE): An extended framework and empirical validation. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 26(7), 521-534. doi:10.1108/088760412112266495j
- Shim, S., & Eastlick, M. A. (1998). The hierarchical influence of personal values on mall shopping attitude and behavior. *Journal of Retailing*, 74(1), 139-160. doi: 10.1016/S0022-4359(99)80091-8
- Small and Medium Business Administration. (2013). Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.smba.go.kr/eng/smes/statistics_01.do?mc=usr0001148
- Statistics Korea. (2013a). Korean statistical yearbook 2012. Retrieved from <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/english/resources/2/1/4/index.static>
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2012) *Communicating across culture*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Ueltschy, L. C., Laroche, M., Eggert, A., & Bindl, U. (2007). Service quality and satisfaction: an international comparison of professional services perceptions. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 21(6), 410-423. doi:10.1108/08876040710818903
- Van Vaerenbergh, Y., & Holmqvist, J. (2013). Speak my language if you want my money: Service language's influence on consumer tipping behavior. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(8), 1276-1292. doi:10.1108/03090561311324327
- Witkowski, T. H., & Wolfenbarger, M. F. (2002). Comparative service quality: German and American ratings across service settings. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(11), 875-881. doi: 10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00206-5
- Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Yin, R. Y. (2013). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.