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« Faire du sens » de l'acculturation organisationnelle et nationale :
Une étude d'entretiens exploratoires des immigrants professionnels
de l'Argentine à Montréal, Québec

Making Sense of Organizational and National Acculturation:
An Exploratory Interviews Study of Professional Immigrants
from Argentina in Montreal, Quebec

par

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Mémoire présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de Maîtrise
en Sciences de la communication
option Communication organisationnelle

mai, 2008
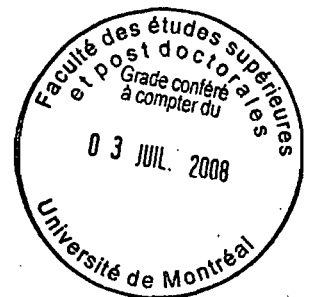
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Ce mémoire intitulée

« Faire du sens » de l'acculturation organisationnelle et nationale :
Une étude d'entretiens exploratoires des immigrants professionnels
de l'Argentine à Montréal, Québec

présentée par :

Gabriela Muriel

a été évaluée par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

Nicole Giroux
président-rapporteur

Boris Brummans
directeur de recherche

Carole Groleau
membre du jury

Résumé

Cette recherche a comme objectif principal la problématisation et l'exploration empirique du processus d'acculturation à partir d'une approche « sensemaking ». Même s'il y a des recherches qui ont abordé ce sujet, ces recherches ne montrent pas comment les immigrants eux-mêmes vivent et font sens du processus. Le concept d'acculturation doit alors être redéfini pour capturer cette expérience vivante. On a besoin d'approcher le phénomène à partir d'une recherche empirique et inductive pour tenir compte des processus communicationnels qui le constituent. L'étude que je propose essaie d'aller contre la tendance fonctionnaliste de la plupart des recherches sur l'acculturation (organisationnelle) en adoptant une approche inductive pour étudier le processus d'acculturation organisationnelle des immigrants professionnels venus de l'Argentine.

Les principales conclusions de ce travail indiquent que le processus d'acculturation organisationnelle (et nationale) prend du temps et, à cet égard est une réalisation en cours plutôt que d'être quelque chose acquise une fois pour toutes. En d'autres termes, elle est construite (négociée, produite, transformée, etc.) par l'immigré dans son interaction avec d'autres personnes qui, ensemble, construisent l'organisation (et la société) comme une réalité sociale. À partir des résultats de cette recherche, le processus d'acculturation organisationnelle semble être « plus facile » ou « doux » que l'acculturation à la société dans son ensemble. Une grande majorité des personnes interrogées ont dit qu'elles ne se sentent pas intégrées dans la société, mais qu'elles se sentent intégrées au travail.

Mots clés : acculturation organisationnelle, « faire du sens », immigrants professionnels au Québec, communication organisationnelle, recherche interprétative

Abstract

This study aimed to problematize the acculturation process and explore it empirically by adopting a sensemaking perspective. Even if there are works in Communication studies that focused on the process of acculturation, these investigations did not fully account for the way this process is actually *lived* and *made sense of* by immigrants *themselves*. The concept of acculturation, then, needs to be redefined to capture this lived experience, and empirical, inductive research is needed to explore the communicational processes that underlie it. This study aimed to achieve this by inductively investigating the acculturation process of professional immigrants from Argentina in Montreal, Quebec.

The main findings of this research indicate that the organizational (and national) acculturation process takes time and in this regard is an ongoing accomplishment rather than something to be achieved once and for all. In other words, it is constructed (negotiated, produced, transformed, etc.) by the immigrant in his or her interaction with other people who together construct the organization (and society) as a social reality. Supposedly, organizational acculturation process is experienced to be "easier" or "smoother" than the acculturation to the society at large. A great majority of the interviewees said that they did not feel integrated into society, but did feel integrated at work. Thus, it could be concluded that helping immigrants to find a job in their areas is very important for their *overall* acculturation process.

Key words: organizational acculturation, sensemaking, professional immigrants in Quebec, organizational communication, interpretive research

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Thank you

To Prof. Nicole Giroux and Prof. Carole Groleau for having accepted to be part of the jury.

To Mr. Boris Brummans for being there as my director

Chapter 1: Introduction

The integration of immigrants is a subject to which researchers in various disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, management, economics, and political science) are devoting considerable attention. In each field, the process of acculturation is generally seen in more or less the same way; that is, as a condition to be achieved. Hence, immigrants have integrated or not. By reviewing the literature on acculturation, I will overview a number of studies on this subject. What can be concluded from reviewing this literature is that most of these studies take a functionalist approach to acculturation and use quantitative methods to measure: (1) the impact of employment-related experiences on acculturation (e.g., Aycan & Berry, 1996), (2) the acculturation strategies of different ethnic groups (e.g., Coatsworth et al., 2005), and (3) the cultural identity and acculturation of immigrants in an organization (e.g., Shalom & Horenczyk, 2004). Most of these studies are based on the acculturation model developed by John Berry, a Canadian Professor of Psychology at Queen's University in Ontario.

The current research aimed to problematize the acculturation process and explore it empirically by adopting a sensemaking perspective. Even if there are inquiries in Communication studies that focused on the process of acculturation (e.g., Albert & Ha, 2004; Clément et al., 2001; Kim, 1977), these studies did not fully account for the way this process is actually *lived* and *made sense of* by immigrants *themselves*. The concept of acculturation, then, needs to be redefined to capture this lived experience, and empirical, inductive research is needed to explore the communicational processes that underlie it. Thus, the study I conducted counters the functionalist tendency of most (organizational) acculturation research by inductively

investigating the acculturation process of professional immigrants who emigrated from Argentina to Montreal, Quebec, Canada, less than seven years ago (I will further explain why I chose this period of time in chapter 4) and who are working (or have recently worked) in an organization in Montreal. The study involved in-depth individual interviews that uncovered themes in people's reflections important for understanding the acculturation process from an interpretive point of view.

The literature review I will present in a moment evidences that several authors consider work experiences to be relevant for the integration of immigrants (e.g., see Aycan & Berry, 1996, for negative impacts on psychological well-being and adaptation due to adversity experienced in employment life, and Alkhazraji et al., 1997, for differences between acculturation strategies to organizations and to society in general). I share this view, but did not come across many studies that examined the importance of work experiences for the integration of immigrants in Canada. In a country like this, where thousands of professional immigrants arrive each year and a lot of resources are used to encourage people to emigrate, it is important to know more about the acculturation experiences of these people. A great deal of statistical information is available that shows how many people entered the country, how many of them are employed, how much money they are making, etc., but it is also important to understand how people give meaning to the process of organizational acculturation they went through. Many people who emigrate to Canada are qualified professionals who decided to leave their homes to find a better place to live. Integrating into a new workplace seems to be one of the most important issues for these professional people. They have high expectations that are based on the information they receive of governmental sources or that they find out themselves. But what happens to them once they are in Canada and find a job? How do they adapt to this new culture?

What are differences between working in Montreal, Quebec in comparison to working in a city, town, or village in their home country? How does it feel to communicate with people in a different language? How does communication with supervisors and colleagues at work evolve? What do people wear at work? How do they greet each other every morning? The answers to some of these questions may not seem relevant from a functionalist standpoint, but they will tell us many things from an interpretive point of view, that is, from a perspective that focuses on understanding how immigrants make sense of organizational acculturation based on a careful analysis of their accounts.

In the next paragraphs, I will overview the chapters of this thesis. In chapter 2, I will review the literature on acculturation and discuss Berry's model that is commonly used to investigate this concept. Then, I will explain how this model, and the concept of acculturation more generally, has been used in several fields of study, such as Cross-cultural Psychology and Management and Organization studies (e.g., to understand the process people go through during mergers and acquisitions or expatriation). After this, I will provide a critique of the reviewed studies on acculturation and explain the importance of studying organizational acculturation from a communicative point of view.

In chapter 3, I will develop a broad conceptual framework that allows me to examine the organizational acculturation process from a communicative, sensemaking perspective. To develop this framework, I will use ideas set forth by Karl Weick and his colleagues. Having explicated this framework will then allow me to formulate the research questions that guided this exploratory investigation.

Chapter 4 will be dedicated to the methodology I used to conduct this study. This chapter includes a discussion on the sampling of research participants, the rationale for using interviews and a reflexive journal as data collection strategies, and the way I analyzed these data.

In chapter 5, I will provide a brief description of the Argentinean context that provided the background of the research participants, followed by my analysis of their interview accounts. More precisely, chapter 5 will include a first-level analysis of participants' own sensemaking (i.e., a descriptive analysis of the participants' histories based on their own accounts), and a second-level thematic analysis of their acculturation experiences. The themes that will be discussed in this second part of the chapter are: (1) language issues, (2) contact with people, (3) identity, (4) perceptions of others, (5) nonverbal communication, and (6) integration at work and in society in general.

In chapter 6, I will return to the research questions and provide answers based on the results of my analysis. To conclude, I will discuss the limitations of this study, its practical implications, and provides some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As I stated in the introduction, Immigration studies is not a homogeneous "discipline." However, it is possible to define different perspectives and approaches in this "field of study," which originated in disciplines like Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, and Management and Organization studies. Most of the previous research is, in one way or another, influenced by Berry's model of acculturation. Hence, I will start this chapter with a discussion of this model.

Berry's Definition of Acculturation

Berry (2003) explained that interest in acculturation initially stemmed from a concern about the effects of European domination on colonial and indigenous people. Later on, researchers began to be particularly interested in the way immigrants changed after they settled into a "receiving" culture, focusing especially on the way ethno-cultural groups related to each other and changed as a result of their attempts to live in the same society. Berry (2003, p. 17) explained that, in Psychology, the process of acculturation was studied for two main reasons: (1) "to control for experiences concerning social and cultural change (such as schooling, telecommunications, and industrialization) that could interfere with comparative studies of psychological phenomena (such as values or cognitive abilities)," and (2) because it is a fascinating psychological phenomenon that occurs at the intersection between two (or more) cultures. Berry conceptualized acculturation based on two works: Redfield et al. (1936) and the Social Science Research Council (1954).

From Redfield et al. (1936, p. 149-150) Berry took the idea that the process resulting from continuous first-hand contact between groups of individuals coming from different cultures

is called "acculturation." This process produces changes in the original culture patterns of both groups. Redfield et al. also argued that it is important to distinguish acculturation from cultural change (of which it is but one aspect) and assimilation (which is a phase of acculturation).

In addition, Berry agreed with the Social Science Research Council (1954, p. 974), which conceived of acculturation as cultural

change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems. Acculturative change may be the consequence of direct cultural transmission; it may be derived from non-cultural causes, such as ecological or demographic modification induced by an impinging culture; it may be delayed, as with internal adjustments following upon the acceptance of alien traits or patterns; or it may be a reactive adaptation of traditional modes of life.

Berry (2005) incorporated elements of both these views to arrive at his own definition of acculturation, arguing that it refers to the

dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioral repertoire. (p. 698)

Many studies in different disciplines (Berry, 1980, 1997, 2001, 2005; Elsass & Veiga, 1994; Luijters, Van der Zee, & Otten, 2006; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988; Navas, García,

Sánchez, Rojas, Pumares & Fernández, 2005; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Parra, Cardona, Busby, &

Wampler, 2004; Romero, 2004; Selmer & de Leon, 2002; Van Oudenhoven, Van der Zee, &

Van Kooten, 2001) have used this definition. Therefore, Berry's conception of acculturation can

be regarded as a key view that many other researchers share. However, the acculturation concept

cannot be fully understood without understanding Berry's larger model of acculturation

strategies, which I will explain in the following section.

Berry's Model of Acculturation Strategies

Berry, Kim, and Boski (1987) have described how the acculturation process happens by

highlighting two dimensions: (1) the value placed on maintaining one's original cultural identity

and (2) the value given to maintaining relationships with other groups in one's group (see Figure

1).

		Value to Maintain Original Cultural Identity	
		Yes	No
Value to Maintain Relationship with Other Group	Yes	Integration	Assimilation
	No	Separation (or segregation)	Marginalization

Figure 1. Dimensions of acculturation.

Jandt (2004) summarized the four strategies adopted by immigrants that Berry and his colleagues defined. *Assimilation* results from giving up one's original cultural identity and starting to participate fully in the new culture. In this case, the person identifies with the country but not an ethnic group. *Integration* implies maintaining important parts of one's original culture as well as becoming an integral part of the new culture. Integration ensures a continuity of culture. The words "biculturalism" and "pluralism" are often used to describe this integration. The person feels as loyal to the country as to any ethnic group. *Separation* or *segregation* refers to maintaining one's original culture and not participating in the new culture. For some people segregation may connote a judgment of superiority and inferiority or prejudice and hatred between groups. In this case, the person has a strong sense of ethnic identity. Finally, *marginalization* refers to losing one's cultural identity and not having any psychological and emotional contact with the larger society. The person has feelings of "not belonging anywhere."

Berry's four-strategy model was adopted in many studies that I will summarize below (e.g., Berry, 2006; Chia & Costigan, 2006; Coatsworth et al., 2005; Elsass & Veiga, 1994; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988; Shalom & Horenczyk, 2004; Van Oudenhoven & Hofstra, 2006; Ying & Han, 2006) to examine different phenomena related to acculturation. In so doing, I will explore some applications of the acculturation model in different disciplines. I will start with a discussion on Cross-cultural Psychology studies on acculturation and then turn to Management and Organization studies that focus more specifically on acculturation in organizational contexts.

Acculturation in Cross-Cultural Psychology Studies

Chia and Costigan (2006) adopted what they called a "person-centered approach" to study a group of Chinese-Canadians' strategies of acculturation. They enlarged Berry's model by proposing five acculturation groups: integrated, separated, assimilated, integrated with Chinese practices, and marginalized in terms of Chinese practices. This study "highlight[ed] the value of simultaneously considering multiple domains of acculturation" and "argue[d] against research methods that assume acculturation status based on background factors such as place of birth or language use" (p. 397). The authors adopted a quantitative approach that allowed them to investigate multiple dimensions of an individual's Canadian and Chinese cultural orientations. In turn, "the results of this study highlight[ed] the diversity that exists within a fairly homogeneous sample of Chinese Canadian immigrants" (p. 410). Thus, Chia and Costigan (2006) found that even if Canada declares to have a multicultural policy, "among the current sample of Chinese Canadians the largest single cluster was unexpectedly the marginalized group" (p. 410). Accordingly, this study showed that "policy and intervention efforts to assist individuals following immigration need to recognize multiple ways of acculturating that are associated with positive adjustment" (p. 410).

Also Van den Oudenhoven and Hofstra (2006) used Berry's model of integration, separation, assimilation, and segregation in a study on the relation between attachment styles (attachment theory looks at ways of interacting with others in new situations) and acculturation attitudes of both immigrants and locals in The Netherlands. They proposed four different styles of attachment (secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful), directly related to Berry's model. They concluded that both immigrants and majority members with a secure attachment style had a positive attitude toward integration, whereas people with a dismissing attachment style did not.

This study showed the importance of the "existential ambivalence of preoccupied people" (p. 783), which might lead to diverse reactions to becoming part of a new culture and which is not directly predictable. The authors defined this "preoccupied" attachment style as the style that "indicates a sense of unworthiness of the love of others, combined with a positive evaluation of others (p. 786).

Ying and Han (2006) studied whether assimilation (defined as "reliance on pre-existing methods," p. 623) or accommodation (defined as "development of new ones," p. 623) was more effective in enhancing the adjustment of 155 Taiwanese students studying in the United States to US culture by employing a quantitative, longitudinal research design. They measured the contributions of personality, acculturative stressors (such as differences in cultural values, racial discrimination, language, work, study, finances, climate, unfamiliar settings, food, among others) and social affiliation to evaluate the acculturation strategies of these students to American society. Their multivariate analysis showed that "affiliations with Americans partially mediated the effect of extroversion on functional adjustment, supporting the effectiveness of accommodation" (p. 623). This means that individuals with extroverted personalities "enjoyed better adjustment because they were more likely to rely on friendship with Americans to cope with acculturative stressors" (p. 632). The authors concluded that the outcomes of their research might be helpful for the development of better orientation programs for Taiwanese students in the US by recommending that American peers need to become more involved in assisting foreign students with their cross-cultural adjustment.

Shalom and Horenczyk (2004) used questionnaires to measure the acculturation strategies of 365 young soldiers who had recently emigrated from the former Soviet Union and who were serving their compulsory military service in the Israeli Defense Forces. The authors explained

that their research was grounded in literature which suggested that cultural identity, adaptation, and the relationship between these two concepts are affected by contextual factors. In turn, they considered national identity, ethnic identity, and Berry's four strategies to evaluate whether adaptation was achieved. Their findings revealed that national identity was positively related to adjustment, especially adjustment to the military setting. In contrast, ethnic identity was not correlated with adjustment. Furthermore, they found that

> individuals in both the 'marginalization' and the 'separation' groups exhibited low levels of adaptation. Three factors—language abilities, sources of cohesion and goals in service—were examined as possible mediators for the effects of national identity on the immigrants' adjustment to military service. (p. 461)

The study showed that national identity affected adaptation partially through sources of cohesion and goals in service.

Acculturation in Studies on Mergers and Acquisitions

Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) proposed a theoretical model to study acculturation in situations of mergers and acquisitions. This model was based on Berry's model, but they introduced a few modifications to study and compare the acquired and the acquirer firms' modes of acculturation. For example, they hypothesized that "the degree of congruence between the acquirer and the acquired organizations' preferred modes of acculturation will affect the level of acculturative stress" (p. 79). The study showed that this difference would either facilitate or hinder the implementation of a merger and that even if the concept of acculturation "was

developed to explain events involving societal groups, it can be applied to industrial or social

organizations as well, because the two share many defining characteristics" (p. 81).

Elsass and Veiga (1994) also adopted Berry's model to study the problems that arise from

differences between the organizational cultures in the event of an organizational acquisition.

They argued that acculturation, in the anthropological sense, "differs from theories of

evolutionary culture change in that acculturation describes a process, a reaction, to the

imposition of one culture onto another" (p. 432). They added that even if theoretically

acculturation can result in a balance between two groups, anthropological studies suggest that

this balance rarely occurs and that, in case of an acquisition, one culture usually tends to

dominate the other.

Studies on Expatriate Acculturation

Van Oudenhoven et al. (2001) adopted Berry's view that two elements are crucial for the

acculturation of newcomers (expatriates in their case) to a new society: (1) identification with the

home culture and (2) identification with the host culture. The combination of these factors

resulted in the four strategies of Berry's model. The authors argued that a marginalization

strategy (identification with neither of the cultures) could be a "reasonable option for expatriates

who often intend to stay abroad for a limited period of time" (p. 468). Still following Berry, they

argued that most immigrants prefer the integration strategy, though: "Integration is a safe option:

the certainty of the original culture remains; at the same time, however, contact with the majority

is not given up so that immigrants can feel at ease in the host society" (p. 468). Van Oudenhoven

et al. (2001) developed a new schema by combining Berry's model with the one Black et al.

(1999) proposed. This schema described the different forms of identification that expatriates use

when their company relocates them to a foreign office. In this regard, the two crucial elements were allegiance to the parent firm and allegiance to the local firm in the new culture. Figure 2 shows the model that van Oudenhoven et al. proposed.

		Allegiance to Parent Firm	
		Low	High
Allegiance to Local Firm	Low	Free agents	Heart-at-the-parent-company-expatriates
	High	Going native-experiences	Dual citizens

Figure 2. Model of expatriate strategies of acculturation.

The model showed four expatriate strategies for dealing with a new culture: (1) free agents who have little allegiance to either firm; (2) going native-expatriates (high allegiance to the local firm and a low allegiance to the parent firm), (3) heart-at-the-parent-company expatriates (low allegiance to the local firm and a high allegiance to the parent firm), and (4) dual citizens (a high allegiance to both the parent and the local firm). These strategies are equivalent to Berry's strategies of marginalization, assimilation, separation and integration for immigrants. Consequently, Van Oudenhoven et al.'s study examined which personal characteristics underlie the four types of allegiance that expatriates may have to the parent firm and the local firm. The researchers surveyed 127 expatriates of a big international company and asked them to rate the importance of items referring to cultural empathy, open-mindedness, extraversion, emotional stability, adventurousness, orientation to action, flexibility, perseverance, and organization

commitment to multicultural success. They found that flexibility and adventurousness were associated with the free-agent allegiance, extraversion and cultural empathy with the going-native allegiance, open-mindedness and orientation to action with the dual citizen allegiance, and commitment to the company and perseverance to the heart-at-the-parent-company allegiance.

Studies on Acculturation in Organizations

Alkhazraji et al. (1997) developed a general framework of employee acculturation process within organizations and they applied it to measure the acculturation strategies of 277 Muslim immigrants in the US. Figure 3 shows the model they developed.
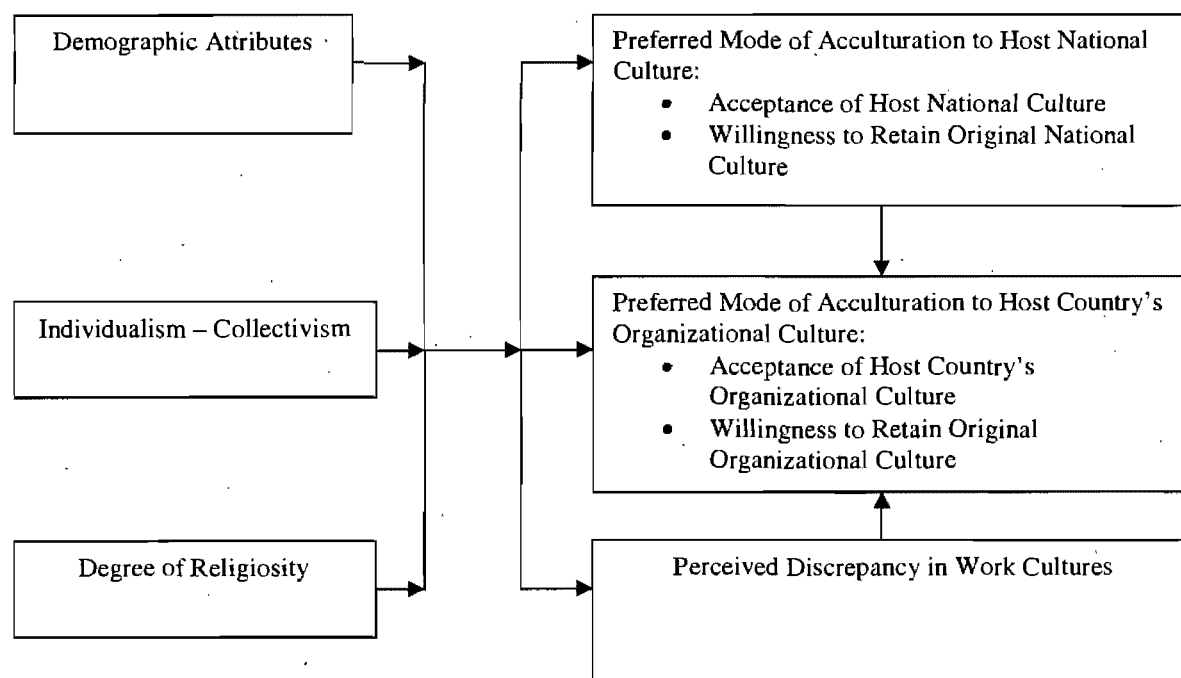
Figure 3. General framework of employee acculturation process within organizations.

The results of their study revealed that most Muslim immigrants were more inclined to retain their original national culture for their private and/or social lives than to adopt the US national culture. In contrast, most accepted US *organizational* cultures. The study also showed that collectivism (defined as "a set of feelings, beliefs, behavioral intentions, and behaviors related to solidarity and concern for others," p. 224), religious beliefs and practices, gender, education, and years lived in the United States influenced acculturation to the US *national* culture. Furthermore, national acculturation, collectivism, and perceived discrepancy between work cultures also influenced acculturation to US *organizational* cultures. What is more, the authors considered the practical implications of this study for managers of culturally diverse workforces, stating that "[a]wareness of their preferred modes of acculturation to organizational cultures, which are integration and assimilation, should help managers to match people with job requirements, motivate Muslim employees, and support the Muslim lifestyles" (p. 257).

Luijters, Van der Zee, and Otten (2006) based their study on Berry's model of acculturation to test preferred acculturation strategies at work. They examined how ethnic minority workers preferred to define their identities in their work context. The aim of this research was to predict the preferred acculturation strategy of ethnic minority workers in Dutch organizations. The authors confirmed that a dual identity strategy, implying *strong cultural identity maintenance* (the extent to which ethnic minority workers want to maintain their cultural identity and the extent to which characteristic features of their culture are considered to be important) combined with *strong team identity adoption* (the extent to which the work team and its characteristics are considered to be important), was the most preferred strategy. Based on these outcomes, they proposed a model of acculturation strategies of employees with non-Dutch

backgrounds at work (see Figure 4). As a result, these two dimensions yielded four acculturation

strategies: marginal identity, cultural identity, team identity, and dual identity.

Team Identity Adoption

Strong

Team Identity   ⇑   Dual Identity

Weak ⇐ *Cultural Maintenance* ⇒ *Strong*

Marginal Identity   ⇓   Cultural Identity

Weak
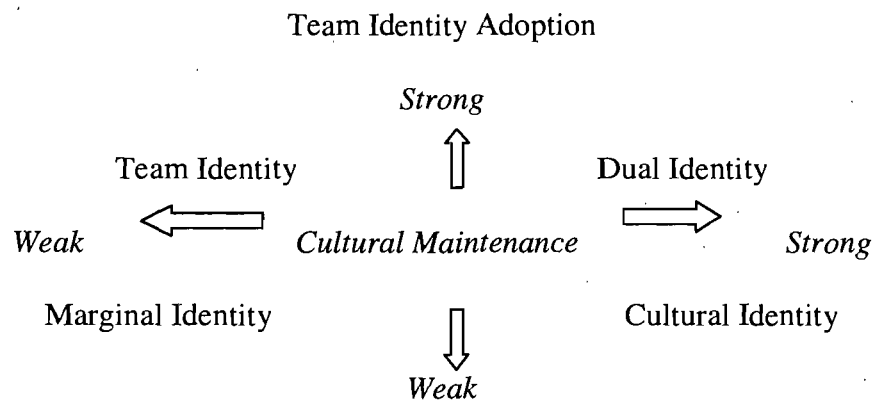
Figure 4. Acculturation strategies of employees with Non-Dutch backgrounds at work.

Similarly to Alkhazraji et al. (1997), Luijters and her colleagues found that strong

maintenance of one's cultural background tended to be combined with a strong identification

with one's work team. Accordingly, the authors argued that "knowledge about acculturation

preferences of ethnic minority workers might teach us how to clear the way for more

constructive intergroup relations at work" (p. 562). In addition, they noted that this

understanding might also promote values of diversity, innovation, and better decision making.

Critique of Reviewed Studies on Acculturation

As my literature reviews suggests, the acculturation process has mainly been approached

from a functionalist point of view. That is, acculturation strategies have been measured;

immigrants and host society members have been surveyed; predictions of and recommendations

for a "better adaptation" have been made. However, using a generalized model universally or

cross-culturally is problematic (see Navas et al., 2005; Padilla & Perez, 2003). As Padilla and

Perez (2003) argued, no general model has been able to "explain how it is that individuals from

the same educational, socioeconomic, generational, and familial backgrounds differ on

willingness and competence to acculturate" (p. 40). Hence, it is important to understand the

actual "contact between members of different cultural groups" (p. 41).

Interpretive research may allow us to gain deeper, richer insight into the way individuals

make sense of their own national and organizational acculturation experiences than functionalist

research is able to do. Moreover, while I agree with Padilla and Perez's (2003) observations and

suggestions that more attention should be given to contact between members of different cultural

groups, these researchers, like many others, paid little attention to the role of communication in

the process of national and organizational acculturation. Regarding verbal and nonverbal

communication as being *constitutive* of the acculturation process will allow us to learn more

about how this process is experienced by immigrants, as I will explain in the next section.

Acculturation from a Communicative Point of View

Communication scholars have approached the phenomenon of immigration, but even

they have predominantly taken a functionalist point of view. For example, Kim (1977) tested a

causal model of communication patterns of foreign immigrants in the process of acculturation,

contending that communication "is crucial to acculturation. It provides the fundamental means

by which individuals develop insights into their new environment" (p. 67). Kim conceptualized

communication patterns on two levels: cognitive and behavioral. The author then identified three

causal factors as major determinants of the immigrant's communication patterns: language

competence, acculturation motivation, and accessibility to host communication channels. The

author noted: "[My] theory consists of nine propositions which explain the relationship among the three causal factors, behavioral participation in the host communication channels, and cognitive structure in perceiving the host society" (p. 67). The theory was tested and supported based on a survey conducted among 400 Korean immigrants in Chicago. The results confirmed that the three causal factors were all significant. However, while the study showed important practical implications for immigrants (e.g. immigrants should develop their language competence, attempt to motivate themselves to participate in the host society, and make the host communication channels available in their everyday life), it did not show how these factors influenced the acculturation process *from the point of view of the immigrants themselves*. In other words, the closed-ended question surveys did not provide much insight into interviewees' own accounts.

Furthermore, Clément et al. (2001) examined the moderating role of second-language confidence for identity change and adjustment among minority and majority group members through three studies. The first two studies involved Canadian Francophone and Anglophone university students at the University of Ottawa and looked at: (1) the relationship between relative status (being member of a minority or a majority group, e.g., francophone majority students from Quebec, francophone minority students from Ontario, Anglophone majority students from Ontario and Anglophone minority students from Quebec) and identity, and (2) the mediating role of communication in determining identity and adjustment. The third study was similar to these studies, yet involved participants of East Indian descent. Although these authors argued that they saw communication as a process, also their research did not show the interpretive processes of immigrants themselves. For example, they stated that "understanding the joint impact of contact and context on acculturation requires a description of how these two

factors come to influence identity and adaptation" (p. 564). They regarded language "as a dynamic instrument of contact, a tool of communication and thinking, and a transmitter of culture and tradition" (p. 564). In turn, they contended that for immigrants, "learning the language of the receiving society often is necessary to ensure their adaptation in the new community." However, it is questionable whether language is simply a communication *tool*. In my view, it is a central constitutive element of acculturation, especially for those who have to learn one or even two new languages in order to be able to work in a particular cultural context (e.g., Quebec). Also in this regard, it is important to see how people make sense of this process: How does having to learn a new language affect their identity? How does this process influence the relationship with other people at work? How do immigrants cope with this process?

Albert and Ha (2004) measured Latino/Anglo-American differences in attributions to situations involving touch and silence differences in nonverbal communication. They used six theoretical dimensions of cultural differences (contact, collectivism, power distance, context, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and polychronicity) and one theoretical concept (Latino's overarching interpersonal orientation) to predict that "Latinos would differ from Anglos in attributions to situations involving touch and silence" (p. 253). This study provided an interesting approach to acculturation, since it showed that "differences in the beliefs, values, and expectations of two separate cultures may lead to misunderstandings between members of those cultures; moreover, cross-cultural misunderstandings that occur due to differences in nonverbal behavior are common" (p. 254). Nevertheless, also these researchers operated based on the assumption that human experience is measurable. Even if their data collection methods included interviews, observations of interactions, structured and unstructured questionnaires, the main aim of the research was to confirm the hypothesis that "Latinos would differ from Anglos in

attributions to situations involving touch and silence" (p. 254) by relying on quantitative analyses.

Perhaps most important to note is that comparatively few communication studies have looked at the concept of *organizational* acculturation. Those scholars who examined this phenomenon (e.g., Selmer & Leon, 2002) again took a functionalist, which was mainly oriented toward meeting the needs of management. For example, in Selmer and Leon's (2002) study, "organizational acculturation [referred] to changes in the work values of host country employees in foreign subsidiaries" (p. 1147). The aim of this research was to examine if "host-country nationals employed in foreign operations become acculturated to the parent organizational culture" (p. 1147). The researchers found that organizational acculturation "occurred in some of the work values measured" (p. 1147) and concluded that corporate hegemony of foreign affiliates is maintained "by cultural control through organizational acculturation" (p. 1148).

Based on my literature review, I conclude therefore that the voices of immigrants have been more or less "muted" in functionalist research on acculturation, in particular in terms of their organizational acculturation experiences. In other words, their accounts of personal experiences and ways of making sense of their own organizational and national acculturation process have not been heard or examined. To address this limitation, I propose an exploratory study based on Karl Weick's ideas about retrospective sensemaking, which I will outline in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework for the Study

of Organizational Acculturation from a Sensemaking Perspective

As suggested at the end of the previous chapter, in this study, I propose to explore the

process of organizational acculturation from a sensemaking perspective in order to understand

the experiences of the people who are living this process. In this chapter, I will overview

Weick's conception of sensemaking and then use it to frame the empirical study organizational

acculturation.

Sensemaking According to Karl E. Weick

According to Weick et al. (2005), "people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and

enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly" (p. 410). In turn,

"sensemaking is, importantly, an issue of language, talk and communication" (p. 410). Weick et

al. (2005) defined several key characteristics of sensemaking, which I will summarize in the next

paragraphs.

(1) *Sensemaking organizes flux and starts with chaos*. It is a process that does not start

"from zero." Rather, it occurs "amidst a stream of potential antecedents and consequences" (p.

411).

(2) *Sensemaking starts with acts of noticing and bracketing*. When the person is

confronted with a non-familiar situation, he or she begins to notice and bracket: "In the early

stages of sensemaking, phenomena have to be forcibly carved out of the undifferentiated flux of

raw experience and conceptually fixed and labelled so that they can become the common

currency for communicational exchanges" (p. 411). According to Weick, the person's world is

simplified when bracketing happens. This process is influenced and, in a way, inseparable from, his or her previous (sensemaking) experiences.

(3) *Sensemaking is about labelling.* Weick, quoting Chia (2000, p. 517) explains that "[l]abelling works through a strategy of 'differentiation and simple-location, identification and classification, regularizing and routinization [to translate] the intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment'"(p. 411). Also this process helps people to reduce equivocality and uncertainty, typical of new situations.

(4) *Sensemaking is about presumption.* According to Weick et al. (2005), "To make sense is to connect the abstract with the concrete (...) Sensemaking starts with immediate actions, local context, and concrete cues" (p. 412). People have previous experience and ideas about how something should be in that situation. When confronted with "reality" these previous ideas may be challenged or confirmed.

(5) *Sensemaking is retrospective.* People always make sense of something *post factum*, that is, of something that already took place or already happened. As Weick et al. (2005) noted, "Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing." In turn, they claimed that,

> viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ingoing circumstances. (pp. 409-410).

(6) *Sensemaking is social and systemic.* Sensemaking is social in that it takes place and is influenced by continuous interaction in a given context.

(7) *Sensemaking is about action.* As Weick et al. (2005) explained, "If the first question of sensemaking is 'what's going on here?', the second, equally important question is 'what do I do next?'. This second question is directly about action (...)" (p. 412). Hence, action and talk should not be conceived in a linear way, but as cycles:

> talk occurs both early and late, as does action, and either one can be designated as the 'starting point or the destination.' Because acting is an indistinguishable part of the swarm of flux until talk brackets it and gives it some meaning, action is not inherently any more significant than talk, but it factors centrally into any understanding of sensemaking. (p. 412).

Thus, what people learn through their experiences with "real" situations provide the point of departure of their future actions. This is an ongoing, cyclical experience.

(8) *Sensemaking is about communication.* Weick et al. (2005) noted that

> [w]e see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk... symbolically encoded representations of these circumstances. As this occurs, a situation is talked into existence and the basis is laid for action to deal with it. (p. 413)

Hence, Weick has a particular vision of communication as an ongoing process of making sense of a given social situation—a vision I adopt in this study, since I believe it is a sound way to investigate the acculturation process of a group of immigrants from a communicative perspective.

(9) *Sensemaking is about equivocality.* Weick et al. (2005) adopted Mills' (2003) idea that sensemaking is a way to deal with uncertainty, arguing that one may "expect to find explicit efforts at sensemaking whenever the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world. This means that sensemaking is activated by the question, 'same or different'?" (p. 414). Also this feature of sensemaking will be a key element in my study, since while acculturating, someone faces a multitude of new, equivocal situations.

(10) *Sensemaking is about plausibility.* Weick et al. (2005) argues that sensemaking is not about finding the truth or what is right. "Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism" (p. 415). They claimed that even if it can be said that people will pursue the objective of "getting it right" in their search for meaning, it is clear that "[p]eople may get better stories, but they will never get the story" (p. 415).

(11) *Sensemaking is about identity.* According to Weick et al. (2005),

from the perspective of sensemaking, who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity. Who we are lies importantly in the hand of others, which means our categories for sensemaking lie

in their hands. If their images of us change our identities may be destabilized and our receptiveness to new meaning increase. Sensemaking, filtered through issues of identity, is shaped by the recipe "how can I know who we are becoming until I see what they say and do with our actions? (p. 416)

In my study, I focused on this aspect in particular, looking at the ways in which the identity of the people undergoing acculturation is constantly challenged and what are the strategies they use to cope with these challenges.

After having introduced the main aspects sensemaking according to Weick, I will briefly overview the few studies that have used these ideas to study issues similar to the ones I will focus on in this research, namely the experiences of organizational newcomers and those of expatriates.

Sensemaking Research on the Experiences of Organizational Newcomers

Louis (1980), Simmons-Welburn and Welburn (2003), Reichers (1987) proposed to study the phenomenon of organizational entry (defined as the moment when newcomers enter an unfamiliar organizational setting) from a sensemaking perspective. Louis argued that "this new perspective proposes that an appreciation of what newcomers typically experience during the transition period and how they cope with their experiences is fundamental to designing entry practices that facilitate newcomers' adaptation in the new setting" (p. 226).

It could be argued that immigrants are newcomers entering an organization. However, they are not only new to the organization(al culture), but also to a particular national culture (see Figure 5). This makes the acculturation process more complex and more difficult for them than

for persons who share the same language and national culture background. Nevertheless, some of the ideas that Louis (1980) proposed may help to explain how professional immigrant make sense of their organizational acculturation experiences. Louis argued that in order to understand the sensemaking process through which newcomers cope with entry and surprises experiences, it is important to comprehend how people cope with normal, everyday setting situations. As Louis (1980) stated, "[I]n familiar, nonsurprising situations, individuals seem to operate in a kind of loosely pre-programmed, non-conscious way, guided by cognitive scripts" (p. 239). Hence, most of our everyday decisions are made "off the top of our heads" (p. 239, citing Taylor & Fiske, 1978). But when individuals sense something "out of the ordinary" (p. 239), conscious thought is provoked. According to Louis, change, contrast, and surprise thus constitute major features of the entry experience. *Change* is defined here as an objective difference in a major feature between the new and old settings. It is the newness of the "changed to" situation that requires adjustment by the individual. The more elements are different in the new situation as compared to the previous situation, the more uncertainty or ambiguity the newcomer has to make sense of and cope with. *Contrast* refers to the features that emerge as relevant, which are, in part, determined by features of previous experience, and which are personally, not publicly perceived. Finally, *surprise* "represents a difference between an individual's anticipations and subsequent experiences in the new setting" (p. 237). In light of these concepts, Louis defined sensemaking as follows:

> [Hence,] when scripts fail, the individual must develop explanations for why the actual outcomes occurred and why the predicted outcomes did not. The retrospective explanations help to resolve tension states by restoring equilibrium, although in a new

configuration. Retrospective explanations are produced through a particular thinking

process that we call sensemaking. (p. 240)

Sensemaking Research on the Experiences of Expatriates

In their study on the sensemaking of expatriates, Glanz et al. (2001) argued that

"sensemaking considers how active agents structure the unknown—a concept that provides a

workable framework for the uncertainty and unstable environments encountered in international

expatriate experience" (p. 103). They added that the principal problem in expatriation failure is a

mismatch of expectation. "As far as a sensemaking model is concerned, the actual areas where

these predictions break down is immaterial...whether they concern cultural differences or job

factors, family issues or organizational differences (...)" (pp. 103-104). Moreover, Glanz (2003)

argued that

Sensemaking differs from the way models of social learning and uncertainty reduction

(...) Expatriate experience is not seen as incremental, moving toward a distant ideal goal

of adjustment. Rather it allows for both such incremental learning and for situations

where all previous learning might be overturned in the face of new input. (p. 270)

This difference between expatriate sensemaking and more traditional models of social

learning and uncertainty reduction applies to organizational acculturation as well, yet

organizational acculturation in a new country involves making sense of differences between the

old and the new culture to construct new "appropriate" ways of doing things that transform a

professional immigrant more permanently and fundamentally than an expatriate who stays in the

host culture for a limited period of time. Moreover, this process presumably also has more

lasting effects on the organizational setting into which a professional immigrant acculturates.

The Present Study: Immigrant Acculturation from a Sensemaking Perspective

In this thesis, I presume that professional immigrants experience the process of

organizational acculturation in a different way than natives (or expatriates). Figure 5 represents

this difference in a simplified form.
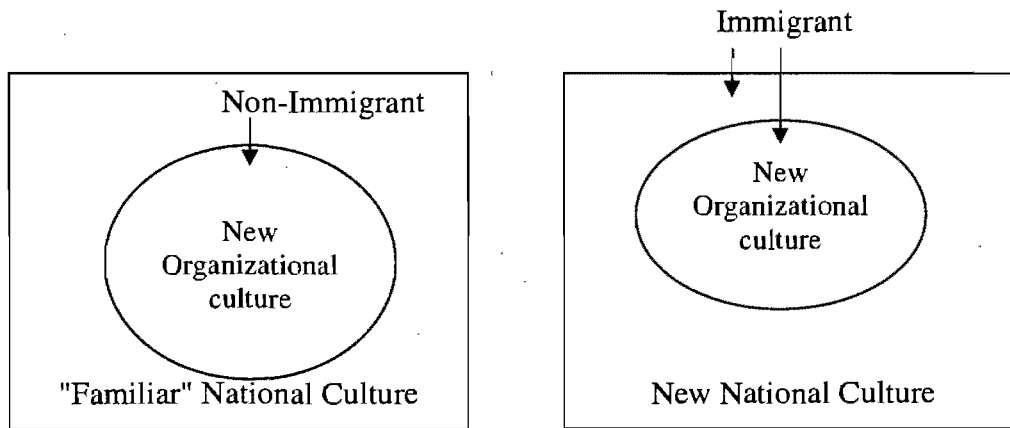
Figure 5. Immigrants' double acculturation model

In my view, an immigrant who enters a new organization in a new country experiences a

process of double acculturation, one pertaining to the adaptation to a new national culture and

one pertaining to the adaptation to the organizational culture. In this study, I explore how

immigrants experienced and made sense of this process, particularly by looking at the role of

verbal (language) and nonverbal (signs, dress, distance, etc.) communication. I concentrated on

two aspects of Weick's elaborate view of sensemaking, namely the importance of equivocality in this process and the role of identity. Accordingly, the following broad research question (RQ) guided this investigation:

> *RQ1:* How do professional immigrants make sense of the process of organizational and national acculturation as it unfolds through communication?

The more specific questions this research focused on were:

> *RQ1A:* What kinds of equivocality do professional immigrants experience during the process of organizational and national acculturation?
>
> *RQ1B:* How do professional immigrants deal with these kinds of equivocality through a specific kind of sensemaking?
>
> *RQ1C:* What role does identity play in this process?
>
> *RQ1D:* How do organizational acculturation and national acculturation influence each other during this process?

In the next chapter, I will discuss the research methodology employed to examine these questions.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I will explain the different procedures I used to investigate the research

questions formulated at the end of chapter 3. First, I will discuss how research participants were

selected, how data were collected, and why I decided to use interviews as well as a reflexive

journal. Thereafter, I will explain my data analysis strategy.

Data Collection

Sampling. According to Yeganeh et al. (2004), it is possible to distinguish three

approaches for the sampling of research participants: convenience, systematic and random

sampling. A review of literature conducted by these authors revealed that cross-cultural research

tends to be dominated by convenience sampling: "In this approach, the selection of cultures is

not related to theoretical issues and researchers select some cultures simply because they have

access to it" (p.77). The "notable weakness" that Yeganeh et al. (2004) saw in convenience

sampling, namely that researchers do not develop a priori predictions about cultural differences

and when some cultural differences are found, posterior explanations are developed. In this

inductive, exploratory study, I did not strive to find generalizable patterns in the ways

professional immigrants make sense of their acculturation process, but to look at the ways in

which a small set of such immigrants, all coming from the same country (Argentina) and having

moved to the same country (Canada) and similar in terms of particular demographic

characteristics, could be compared and contrasted in terms of their situated accounts.

Following extant literature on qualitative research (e.g., Berubé, 2004; Kvale, 1996), I

interviewed 10 professionals who were all in their 30s-40s and had emigrated from Argentina to

Montreal, Quebec, Canada after 2001. I decided to include people who had emigrated during this period to this city for two reasons. First of all, I presumed that for immigrants, the first years in a new country constitute a critical period in which they experience the acculturation process more strongly than later on. Hence, I expected that people who had recently immigrated would be better able to reflect on this process. Second, it could be said that people who emigrated from Argentina to Quebec during this period did so primarily for economic reasons—rather than those who came in the 1970's for political reasons. These two criteria helped me construct a sample with similar characteristics, which allowed for a better comparison of research participants' sensemaking. My main reason for focusing on Argentineans stemmed from the fact that I am an Argentinean immigrant in Montreal myself. Therefore, I shared a profound understanding with the people I studied.

I recruited my research participants by: (1) interviewing five people from my circle of personal acquaintances and (2) recruiting five other people via an Internet forum called "Chemontreal." The name of the forum refers to "Che" Guevara, perhaps one of the most infamous individuals who hailed from Argentina. The main goal of this forum is to exchange information about the immigration process between people coming from Argentina to Montreal. I sent a message to *la lista* ("the list," as it is known by this community) and invited to be part in an exploratory study on the immigration experiences of Argentineans working in Montreal. Ten people replied and I selected five of them according to their availability and background (i.e., age, education, period of time in Canada, and Canadian work experience).

I interviewed two women and eight men. Even if I believe that gender may greatly affect the way someone makes sense of their acculturation, I was unable to find three other women willing to participate in my study. Obviously, this limited the "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba,

1985) of my findings. Moreover, most of the people I interviewed came from Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. In fact, only one of them came from one of the provinces (Ushuaia, in the south of the country). Also this limited the transferability of the outcomes of my research and, as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter 6, future research should delve deeper into the influence of gender and place of origin on the phenomenon under investigation in this inquiry. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of the research participants.

Table 1. Summary of interviewee characteristics.

Name	Gender	Age	Profession	Year of arrival in Canada
Gustavo Fernández*	Male	35	BA in Finance	2002
Luis Luque	Male	36	Chemical Engineer	2004
Diego Rodríguez	Male	38	Translator	2001
David Gaitan	Male	36	Industrial Engineer	2004
Guillermo Rivas	Male	42	BA in Marketing	2005
Gaston López	Male	45	Engineer	2002
Fabián Gutierrez	Male	34	BA in IT	2004
Martín Moreno	Male	48	Naval Engineer	2004
Julia Cohen	Female	45	Histo-technician	2004
Elena Sabatini	Female	39	Engineer	2004

* Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant's privacy.

Interviews. To collect my data I conducted one semi-structured in-depth interview with each of the participants, lasting one hour each on average. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio tape-recorded, and then transcribed. To create a climate of trust and comfort, I explained to the interviewees at the beginning of each interview why I was conducting the study and what I wanted to explore. Before starting, I asked each interviewee to sign an informed

consent form that had been reviewed by the ethics committee of the Université de Montréal. After I had transcribed the interviews, I sent each participant a copy of the transcript and asked them to check it. This process of "member checking" (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed me to create the best transcripts possible. Moreover, prior to the interview, I assured the participant that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers. The objective of the interviews was to elicit participants' accounts of their personal organizational and national acculturation experiences. Thus, I asked them to recount stories, specific situations that were humorous, painful, etc. In line with my focus on the role of communication in acculturation, I frequently asked the interviewee to reflect on the communicative aspects of his or her experiences. The specific questions I posed are shown in the interview protocol in Appendix I.

Reflexive journal. To increase the reflexivity of my research, I regularly wrote in a journal (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As an immigrant, I, too, have gone through a process of organizational and national acculturation, so my own acculturation experiences mattered in this qualitative study. I predominantly used the journal to help me to understand the sensemaking of the research participants vis-à-vis my own, meaning that I did not to use quotes of my journal as actual data. In other words, the journal entries simply served to guide my interpretations of the sensemaking of those who had undergone the process of leaving Buenos Aires and starting a new life in Montreal.

It could be argued that the fact that I shared the same background and path as the participants in my research limited this inquiry. Put differently, sharing the cultural background with the people I studied (adopting Jandt's [2004, p. 3] vision of "culture" as the "sum total of ways of living including behavioral norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining

transmitted over the course of generations") helped me interpret what they were saying, but my *emic* point of view may also have "blinded" me at times. Nevertheless, grounding my interview questions and my analysis of the interview transcripts in a larger conceptual framework inspired by Weick's ideas allowed me to take some distance and prevent my study from being based on solely my own subjectivities.

Data Analysis

In this research, the interviewees were considered as persons who constructed the meaning and significance of their realities. For the analysis, it was important to compare these constructions in order to determine the main similarities and/or differences between the participants' ways of sensemaking. Having kept certain "factors" "constant" between the interviewees helped to construct these similarities and differences. That is, I presumed that the fact that they came from the same country, spoke the same language, had more or less the same age, were of the same race, and had a university education allowed me to sharpen this study's rigor and systematicness.

In line with my interpretive approach to understanding human behavior, I employed a grounded theory (GT) approach, first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), to analyze my data. Corbin and Strauss (1990) argued that qualitative methods can be systematically evaluated only if their canons and procedures are made explicit: "Grounded theorists share a conviction with many other qualitative researchers that the usual canons of 'good science' should be retained, but require *redefinition* in order to fit the realities of qualitative research and the complexities of social phenomena" (p. 4). In turn, these authors stated that even if researchers using the GT approach do not need to adhere to the philosophical and sociological orientations from which this

method is derived (i.e., pragmatism and symbolic interactionism), they do have to keep in mind two principles: (1) change and (2) determinism:

> Since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through process, into the method. Strict determinism is rejected, as is non-determinism (...) Grounded theory seeks not only to uncover relevant conditions, but also to determine how the actors respond to changing conditions and to the consequences of their actions. It is the researcher's responsibility to catch this interplay. (p. 5)

As stated, the advantage I had in this study was that I shared the same cultural background with the people I interviewed. This allowed me to better understand and interpret what they meant when they were talking and to ask for precisions in case something was unclear. It also allowed me to understand how people might have changed throughout time, in line with the above quote. In this regard, for example, I understood what was going on in Argentina when participants decided to emigrate (see also next chapter) and the turmoil they might have felt at that time. Another example that contributed to "catch[ing] the interplay," to stay with Corbin and Strauss, is the fact that I spoke the native language of the interviewees—and underwent the struggle of having to learn French and English in Canada as an immigrant. Hence, being able to conduct the interviews in our mother tongue favored "good communication" between us.

Moreover, Corbin and Strauss argued that a researcher must be reflexive and explicit during every stage of the data collection and analysis: "If key components of the research process are clearly laid out and if sufficient cues are provided, then the theory or theoretical

formulations can be assessed in terms of degrees of plausibility" (p. 20). If this process is clearly described, "we can judge under what conditions the theory might fit with 'reality', convey understanding, and prove useful in practical and theoretical terms" (p. 20). In this research, I tried to meet this criterion by describing my research methods with as much detail as possible and carefully "tracking" my own feelings, insights, reflections, and interpretations in my journal, something which helped me to stay open and attentive.

In line with the premises of GT outlined by Corbin and Strauss, I analyzed the transcript by using the "constant comparative analysis" (see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This entailed that I began by reading the transcripts and making summaries of important points. Then, I reread the transcripts several times to find similarities and differences between the interviewees' accounts. This allowed me to begin to code the data according to specific themes. Through this iterative process, during which I often relied on entries from my reflexive journal, I developed six main themes (i.e., language, contact with people, identity, perception of the others, nonverbal communication, feeling integrated). Thereafter, I translated the most significant parts of the interviews and ordered them into coherent descriptions of each theme (presented in chapter 6).

In line with Corbin and Strauss (1990), I tried to meet the following criteria to ensure that my research was sound: (1) validity, reliability and credibility of the data; (2) plausibility and value of the theoretical contribution; (3) adequacy of the research process; (4) empirical grounding of the research findings. To ensure that that this study met these criteria I studied the literature on acculturation deeply in order to discover what was missing. Once I discovered that extant research did not emphasize the *lived experience* of professional immigrants during their organizational and national acculturation, I developed an exploratory questionnaire in light of Weick's work to examine interviewees' accounts. While I was conducting the interviews and

noticed that one question or aspect was not as relevant as I thought it would be, I took notes and, eventually, changed the questionnaire to better tap into interviewees' sensemaking. Thus, my aim was to create a questionnaire that was as detailed as possible, yielding sufficiently rich and deep data to gain insights that would later help me respond to my research questions. Consequently, throughout the data collection and analysis, I always stayed open toward new or unexpected ideas that appeared during the interviews, even if they contradicted my expectations or intuitions.

Moreover, in line with Corbin and Strauss' suggestions, I tried to provide as much details as I could to ensure the findings could be traced back to the data. I asked questions that required the interviewees to elaborate on their thoughts, not just answer by yes or no or with pre-fabricated phrases. To a certain extent, then, if another researcher were to follow the procedures I followed, he or she would be able to find similar themes. However, of course, a perfect "match" would never be possible, let alone desirable. As Corbin and Strauss explained, "[N]o theory that deals with social psychological phenomena is actually reproducible in the sense that new situations can be found whose conditions exactly match those of the original study, although major conditions may be similar" (p.15).

Chapter 5: Analysis

Before presenting my analysis in this chapter, I will provide a brief summary of the historical Argentinean context that unites the ten people who participated in this study (and me). Providing this description is important because it explains the larger societal context that motivated these people to leave their home country in search for a better place to live.

After this, I will present my first-level, descriptive analysis of the data that "belongs to the observed human subjects" (Lee, 1991, p. 351). In other words, this understanding consists of the "everyday common sense and everyday meanings with which the human subjects see themselves, and which give rise to the behaviour that they manifest in socially constructed settings" (p. 351). According to Lee (1991), "understanding at the second level," in turn, belongs "to the observing organizational researcher. This understanding is the researcher's reading or interpretation of the first-level, common-sense understanding" (p. 351).

5.1 Socio-Historical Background of the Interviewees

To better understand the immigrants' socio-historical background, I will very briefly overview the main events that define Argentina's history which are, in one way or another, relevant for this study. As many people know, *La República Argentina* (the Argentine Republic) is located in South America. It is second largest country on this continent and the eighth largest country in the world. The following timeline shows important dates that constitute Argentina's history:

1516:   Spanish explorers arrived.

1580:   Spain established a permanent colony in what is now called Buenos Aires.

1776:   The *Virreynato del Río de la Plata* (Viceroyalty of the Rio de la Plata) was created. During this period, Argentina mainly was a country of Spanish immigrants and *criollos* (descendants of Spanish born in the colony). Most of them lived in Buenos Aires.

1816:   Independence from Spain was declared on the 9th of July.

1880-1916:   Due to its agriculture, Argentina became one of the top ten richest countries in the world.

Until 1916:   Conservative forces dominated Argentinean politics through various military regimes.

1916-1930:   The first elected government was constituted by *los Radicales.* In 1930, a military *coup d'état* removed Yrigoyen from government.

1930-1945:   Military dictatorship.

1946:   Juan Domingo Perón became president. His main ideas included *la clase obrera al poder* (working class empowerment) and *sindicatos* (unions) development.

1955:   The so-called *Revolución Libertadora* removed Perón from power.

1950s-1970s: Military and civilian governments followed. The economical situation was very good at that period, but episodes of political violence increased.

1973:   Perón returned to the government and died the following year.

1976:   With another *golpe militar* (military coup), the military took possession of the government until 1983. This was a particularly black period in

Argentina's history. More than 30,000 people disappeared. It is also is

known as *Proceso de Organización Nacional* (National Reorganization

Process).

1983:   A democratic period started (Presidents: Alfonsín 1983, Menem 1989,

were elected). However, the economical situation became more and more

difficult. The 1990's began with hyperinflation. To stop this process,

President Menem imposed a peso-dollar fixed exchange rate and lots of

public organizations were privatized. In light of these measures, the

economy seemed to be improving until the end of the decade.

1998-1999: Economic crisis, recession (due to fiscal deficits and overvaluation of the

Argentinean peso) and corruption were part of the situation at the end of

the 1990's.

2001:   Economic crisis escalated. The government took a series of measures

including *el corralito* (the freezing of bank accounts). This led the country

into one of the worst institutional and economic crisis in its history on the

20th of December. Violent protests resulted, especially in Buenos Aires.

President de la Rúa resigned and escaped from the *Casa Rosada* (Pink

House) in a helicopter. Several presidents succeeded him.

2003:   Nestor Kirchner was elected president during a now more stable national

situation.

2007:   Cristina Fernandez (Nestor Kirchner's wife) was elected president.

Recently, an Argentinean sociologist, Alejandro Goldberg (2007), wrote a book called

Tú, sudaca (*Sudaca* is a pejorative way of naming the people from South America; it is mainly

used in Europe) in which he discussed the historical, geographical, sociopolitical and cultural

dimensions of what it means to be an immigrant (from Argentina) in Spain. The main insights of

this book resemble the experiences of Argentinean immigrants in Montreal, Quebec, even if the

immigration context in Spain is very different from the Canadian one because Argentinean

immigrants in Spain suffer from much discrimination and xenophobia. The book is especially

interesting because it explains with relative detail why so many people have emigrated from

Argentina. Goldberg distinguished three important periods in the history of Argentina that

provoked emigration: (1) 1976-1983 (military dictatorship); (2) 1989-1992 (economical crisis);

and (3) December, 2001, until the present (economical, political, and social crisis). His research

focused on this last period in particular, and indicated that, according to *the Dirección Nacional*

de Migraciones (Migrations Office in Argentina), until March, 2003, 260 000 people had left the

country without coming back (in 2002, 90 000 left). He quoted Mr. Lelio Mármora, director of

the Master's degree in International Migration Policies at the University of Buenos Aires, to

explain that the migratory process in this period was a sociocultural phenomenon determined not

only by the crisis and the economical situation, but also the frustration with the country's state of

affairs felt by many young people that had gown up and were educated in Argentina in the

1990's. The ten interviewees (and I) are part of exactly this group.

5.2 First-Level Understanding

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I will start my two-level analysis by

drawing a portrait of each of the interviewees who participated in this research and, in so doing,

show the "everyday common sense and everyday meanings with which [they] see themselves" (p.351).

Gustavo Fernández . Gustavo is a thirty-five year old man who hails from Buenos Aires. He has a BA in Finance and decided to leave Argentina during the economical crisis in 2001. "There was no future there," he stated. He and his spouse chose Montreal because, as he said, "I had already been there ten years ago, invited by a friend who lived in this city and I had really liked it." These friends had told them that life was nice in Montreal and that there were a lot of opportunities. Added to this, Quebec was recruiting professionals from Argentina, so immigrants were welcomed. "From the two or three countries that were recruiting immigrants, Canada was by far the best option because the papers were easier to get and the conditions for newcomers were better." When he arrived in Montreal, he was bilingual French and Spanish and able to communicate in English. He had been unemployed for about one year when he left Argentina in 2002: "The fact of not being employed pushed me out even more." It took him about two months to find a job in his area of expertise (finance) in Montreal. For his first job, he worked in an IT company for two years. After this, he changed to a better position in an industrial medium-sized company, again in his area of expertise. He has been working there ever since. "I feel comfortable, integrated from an economic point of view, but 100% integrated? No, maybe in the future I will. Now, I am completely adapted to the environment, I know it, I can handle it, I understand it, even if I am very critical, I understand it. But I don't feel identified with the society and I don't think it's just my problem, I don't think Canada is an 'integrating' society."

Luis Luque. Luis is a single chemical engineer who also came from Buenos Aires. His story is different from Gustavo's. He arrived in Montreal in 2004. He had spent four years studying in the US before deciding to emigrate to Canada and apply for permanent residence

here: "I chose Canada because the papers were easier to get. But, if I had been given the choice, I would have stayed in the US." He left Argentina some time before the economic crash. "My decision was 100% due to economical reasons and possibilities to grow. I have always worked in the pharmaceutical industry and Montreal has a strong reputation in this area," he noted. Luis found his first and only job in a pharmaceutical company in 2005. When he arrived in Montreal, he was fluent in English and had already started learning French. "Language was not a barrier for me." At the moment of the interview, he seemed rather unhappy and disappointed because he had lost his job. During the interview, he stated: "I tried to do everything to integrate with the people, but nothing worked. Canadian people are cold. I cannot find a point of contact with them, something in common, something to approach them. I keep on trying, but it is not easy. Anyway, I know that I will end by moving to the US because nothing ties me to here. I love the city, but if I get an opportunity in the US, I will certainly leave. Besides, I know that I will die in Argentina. When I retire I am almost sure that I will go back there."

Diego Rodríguez. Also Diego hails from Buenos Aires. He is a French-English-Spanish translator graduated in the University of Buenos Aires, so language has never been a problem for him. He and his wife decided to emigrate in 2001 for economic reasons, but also because they were attracted to the idea of working abroad. "My wife and I had always wanted to have an experience in another country; it had always been a project. At that moment, you were not able to see a future there. We didn't like our jobs very much and a friend of us who lived here told us that Montreal was a good place for translators because language was considered important here." They chose Montreal for several reasons: "My wife is French, so the natural option was to go to France, but we had a lot of prejudices about Europe. We had heard that there were lots of problems with the integration of immigrants so we felt that it would be more difficult to integrate

into the society. And Canada, well, we felt it was a young country, with lots of opportunities, with an immigration policy and a structure that seemed prepared to welcome the immigrants. And, in fact, when we arrived here we confirmed this by meeting many people in the same situation and it helped us not to feel so strange, so different." Diego found a job as a translator in an engineering company a couple of months after his arrival. He is still working there, but now has a better position. Overall, he seems to be happy: "Every once in a while I make up the balance and it is still positive." Nevertheless, he recognizes that the cultural and social part of the immigration experience has not been easy. "When we arrived here we decided not to meet with people from Argentina because we didn't want to sit together to listen to tango, eat *asado* (grilled meat), drink *mate* (a typical beverage made from yerba mate) and cry about how well we used to be in Argentina. So, very consciously, we avoided all the Argentinean people. But after two years, we realized that we were not seeing any Argentineans, but we were not seeing anybody else either! So we changed this attitude."

David Gaitan. This industrial engineer also came from Buenos Aires. He left Argentina with his wife and their child in 2004. "I am very lucky because I found a job in my area a couple of days after we arrived in Montreal, not too many people can do that. It was very good, not only for us because it gave us peace in the economical aspect, but also it reassured our families in Argentina. " He had made email contact with the multinational company he is currently working for before leaving Buenos Aires and when he arrived in Canada, they were waiting for him with an interview. It was the same industrial company that he had been working for in Argentina for several years. "They were implementing a system here that I had already implemented in Argentina a couple of years before, so I was more than welcomed." When David arrived, he was able to communicate in English and was learning French, but he was not fluent at all in any of

the languages. Since his arrival in the organization, he has been promoted twice and now he occupies a manager position. He seems to be well integrated to the work environment and also happy with his personal situation. "I don't feel—and nobody considers me—like a *sudaca* who came to work here. I showed everybody how good I was in my work, that I had a sense of humor and that I was like everybody else; so they accepted me in the group of people, just as one of them."

Guillermo Rivas. Guillermo also came from Buenos Aires. He also is a *porteño* (people who live near the port of the city of Buenos Aires is called like this). He has a BA in Marketing and he has always worked in sales for the Latin American market. In 2002, he postponed emigrating to Canada because he was offered an interesting position, but "then everything went to normal and, as always, things started to go less well and we reactivated the paperwork." He emigrated from Argentina with his wife and their three children. When Guillermo arrived in Montreal in 2005, he was fluent in English and he started to learn French. Before leaving, he had started to make contacts with some companies here in order to "test the market." "I traveled alone before bringing the rest of the family. I wanted to explore and feel in my skin if I liked it or not. Even if you are a tourist, you can say if you like a city or not. And I liked it." A couple of days after his arrival, he found his first job in an IT company and some weeks after that, he found a job in a medium-sized company that was focused more specifically on his area of expertise and had better salary and working conditions. "It was a difficult situation because I had been so well treated in the first company, that I felt that I was betraying them. But my boss told me that she completely understood the situation and she recognized that she was always looking for better positions outside of the company. So I felt relieved and less guilty. In Latin America we have this feeling of belonging to a company and when we have to leave, we feel that we are

unfaithful. But it seems to be different here." Guillermo says that he is happy with their decision of emigrating. "I am in peace, this is a nice and safe place to be with your family." However, he also feels that the social part of the experience is not easy at all, since he feels he does not belong here. "I feel that I am using all the resources and taking advantage of all the opportunities that Canada is giving me, but I cannot celebrate Canada or Quebec day. I don't feel it. I don't know if everybody has the same feeling. It's a continuous internal fight to see until where I can go in this experience of immigration. Until now, it is positive, but you never know…"

Gastón López. Gaston is another engineer coming from Buenos Aires. Before moving to Canada in 2002, he owned an engineering company in Argentina, but the economical crisis forced him to close it. "Argentina pushed me out," he said with sadness and disappointment in his voice. "When I arrived, I worked for some time in Toronto and then I moved to Sherbrooke (Quebec) to complete a Master's degree in Engineering. In 2005, I finished my studies and found a job in Montreal." However, it was very difficult for him to live in Sherbrooke and work in Montreal, so he changed to a job in Sherbrooke. Nevertheless, adapting to work there was very difficult so he found another job in Montreal with an important company in his field. "In the smaller cities, being an immigrant is more difficult than in Montreal. The farther you go into the interior of the province, the more different they see you. They are not accustomed to different accents. They believe that you cannot be useful for society. They have a lot of prejudice against things that come from the outside. So I decided to go back to Montreal to work." He is still living in Sherbrooke. Gaston feels "adapted" to society. He married a woman from Quebec. "I feel integrated because I have projects for the future. I bought a house and I am working on it. The only thing that I don't like is not having any friends from here. You usually make friends at work, but as I work 150 km from home, it is very difficult to build friendships in that situation."

Fabián Gutiérrez. Fabián was born and lived in Buenos Aires before moving to Canada in 2004. His immigration story is rather funny. When he was living in Argentina, he met a Canadian woman online. They started to get more and more interested in each other and, one day, they decided to meet. So, she traveled to Buenos Aires. She had lots of fun there, but she had to go back home to Montreal, where she lived. Fabián followed her. They got married some time after his arrival and he decided to stay. "I was there, in the marriage ceremony and I didn't understand a word of what was being said there [at that time he did not speak French at all]. [I was] surrounded by strange people and getting married! It was crazy!" Then he applied for his permanent resident visa. He is still married to the same person. He found his first job with an IT company in 2005. He is still working there, but now has a better position. He also works free-lance in web site development. Fabián says he is happy in Canada, yet he is sure that he will leave this country in the future: "I simply do not see myself growing old in a place where I do not have any friends."

Martín Moreno. Martín comes from Ushuaia (in the south of Argentina, the southernmost city in the world). He and his wife emigrated to Canada in 2004. They left their teenage children with their family in Argentina to look for a better future. "My sister was murdered and I realized that they would never find the murderer because there is no justice in Argentina. Corruption is everywhere and I didn't trust the institutions anymore." They had projects for their arrival in Montreal, but when they got here, the projects were not longer viable. "The economical conditions had changed and we had to think about something else to do." Some time later, he and his wife decided to get divorced. In Argentina, he worked as a naval engineer. He joined the crew of a ship in Canada and now travels several months of the year. The rest of the time, he builds houses and other technical gadgets but he does not directly work with Canadians. "I don't

compete with them. I just do things that they don't." When he arrived in Canada, he did not speak any English or French, so he decided to prioritize French. "Language is a barrier. It was invented to divide people," he noted. Martín explains that, in general, he is happy in his new country, but he also complains that he doesn't have any friends here and that he doesn't like women from Quebec: "I will never be able to marry a woman from Quebec. I prefer Latin American women."

Julia Cohen. Julia was born in Uruguay, but she married a man from Argentina and lived most of her life in Buenos Aires. She arrived in Canada in 2004 because, she stated, "I was desperate for my children: two great professional kids who weren't able to find a decent job. I was OK, but I had to do something for them." Her first job was as sales agent in a bazaar, which she quit a couple of days after starting. She said: "I wasn't even able to understand the names of the horrible things that they sold in that place. It wasn't for me." Then she was introduced to a person who finally offered her a job in her field (she is a histo-technician in a pathology laboratory). Julia says she is very happy in her personal life: "My children have very good jobs here. They are much better now." She met and lives with a man from Quebec. In spite of this, she is very angry with the obstacles that the professional order of doctors imposes on immigrants: "They are the mafia. They just don't want people from outside to work here. They desperately need doctors here and you have the foreign doctors driving taxis or doing no matter what. Even if they passed the exams, they do not leave them exercise their profession. It's ridiculous."

Elena Sabatini. Elena hails from the province of Buenos Aires. She left Argentina with her husband and her daughter in 2004. She had a lot of security problems that involved two close family members and they decided to leave. She mentioned: "We suffered the insecurity crisis in

our own family. My father-in-law was murdered during an assault and, nine months later, my husband and my 5 year-old daughter were almost kidnapped in front of our house." She also felt that in Argentina there was no future for their child. In her home country, she used to work in a male environment (a factory). It was very difficult for her because, she said, "in factories in my country, men are very *macho* and I had a lot of stress. I had to be better than anyone else just because I was a woman." She studied Engineering and she used to work in a manager position in that area before moving to Canada. When she moved, she hardly spoke any French or English. She has been studying both languages since then. Her first job was as a supervisor in a packaging company. Since 2006, she has been working in a similar position in a multinational company. "In Canada it is not unusual to see women working in factories. There are plenty of them," she remarked. Elena seems really integrated in Canada, not only at work, but also socially speaking:

> People are very friendly. They show interest for me and my family. They want to know where we came from, what we like eating or doing. I see that at school with my daughter, at work with my colleagues and even in the community, with my neighbors. I was born in Argentina, but I feel very well in Canada. I am happy. If you asked me if I would go back to Argentina, I would say, yes, I would go there to visit my family and my friends. There are many things that I left back there, my roots are in Argentina, but then I would come back here. This is the place I chose to continue with my projects, to grow up as a person, and to raise my child. I have no doubts about that.

After having described the "characters" of my study and their socio-historical background, I will now turn to my second-level thematic analysis; that is, my thematic

interpretation of their accounts, based on the mentioned constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), and in view of the research questions formulated at the end of chapter 3.

5.3 Second-Level Understanding

Using the constant comparative method, I determined six different themes that recurred regularly in the interviewees' accounts and thus presented important facets of the way they made sense of their organizational and national acculturation experiences. I have titled these themes as follows: (1) language at work; (2) contact with people at work; (3) identity at work; (4) . perception of others at work; (5) nonverbal communication (greeting, dress, punctuality, formality) at work; and (6) feeling "integrated" at work and in society in general. I will present the data that support each theme in next sections, as well as my analysis of these data.

5.3.1 Language at Work

Since the native language of each of the research participants was Spanish, language issues were repeatedly brought up when they reflected on the acculturation experiences. Many of them had to learn to work in two or sometimes three languages at the same time. This is what they expressed about language with regard to organizational acculturation (as well as, sporadically, national acculturation):

Gustavo: It was a surprise to everybody that I was able to speak French so well.

Martín: I decided to choose one language (French) to move on (...) Language is a barrier, a wall that divides people. (...) Language is the other's problem. If they do not understand me, it's their problem, not mine.

Fabián: When I arrived here, I was Tarzan in English and I spoke zero French (...) Language was very hard during the training. Then, when I started working I had to use Spanish. This was great to become confident. But then, they made me start working in English. It was like being hit, I became insecure. I had the feeling that I was consuming myself. I used to carry the passport with me all the time. (...) Now everybody laughs when I speak English, but still I am everybody's boss! I have three languages now. I feel confident.

Diego: I had no problems with language. I am a translator! I found it funny that I was called the specialist in Spanish, and, to be honest, nobody spoke Spanish better than I do in that office.

Gastón: Once they learn to understand your accent, they learn to listen to you. It's not that difficult. In Montreal, the language issue is easier than in the province, they see you more different outside of the city. (...) In the beginning, using the new language was really hard. French was a constant noise to me. (...) You have a constant headache. You are permanently thinking in two levels: what I am going to say and how I am going to say

it (not only grammatically but also the tone). (...) In the beginning, when they sent me to meet customers, I asked them if these people would understand the fact that I was not fluent because I was representing the company. My boss told me not to worry; he said that this would change with time. He was completely right. (...) Now I don't worry anymore. If you don't understand me, it's your problem. I speak French. I speak with an accent. Many people speak with an accent. (...) Regarding language, humor is a very important item. One day, I had to give a presentation in French in front of a lot of people. I told them: I wish you luck because from now on you will have to understand me! (...) Communication is an extra effort that you have to make, a very hard effort. It's very important because when I calculate a structure, people have to believe me that it won't break. And if you don't speak well, they also think that you cannot think well...

Luis: The company's owners asked me to write greetings cards to some customers in Spanish from Argentina; the *Che* Spanish, which is very different from the Spanish that is spoken in the rest of Latin American.

Julia: The first days at work were horrible. I had a manager from Quebec and I did not understand a single word of what he said. Because he was very demonstrative with his hands, I understood 50% and I figured out the other 50%. A woman from Nicaragua was my link to understanding, my

anchor of connection and explanation of the things that I did not understand. (...) One day, in a meeting, I was very concentrated and I was surprised about how well I was expressing myself. After a couple of minutes, I realized that I was speaking Spanish. They did not stop me. Everybody laughed. I felt stupid. I was speaking so well, and, of course, I was speaking Spanish! (...) I find it very difficult, the fact of switching and thinking in three languages all the time. (...) I do not care anymore about the fact that my pronunciation is not perfect. The only honorable way, I find, is humor, there is no other...

Elena: Language was a real obstacle for me. I had zero French and just a little English. When I was looking for a job I was afraid of speaking, of not being able to explain what I was able to do, my experience. I did not have the technical vocabulary. The job interviews were very hard. I was really scared. (...) When I got my first job, I started to improve my language. I was not that scared anymore. I was capable of expressing what I wanted to say. I learned the informal French, the one you hear in the street. You start learning to listen. You start adapting without even noticing. (...) It was rather difficult to be a supervisor and try to set limits to the employees with your half-language. (...) I have hundreds of stories about mispronouncing words. I asked my colleagues to correct my mistakes. They laughed, I laughed. They asked me how to say the word in Spanish. I was always an exchange.

Guillermo: In my second job, I had a training session in Sherbrooke and it was very

difficult to follow because they kept on mixing English and French all the

time. At the beginning, I watched the conversations as if they were a

tennis match. I just saw the words going from one person to the other (...)

English is easier for me. I always use it to simplify things. The French

from here [Quebec] is very different from the one I had learned there (in

Argentina). I use Spanish for my work, especially to deal with customers.

(...) In the place I work, the French language is used to exclude the

Americans who acquired the company from the conversation. It is a

cultural barrier. I need to study French again to have more possibilities.

David: My first interview for a job was in English because I couldn't speak

French very well. It was very hard for me. They realized this and changed

to English. (...) During the first days, everybody spoke slowly so that I

could start adapting. The first day, I had a conference call with four

different plants at the same time. I didn't understand anything at all. I was

completely lost. I said to myself: "These people will notice and they will

fire me in one week!" But I started to adapt. Everybody spoke slowly.

They even asked me if I wanted them to speak English to me, but I said

no. I said that I wanted to practice my French to become accustomed to it.

(...) Now everything has changed. I understand 99% of what is said, even

the jokes, and I am capable of expressing what I want. Sometimes, I know

that I use more words than necessary, but I explain my ideas in a much better way.

As these interview excerpts illustrate, language was a main issue for the majority of the research participants (the two exceptions being Diego and Gustavo who were already fluent in French before emigrating). In Argentina, most people learn English as a second language. French is not a language commonly spoken there. Besides, being bilingual (in their cases, trilingual) seems to be very important at a professional level in Quebec. The interviewees explained that language and confidence were closely related in their organizational acculturation process and they added that it took them some time to accept the fact of not being as fluent in the new languages as they are in Spanish. Most of them saw language as an obstacle, a barrier, something to overcome or to *obtain* or *possess*. As Fabián said, "Now that I *have* French." Elena stated: "I *had* zero French (...) It was very difficult for me because I didn't *have* English." However, after some time, this obstacle seemed to disappear and people started to feel more confident and comfortable. Once they felt they were able to communicate (David: "Now I understand 99% of what is said"; Elena: "When I got my first job, I started to improve my language; I was not that scared any more, I was capable of expressing what I wanted to say") language was not longer *their* problem. In fact, it became *the listener's* problem. As Gaston explained, "If you don't understand me, it's your problem. I speak French, I speak with an accent. Many people speak with an accent." The attitude they developed once they felt confident regarding language can be explained by using Weick's idea of equivocality. Once these persons know how to express what they want in their new language, they don't have to deal with the uncertainty of not knowing how to make the others understand them. They know they are capable of expressing their ideas

and feel that the others should understand them. If they don't, it becomes their problem. Interesting, in this regard, is that the ability to speak a language serves to reduce equivocality, at first, but at a certain point the immigrant seems to establish his or her own norm, believing that he or she has mastered it sufficiently. At that point, it no longer is the *other's norm* that seems to count, but *their own*.

As the data show, this process is intimately tied to developing renewed confidence in oneself in the initially very uncertain and often equivocal situation. Learning a new language as an adult and feeling the pressure of having to do so quickly in order to perform well at work was something that certainly affected these people's identities. As Elena explained: "You feel that you are like a child again. You feel that you are not capable of expressing what you want to say. You feel stupid and frustrated." Not being able to express what you want to say is particularly frustrating for professional people since it challenges and even questions their professional credibility and social status. A person in a professional level is supposed to be able to express in a certain way and this is not always possible at the beginning of the acculturation process. As Weick (2005) noted, "Who we are lies importantly in the hand of others" (p. 416). David expressed this most clearly: "At the beginning I was absolutely lost. I couldn't understand a word. I said to myself, these people will realize and they will fire me right away!" Thus, the perception that several of the research participants expressed was that if the locals see that a professional cannot speak or express himself or herself as someone in that position "is supposed to," they will doubt this person's professional qualifications and, by association, their identity. Gastón explained this, saying that, "Communication is an extra effort that you have to make. It's a very strong effort. And it is very strong because when I calculate a structure people have to believe that that won't fall (...) And they think that as you speak badly, you will build the

structure in the same way: badly. You have to reinforce all the time the trust people have in you. You have to show them all the time how good you are." I will discuss the issue of identity in more detail in section 5.3.3.

Once the research participants had gone through the difficult process of learning the new language and were able to communicate well, they still faced pronunciation or accent issues. Several of them coped with this by using humor, as Julia explained: "I do not care any more about the fact that my pronunciation is not perfect. The only honorable way that I find is humor, there is no other." Once the new identity started to be accepted by the immigrants themselves, the data suggested, they could laugh about equivocal situations, accepting them as parts of their daily lives that are no longer threatening their identity. As some interviewees' accounts indicated, the accent was incorporated into their new identity and even started to define it, yet this appropriation did not happen without resistance. As Diego said, for example: "It is fine with me. I don't want to assimilate so much. I still want to be me."

5.3.2 Interactions with People at Work

According to my analysis, the organizational/national acculturation process takes/took place especially when the professional immigrants I studied interact/ed with other organizational members. These encounters were described as follows:

Gustavo: It was very hard at the beginning; I received no support at all.

Martín: I do not compete with Canadians for a job; I do not work with them.

Fabián: I am very happy with the relationship that I have with my boss, he recognizes and respects my experience. He shouts to everybody; not to me. As he realized that it did not affect me, he doesn't do it anymore. (...) I learned to be very careful with the jokes I make, with the words I use. People take it very personal. I look for the people's limits through humor.

Diego: During the first days, I used to interact with a woman from The Dominican Republic in Spanish. The integration is difficult due to the cultural shock. (...) In the company where I work there are two groups that confront each other (the old and the new employees). I decided to stay away from both. I feel a little isolated. (...) I just have irrelevant conversations with my colleagues; nothing interesting. Just with one or two people, I would say, I have a deeper relationship.

Gastón: I was never completely accepted in my first job. I cannot say that I was discriminated, but regarding personal relationships, I was always outside of the group. (...) The method of working [in Engineering] is exactly the same in Canada as in Argentina. The difference is how people deal with personal relationships. (...) In general, you cannot talk about anything interesting with people here. Only about reality shows: hockey, American football. Just with some of them I had interesting conversations about politics. They were surprised to see I cared about it. Sometimes, I pretended not to know about a subject just to see what they thought. (...) I

have a very good relationship with another immigrant in my present job. We share similar stories, we are both immigrants. (...) Once, a colleague and I had a meeting with a customer and the client always talked to my colleague. I tried to turn the conversation to my side by speaking slowly, by saying interesting things. You have to reinforce the link of trust that people have in you all the time.

Luis: The relationship with colleagues was very difficult. It was not because I was a foreigner that they rejected me, but because I was new in the company. There were a lot of people from abroad. The interaction with Canadians with foreign backgrounds was easier than with Canadians-Canadians. I tried very hard to make my colleagues trust me. I was not able to achieve this. The relationship with the superiors was very good. I always responded very well to them.

Julia: My boss is from Argentina, also Jewish like me. When he had the interview with me for the position, he did not want to read the letters of recommendation. He knew the places where I had worked because he also came from there. (...) There is a great difference in human relationships. In Argentina, when somebody saw you a couple of times, maybe someone did not say hi, but there was a familiarity, a feeling that you belonged to that place, a feeling of a second home. (...) How do I react to the people who do not say good morning? To the antipathy I react with super

antipathy, as a method of defense. And with the nice people, I am also nice. (...) The problem here is that you do not know the parameters of the people; you have to play with their rules. But first you have to learn these rules.

Elena: In my first job, I used to hug all the female employees who worked with me. People from Quebec are rather cold, distant and they kind of like the Latin thing. They asked me a lot of things from Argentina. They received very well my affective side. (...) In the interview for my second job I was very nervous. It was a complete failure. I had a second chance because someone in the company was from Argentina and he knew that my experience was good, that it was a question of language and confidence. They people in Human Resources decided to give me a chance to improve my language. They said it would come by itself. It happened like that.

Guillermo: In the company where I work the people started to say that there was a *Quartier latin*. Management started to hire more and more people from Latin America because they are more flexible. (...) What I don't like here is the daily contact with people. It is very cold. I miss physical contact, joking, informality. The Latin thing is good because it has the warmth of the contact, the kinetics, but at the same time it is always noisy, you live in a constant mouth to mouth rumors environment that I do not see with

people from here. They are colder here, but they respect your privacy more.

David: In the beginning, I didn't understand anything. I laughed and I said yes to everything. Everybody said how nice and friendly I was. Typically, when you don't understand, you laugh a little, you say yes and everybody is happy. People have always been nice with me at work. The relationship with superiors is excellent. They are very respectful and they treat you with equality. In Argentina, the boss was the boss and you were not allowed to discuss his decisions because he was always right. (...) I feel that I am like everybody else at work because I participate in the same activities. In the beginning, I did not participate very much because I felt that I didn't understand and I didn't want to disturb. Now this has changed. Everybody invites me to go out for lunch. They come to my office to chat. This didn't happen during the first months. Now I feel very comfortable. I am just like them.

From a communicative standpoint, understanding how relationships between people are formed and maintained is key. As these excerpts show, the way communication shapes relationships is especially important for people's organizational (and national) acculturation. For example, the Centre for Intercultural Learning of the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada website (www.intercultures.ca, which is a Canadian institute that provides information for people wanting to do business abroad) states that most Argentine people have Spanish and

Italian origins and "have a very warm nature and their communication style reflects this. Personal space may not be as important to Argentines as it is to Canadians." It also states that Argentineans are more likely to display affection than Canadians: "They like body expressions to come with conversations. Mostly among friends, people use more facial expressions, laugh and touch."

The interview data show that most interviewees "had to learn" to "play" according to—but also *with*—the communication "rules" of their host organization and country. Most of them thought Canadians were cold, distant, and reserved. This was not something negative in itself, but they had to become accustomed and adapt to these new rules, and this new way of being. Hence, some of them explained that, at work, they communicated more and better with other immigrants or with Spanish speaking people.

In general, even if they said that the relationship with colleagues was not easy, they built a good relationship with their superiors. As David explained, "The relationship with superiors is excellent. They are very respectful and they treat you with equality. In Argentina, the boss was the boss and you were not allowed to discuss his decisions because he was always right." In fact, several interviewees expressed their contentment regarding the "Canadian" style of organizational communication, which they perceived as less vertical, less hierarchical, and more participative. Hence, while some aspects of everyday interactions with people from the new culture made organizational acculturation difficult, other aspects facilitated it.

The data also show that in order to cope with the uncertainty of entering an organization in a new country, most of the participants put labels on or made generalizations about "the locals." They compared the new situation with what they already knew in order to find the differences and reduce equivocality, in line with Weick et al.'s (2005) observations. Once they had a general

idea of "how things are done here," though, they were ready to take action based on their inculcation of the new communication rules—as well as, in some cases, transformation of these existing rules. In this way, that is, through this continuous exchange, or better, *negotiation*, they started to build their new identity. This shows that the organizational/national acculturation process is ongoing and that people undergoing this process try to get "the right picture" through time, while also altering an influencing it in their own way (e.g., through using humor).

5.3.3 Challenges to Identity at Work

While identity played a role in nearly every theme discussed in this second-level analysis, this specific section focuses on interviewees explicit accounts on challenges to their identities. That is, almost every one of them mentioned, in one way or another, that it took time for them to regain confidence in themselves during the organizational/national acculturation process. As I already showed, this confidence was closely related to language acquisition. This is how the interviewees made sense of the identity challenges they faced during their acculturation:

Gustavo: The rest of the people at work do not care if you are an immigrant.

Fabián: I washed the dishes in a restaurant as a job for fifteen days. The physical pain motivated me to learn the language to improve. Now I can speak three languages. I have confidence in myself. (...) I am more Argentinean than before.

Diego: Nobody tells you if the job you did is good or not. I do it for personal satisfaction (...) I had to fight very hard to have my ten-year experience recognized here. (...) As Argentinean, you are prepared to work with things that do not work well or without tools. This is an advantage for me.

Gastón: People think that as you do not speak well, you are not capable of thinking well. And as you are an immigrant, they think that you know nothing and you have no experience. They think you are worthless. It is very hard. You start all over again. You have to show everything you can do, everything you are capable of.

Luis: I was told that I was extremely efficient and they suggested I do not work so hard. I was trying to adapt, I didn't want to be seen as someone who didn't follow the same standards as the rest of the employees. (...) They didn't care about my potential, my studies or my experience (...) In Argentina people are more flexible, more adaptable, more multifunctional. Being an engineer in Canada is not the same than in Argentina. [In Argentina,] an engineer there has a more complete, more flexible and more universal formation. Here, it is more technical, more specific, more limited.

Julia: I think that having worked in a third-world country is an advantage. You have to be creative. When you don't have the tools, you still have to move

on and solve the problems (...) I will never be a Canadian, I will never stop being Uruguayan. But as a matter of fact, I am from nowhere. You have that feeling, where am I from? Who am I?

Elena: I need to have this feeling of belonging to the place I work. I feel part of it. It was like that in Argentina and it is still like this in Canada. For me, working is a way of making money, but it is also a way of becoming a better person. (...) In Argentina I was the only woman working in the plant, it was not common for a woman. In Canada it is more normal, you see other women working in factories (...) It is very hard to leave everything behind, your family, for something uncertain. Because you come here and you have nothing. (...) In the beginning, they looked at me and they thought, this immigrant comes here and she cannot even speak well. But then, when they began to know me, they forgot. (...) They do not know that you start all over again; they do not have an idea of how hard this is. You don't even have the language, for me this was very hard. (...) I never felt discriminated, on the contrary. I feel that they love me, they respect me as a person, they respect my work.

Guillermo: In the beginning, I felt that I was always behind the rest because of the language. I felt that I had less opportunity than the others. After some time, I started feeling more confident. Nowadays, I feel more secure and even if I cannot express myself in French as I would like to. I don't miss

any details any more. (...) Regarding habits, I always felt as an outsider. In Argentina, we say "*como sapo de otro pozo*" (the literal translation would be "as a toad from another hole," meaning: "as someone who comes from outside and does not belong in a place"). I learned to live with it, but I didn't change my habits. (...) The best experience of being here is being recognized. (...) Working with Latin people is another subject. The typical rivalry with the Argentineans appears. For the people from Quebec, Brazil, Venezuela, or Argentina it is the same. But we are very different...

David: I like it here in Canada because I can stand out from the rest. I am a person with a lot of initiative. It is also true that sometimes it is very difficult to work with people who do not care very much about their work.

Regarding identity, it seemed to be difficult for the interviewees to accept that they had to start all over again and re-explain—and justify/re-legitimize—themselves (and their background). As Fabian explained, "Most people in Canada didn't even know where Argentina was located." They shared the feeling that they had to work hard to be recognized. But, as the data suggest, many of them were able to show/prove what they were capable of. As already mentioned, language played a main role in terms of being *recognized* as a professional. In this regard, recognition from others is seen as an important for reconstructing one's destabilized identity during the acculturation process. As Gaston stated, "People think that as you do not speak well, you are not capable of thinking well. And as you are an immigrant, they think that

you know nothing and you have no experience. They think you are worthless. It is very hard."

Becoming more fluent and confident in terms of language allowed the reinforcement of

participants' new identity, as Fabian noted: "Everybody laughs when I speak English, but still I

am everybody's boss! I have three languages now. I feel confident." Furthermore, also labeling

the "locals" in negative terms such as cold, ignorant and/or with little initiative seemed to have

helped the newcomers regain confidence in themselves. Interestingly, though, once they regained

confidence in their new selves, they were capable to see the positive aspects of their "hosts"

again as well. The next section will illustrate this latter observation in more detail.

5.3.4 Perceptions of "Locals" at Work

The relationship with colleagues at work was certainly marked by how the research

participants perceived "locals," both within their organization and in Canadian (or Quebecois)

society in general. In this respect, the interviewees stated:

Gustavo: The people are very difficult. They are not well educated. Besides, they

are always busy. It is very difficult to organize a social event with them.

Martín: The people from Argentina have common sense and education. Here,

people don't have common sense. They only have a 180° vision.

Fabián: I used to idealize the "Canadian way of working." But, the more stupid

they are, the less they work, the better for me (...) Canadians have a

different blood temperature. The Argentinean is more impulsive, needs to

argue, feels passion for things. I don't feel Canadian. (...) I interviewed a

lot of people for job positions in the company I work and I learned a lot of

the work market. People in Canada aren't afraid of losing their jobs as in

Argentina. People are less flexible. (...) One day, one of my colleagues

asked me if Argentina was located next to Cuba. He thought both

countries were almost the same. At first I thought, oh, my God, they are so

ignorant. But then I said to myself, do you know where Zambia is? I don't

know where it is. We are all a bit ignorant.

Diego: In Canada, nobody is responsible for anything. There are no consequences

for a bad job (...) Here, people cannot work if they don't have all the

available tools.

Gastón: They think that they are always right. They are very strict, they always

follow the rules. And they don't question the rules. They just follow them.

Luis: I was surprised by the idea that in Canada you also have to work "putting

out fires," improvising all the time, even in the industry in which I work,

which is highly regulated. (...) People at work were rather cold.

Julia: They do not lack warmth, but there is anonymity (...) I thought that

Canada was more advanced.

Elena: Here most people don't even know where Argentina is located (...) People

from Quebec are cold, distant, but they like the Latin thing. (...) It isn't

usual here to see people taking the initiative and proposing new ideas. (...)

In Argentina, you think that you are in a third-world country and you

imagine that, in Canada, a country in the developed world, everything is

better. But the surprise that you have when you come here is very ugly.

Guillermo: In Canada, you don't see that people feel they belong to an organization.

The way of working, and everything in general, is very individualistic;

they don't meet other people just to chat. That is very hard for me. In

Argentina, the team spirit was more evident. You tried to work with other

people. You tried to build a relationship even while working to make

things more relaxed. (...) I specifically work in the development of

business in Latin America and I would say that it is impossible that

someone from here manages the business there because we have other

times, other habits. Everything is urgent in Latin America and this is

something very difficult for the Canadian people to handle. Most deals are

closed during dinners or lunches that take hours and they get bored after

thirty minutes.

David: Nobody likes taking decisions here. I didn't change the way I work, but I

got better results here because people do only what they are asked to do.

That isn't enough for me. Working here is really different from Argentina.

I see that the people who get promoted, get promoted because they are good. But what I also see and don't like is the lack of initiative. In Argentina, you were always competing with somebody. There [in Argentina], they were always telling you that you had to wear the "shirt of the company," with the idea of being part of the team, but here I feel that they are all naked. They don't care about anything. People here are much colder, as if nothing could upset them. In Argentina, everybody took everything personally and they reacted much more than here.

As the data indicate, most of the interviewees shared the opinion that Canadians are not well educated—which is ironic, because the data also suggest that they believed that Canadians initially presumed that many of the research participants were not very intelligent either, an impression mainly created due to their poor language skills. They used to idealize Canada, regarding it as a developed country, a place where everything works well, where people have a high standard of life, and are highly educated. However, most of them felt that their expectations had been too high once they started working and living in Canada. Their accounts suggest that they do not like people who are inflexible, irresponsible, or lack team spirit. Hence, it seems that the expectations the interviewees had when emigrating were too high, which is normal because, otherwise, they would probably not have taken the step to do so in the first place. Once they were confronted with the "reality" of being an immigrant in Canada, these expectations were strongly challenged. Some of them, in turn, took advantage of this and used this negative aspect to distinguish themselves from "the locals." It helped them to construct their new identity. However, this was certainly not true for all the research participants.

Hence, the (theoretical) presumptions the research participants had before leaving their home country were challenged once they arrived in Canada. They believed that certain things would be in a certain way, but once they were confronted with the "real" life, they ended up being different, forcing them to make *new* sense of what was going on. In other words, once they realized that many things were not as they had expected, they needed to put find new labels to define their situations and make these situations—and their positions in them as well as their relations with "others"—"logical," "understandable," "in line with a coherent, sensible framework to understand the world," in line with Weick et al.'s (2005) generic observations about sensemaking.

5.3.5 Nonverbal Communication (Greeting, Dress, Punctuality, Formality) at Work

Canadians and Argentineans are, presumably, very different in terms of their nonverbal communication. This was another aspect that interviewees reflected on in order to make sense of their acculturation experiences:

Gustavo: They do not say "hello." It is very different from Argentina. Regarding clothing [at work], Canada is more informal.

Fabián: Here there is a "no touching" rule. Once, I tried to kiss a woman, a friend of my wife. She refused me with disgust. At that moment, I didn't understand what happened. Now I do. I became accustomed to the Canadian way, but when I see someone from Argentina or from Latin America, I touch them!

Diego: In Argentina, everybody says "hi" with a kiss. Here, some people do not even say "hello," but I learnt that that is cultural. They just don't think it's necessary to say "hello." But I had to learn it. For example, one day, a colleague arrived and said nothing. I told her, "Hey, good morning, right?" and she said, "What do you mean, we saw each other yesterday".... But since that day, she always says hello. (...) Regarding clothing, it's more informal in Canada than in Argentina. I would say that in general the relationship between people is more informal, more horizontal, with less hierarchy. In Argentina it's more vertical.

Gastón: Regarding greeting, they are savages here. Younger people are the worst. They never say "hello." How do I react to that? It depends on the day. Some days, I don't say "hello" either. Other days I just don't care and some others I almost shout at them "good morning!" (...) Women were delighted with me because I held the door open for them. But you have to adapt, right? They are like that; they don't do it because they are bad. It's specially the young people.

Luis: Unionized people from the Laboratory never said "hello" to anybody. I expected a "good morning" at least.

Julia: The never say "hi." I call them "the Nobel Prizes" because they feel so

important that they don't even care to waste their time saying "good

morning" to you.

Guillermo: Lunch time was a social ritual in Argentina. Here, it means to introduce

food into your body. (...) Clothing is much more informal in Canada, they

don't care about it. (...) Here everything happens in a low voice. The only

exception is the area where Latin people work. There you can hear people

laughing and talking in loud voice. (…) In Canada, everybody respect the

time schedule. This increases the company's efficiency. (...) In Canada

people use more the email than in Argentina. People don't usually walk;

everybody stays at his place. In Argentina, it is more out of control, or

more spontaneous. (...) Regarding physical contact, I am someone who.

touches a lot and here I found that the distance between people is

important. I used to get closer and people moved away to keep this

distance. Now, I know that I have to play the game that they impose me to

play. Now, I keep this distance. You have to play with the rules that the

majority establishes. (…) Saying "hello" is just a formality and only with

the person sitting next to you, they don't really care how you feel.

David: In Canada, it's more relaxed. Everybody respects the time schedules.

Regarding clothing, in Canada it's much more informal. (...) People here

almost don't say "hi" to each other. They walk close to you and they

ignore you. My attitude to these people is to do the same that they do. If

they say "hello," I greet them back, if they don't I also ignore them. Some

people are very nice, but nobody shakes hands with you or touches you.

They are colder.

Nonverbal communication generally was an issue for the research participants'

acculturation, as these data illustrate. During the initial phases of their acculturation they did not

know how to react in certain situations, but after some time this uncertainty of not knowing what

to do was not so much a problem anymore and the question became what strategy or attitude to

adopt. They did not like many of the cultural differences they saw (e.g. not saying "hello" or

touching), but they respected "the rules" or norms. As David said, "My attitude to these people is

to do the same that they do." Nevertheless, adapting or playing according to the host

organization's or society's rules did not mean that they fully accepted them, always still keeping

a certain affinity with the rules of their home culture. As Fabián said, for instance: "I became

accustomed to the Canadian way, but when I see people from Argentina or from Latin America, I

touch them!"

Weick et al.'s (2005) ideas about noticing, bracketing and labelling help to understand

the role of nonverbal aspects in the process of organizational and national acculturation. Most of

the participants' first reactions were to label/qualify/see the locals' behaviours in negative ways.

However, in time, most of them started to see their behaviours as simply *different* from what they

used to know and began responding in ways they considered appropriate. These ways were

neither fully Canadian/Quebecois, nor fully Argentinean, but new, hybrid ways of interacting

and being.

Regarding clothing at work, the Centre for Intercultural Learning website states that "Argentines pay extreme attention to dressing; both in summer and winter (...) In Buenos Aires, people are concerned about style. The city has a European flair and this is reflected in the way people dress and carry themselves." When arriving in Canada, the interviewed Argentinean immigrants noticed this difference, yet seemed immediately comfortable with being more informally dressed. Diego expressed this by stating, "When I had my first interview for my present job I was wearing a suit and a tie as I would have worn in Argentina, but when I arrived at the company I saw that everybody was wearing very informal clothes. So I asked the interviewer if I was overdressed and she said, maybe a little..."

5.3.6 Feeling "Integrated" at Work and in Society in General

The current study corroborates the assumption, made in chapter 3, that organizational and national acculturation are intimately related. The interviewees described this relationship in the following ways:

Gustavo: I do not feel integrated in society, but I feel integrated at work.

Martín: I feel integrated: I have a lot of things to do, I have a relationship with the people, I have projects.

Fabián: Work was a great support for my integration. I feel integrated in some aspects (I work here, I live here, I study here). However, this integration is just functional. I integrate with regard to the things that I want, with regard

to the things that are convenient for me. I do not see myself becoming old here. I do not have friends. The social part of my integration is in negative. The rest is OK. I adapt. I am functional.

Diego: Regarding society, I feel integrated because I work. I have no problems at the office. I see some of the people outside of work hours. But culturally there is a barrier. When I talk to someone from here I have the feeling we do not fully understand each other. It is easier to communicate with people from your own country. But this is fine with me. I do not want to become assimilated to the locals.

Gastón: I don't know if I am integrated, but I have projects, things that I would like to do here in the future. From that I deduce that I must be integrated. Otherwise, my project would be to leave. (...) Something that I don't like is that I don't have local friends.

Luis: I do not feel integrated. I do not feel in contact with the people from here. I undertake a lot of social activities to meet people such as salsa or the cinema club. Now I am not working, but I feel that if I had a job, I would feel much more comfortable. I know that, from a social point of view, I would feel better in Argentina than here, but this is not so bad either.

Julia: I like Canada because there is a great number of opportunities and people are not socially aggressive. It is a safe and secure place. But I will never be Canadian. I have no Canadian friends.

Elena: I feel 100% integrated in Canada. People such as neighbours, my work colleagues, the school community members, they come to see me, they care about me and my family, they try to understand us.

Guillermo: I feel integrated at work, but not in other ways. I feel that I am using all the benefits and resources that Canada has to offer, but socially, I do not feel part of it.

David: I believe that I am integrated. Here I have the same things I had in Argentina. It is true that the cultural differences are big and the social relationships are also very important, but I accept that.

As far as the ways in which the research participants made sense of their integration at work and in society in general, a majority of them agreed that they integrated organizationally but not socially or nationally. They seemed to be making great progress in their workplaces, but they did not feel that their social life was satisfying. Most of them mentioned that not having any Canadian friends was symptomatic of the difficulty of acculturating to a new country. I will further discuss this important finding in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Discussion

In this final chapter, I will first provide responses to the research questions based on the analysis presented in the previous chapter. Then, I will draw the main implications of this study and discuss its limitations. To conclude, I will suggest directions for further research.

6.1 Responses to the Research Questions

The main research question this study tried to investigate was (first formulated at the end of chapter 3):

> *RQ1: How do professional immigrants make sense of the process of organizational and national acculturation as it unfolds through communication?*

The following more specific research questions were derived from this general question:

> *RQ1A: What kinds of equivocality do professional immigrants experience during the process of organizational and national acculturation?*
>
> *RQ1B: How do professional immigrants deal with these kinds of equivocality through a specific kind of sensemaking?*
>
> *RQ1C: What role does identity play in this process?*
>
> *RQ1D: How do organizational acculturation and national acculturation influence each other during this process?*

According to this study, organizational and national acculturation depends on a web of recognition, confidence, language skills, nonverbal communication rules, and belonging. When immigrants enter an organization, they need to reduce the uncertainty of not knowing "how things are done around here" by making sense of the new situation. At first, they go through a period when they observe and try to organize chaos. They are confronted by a new language, culture, way of working, and dealing with people. They need to identify and differentiate what is going on in order to find logic. This is what Weick et al. (2005) called "acts of noticing and bracketing." These acts help the newcomer simplify the world. As this study showed, one way of simplifying the world is to put labels on people, on situations, on behaviors. Research participants' account indicated this by suggesting that they disqualified "the locals" by calling them "uneducated, savage, ignorant, cold, etc." Before immigrating, they believed that Canada was much a better place and they idealized it. This idealization was mostly based on the stereotypical idea that Canada is one of the best countries in the world with respect to quality of life. So, they *presumed*—presumption being one of Weick's key features of sensemaking—that Canada was almost the perfect place. However, once they had arrived here, they were confronted with the reality that Canada was far from the perfect place they had believed it to be.

Nonetheless, even if in the beginning they thought that everything was worse than they had expected, after having spent some time and after having started to make sense of the situation according to a "new logic," they began to "discover" or construct their own place in this new context. Their identity, which was severely challenged at the beginning of this process, stabilized; they became more comfortable with/in their "new skin," so to speak. Language acquisition, discovery of the local nonverbal communication rules, and plain time, among others,

helped to reduce the equivocality they initially experienced and they started to "find themselves" in their "new" selves.

This accommodation to the new culture made them feel better and more confident. They had more information now, "collected" throughout a considerable period of time. In turn, they knew more about how to act. Most of this happened through verbal and nonverbal communication. That is, they had learned to adopt different communicative strategies in order to cope with these new different situations. Some of them accepted the local rules without questioning, such as Guillermo: "I know that I have to play the game that they impose me to play. Now, I keep this [personal] distance. You have to play with the rules that the majority establishes" or David: "My attitude to this people is to do the same that they do. If they say hello, I greet them back, if they don't, I also ignore them." Others, such as Gaston or Diego, tried to resist or transform the status quo ways of communicating/interacting. As Gaston explained, "They never say hello. (...) Some days, I don't say hello either. Other days I just don't care and some others I almost shout at them good morning!!!" Diego mentioned:

Here, some people don't even say hello, but I learnt that that is cultural, they just don't think it is necessary to say hello. (...) For example, one day a colleague arrived and said nothing. I told her, "Hey, good morning, right?" and she said, "What do you mean, we saw each other yesterday"... but since that day, she always says hello.

And others, like Elena, just kept on doing what they did in Argentina: "In my first job, I used to hug all the female employees who worked with me. People from Quebec are rather cold, distant

and they kind of like the Latin thing. They asked me a lot of things from Argentina. They received very well my affective side."

All these accounts illustrate strategies which these immigrants adopted to cope with uncertain situations during their organizational (and national) acculturation process. These strategies allowed them to begin to get a more plausible idea of how things are done in the new context, who they are in light of who they were (or want(ed) to be), and what their new place is (or want(ed) their place to be), organizationally and nationally/socially speaking.

Regarding the relationship between organizational and national acculturation, it is clear that the main objective of these professional immigrants was to find a good job. They had been selected, first and foremost, for their professional skills and success in their work as well as successful organizational acculturation seemed to have been an important determinant of their overall happiness and well-being. During the interviews, people displayed mixed emotions about living in Canada, but most of them appeared satisfied as far as their *organizational* acculturation was concerned. In terms of national acculturation, though, many of them did not feel entirely satisfied. I will delve deeper into this issue in the discussion section.

6.2 Discussion

This study focused on immigrants' ways of making sense of organizational and national acculturation processes, the point being, above all, to reveal their "real" human beings' stories, stories that often remain hidden in functionalist studies. This research was especially meaningful to me because I am a professional immigrant who moved from Argentina to Montreal four years ago and also because I am still living the organizational and national acculturation process.

This exploratory study provides the reader with a glimpse into the complexities of the processes that I and so many other people are currently living, have lived, and will be living. Functionalist studies on these processes may conclude that the people I studied are have more or less "successfully" acculturated by measuring their degree or level of acculturation or "integration" because they succeeded to maintain their original cultural identity and, at the same time, succeeded to maintain relationships with other groups (e.g., see Berry, Kim, & Boski, 1987). This strategy allowed them to become "functional" in their respective organizations and the new society—specifically in *this* order, and not vice versa, my study indicates. According to Jandt (2004), "Integration implies maintaining important parts of one's original culture as well as participating fully in a new culture" (p. 5). However, as this interpretive study shows, being or having integrated (or having acculturated) is an ongoing process that never really ends. The people I studied only feel *partly* acculturated, especially in terms of their organization. Listening to their accounts revealed similar and dissimilar "sensemakings." Most of the people I interviewed said they felt integrated in their work environment, but and not in society. This is an important finding, which often gets overlooked in studies that leave the stories of those living the acculturation process unattended (see chapter 2).

At this point, an important question raised by this research is: Why is this study relevant for organizational communication studies? Based on this work, my reply to this question is as follows: In Canada, as elsewhere, immigration is a central issue and many resources are spent to encourage people to move and integrate here. According to the findings of this exploratory study, it will be important to do more than just *count* how many people entered the country every year, how many of them are working, how much money they are making, and so forth. We should try to understand how their acculturation is actually experienced in order to facilitate the process of

integration into a society and into the organizations that compose an important part of it. Many immigrants are qualified professionals who decided to leave their homes to find a better place to live. Before moving, they believed that the host country would be a splendid place, full of opportunities. Beliefs and expectations like these are in part fuelled by the information conveyed *en masse* by governmental agencies or other sources. In fact, as is known, the Canadian Ministry of Immigration actually sends immigration officers to various countries around the globe to recruit immigrants. These recruiters explain why it is a good decision to leave everything behind and settle in Canada. This "country marketing" thus "sells" a place by showing its most favourable characteristics and, usually, masking its less attractive aspects. However, as this study indicates, in a way, these strategies make especially the *national* acculturation process more difficult because newcomers have to deal with huge disappointments and considerably readjust their frames of expectation. *"False" expectations*, this study shows, are therefore perhaps the largest obstacles in the national/organizational acculturation process, since it creates fixed ways of making sense *prior to* someone jumps into the new situation. In turn, from a sensemaking point of view, holding onto the old, the expected, delimits opening up to the new, in line with several of Weick's studies (e.g., see Weick's [1993] Mann Gulch disaster study).

Moreover, this study demonstrates that organizational and national acculturation challenges and influences the core of people's identities. They have to relearn many things they took for granted in their home country. From an Argentinean point of view, all action and communication here seems to come "from the head." This is experienced as counter-natural or counter-intuitive. People have to think about everything before acting. This is part of what Elsass and Veiga (1994) call "culture shock," that is, "the emotional reaction of individuals when they cannot understand, control, or predict the behaviour of others" (p. 446) or the psychological

distress "of having to start all over again" (p .451). This study shows how people experience and deal with this kind of shock from a communicative perspective. For example, as Fabián explained, "Here, there is a no touching rule. Once I tried to kiss a woman, a friend of my wife's. She refused me with disgust. At that moment, I didn't understand what happened. Now I do (...) But when that happened I felt very upset and out of place."

Thus, organizational and national acculturation involve the construction of new identities—or, we could say, the *re*-construction of "old" identities. Although I have not focused on this in my analysis, arguably, this process is particularly difficult in a place like Montreal, Quebec, where people's social identity is continuously contested due to the historically conflictual relationship between French and English Canadians. Hence, professional immigrants enter a situation that is potentially equivocal in a triple sense: They have to make sense of a new country, a new organization, *and* the "push and pull" relationship between Francophones and Anglophones. This may be confusing for immigrants, yet it may also offer them a space to develop/negotiate their own identity, since it is a more or less *openly contested* space for identity formation. In other words, if the national culture were clearly or strictly defined, it would not leave much space for cultural development and there would be "little room" for the immigrant to affect the acculturation process.

Interestingly, in this study, participants did not make an explicit or clear difference between Quebec and Canada when telling their stories. Each time they talked about the place to where they had emigrated, they mentioned Canada. It would be interesting to investigate this phenomenon more carefully. For example, Quebecois people tend to claim that they are very Latin but this study suggests that idea does not seem to be shared by people coming from a

supposedly "extremely" Latin country like Argentina. According to many of the interviewees, "Canadian people are very cold."

As mentioned, this study also indicates that the organizational (and national) acculturation process takes time and in this regard is an ongoing accomplishment rather than something to be achieved once and for all. In other words, it is constructed (negotiated, produced, transformed, etc.) by the immigrant in his or her interaction with other people who together construct the organization (and society) as a social reality. Supposedly, organizational acculturation process is experienced to be "easier" or "smoother" than the acculturation to the society at large. Eight of the ten interviewees, for example, said that they did not feel integrated into society, but did feel integrated at work. Thus, it could be concluded that helping immigrants to find a job in their areas is very important for their overall acculturation process. These findings coincide with Alkhazraji et al. (1997) research, which found that from 277 Muslim immigrants, most were more inclined to retain their original national culture for private/social lives and adapt to the US organizational cultures. In contrast, most accepted US organizational cultures.

Furthermore, Ying and Han (2006) recognized that the acculturation process involves personality, acculturative stressors, and social affiliation. The acculturative stressors they mentioned were: physical (climate, unfamiliar settings), biological (food, disease), social (homesickness, isolation), cultural (different cultural values, racial discrimination), and functional (language, work, study, finances, transportation). The present study did not look at physical or biological stressors, but certainly found that social, cultural and functional factors strongly affected the organizational acculturation process.

Finally, not all too surprisingly, this study indicates that language acquisition plays a major role in both organizational and national acculturation. Organizations can play a major role in facilitating this acquisition. For example, some of the interviewees mentioned that some of their colleagues spoke slower to them at the beginning. They talked to them in English or in French according to the newcomer's preference. However, they also indicated that this kind of "organizational adaptation" does not need to continue indefinitely. In fact, all of the interviewees explained that, after some time, they did not need this anymore.

The management of an organization could encourage (and even pay for) language classes if they feel the person needs them. This study suggests that this would not only help the organization from a practical point of view (because they will have an employee who masters several languages), but also strengthen the employee's sense of organizational identification and belongingness—*as well as* his or her sense of identification with and belongingness to the national culture. The government has several programs to help newcomers learn or improve their language skills. What may be inferred from this study is that if the government wants the immigrants to acculturate "better"/"faster," both organizationally and nationally, it could provide organizations with monetary subsidies or other kinds of incentives to fund immigrant employees' language courses while they are becoming part of the new workplace. In this way, immigrants would not have to stop working to learn the new language, which would most probably facilitate their organizational and national acculturation since working appears to be such an important element in the process of national acculturation. As this study demonstrated, working allows professional immigrants to start feeling that they are part of society. As Fabián remarked, "Working was a great support for my integration" or Luis when he said "Now I am not working, but I feel that if I had a job I would feel much more comfortable."

To conclude, let me reiterate the fact that this study demonstrates how organizational and national acculturation are *communicative* processed that happen through continuous interactions between the "host" organization and society and the "guest." Hence, *both* play a major role in this process. It shows that the organizational acculturation process helps immigrants to constitute a link with the new organizational culture by putting them in constant contact with local people. However, this may not necessarily lead to a strong link with people in the new society at large— in fact, as this study hints, organizational acculturation may "shield" or hinder people from acculturating nationally. This finding questions Aljahzraji et al.'s (1997) study, which found that "it is reasonable to conclude that the way immigrants acculturate to a given organizational culture will be affected by how they acculturate to the more general national culture" (p. 222) and that organizational acculturation tends to take precedence over national acculturation.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study was limited in many ways, some of which I already discussed in chapter 4. First of all, it may be questioned to what extent the outcomes of this small exploratory study based on one-time interviews with a small sample of professional immigrants from the same country can be "transferred" to other contexts (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and how time affects people's sensemaking. For example, do professional immigrants from other countries display similar sensemaking strategies as the Argentinean immigrants who participated in this research? Are there substantial differences in the ways non-professional immigrants make sense of their acculturation? How do French-speaking (or English-speaking) immigrants in Montreal experience and make sense of this process? How do people's ways of making sense of their acculturation change over time (i.e., if we interview them at different points in time)?

Second, as mentioned in chapter 4, this research did not look specifically at gender differences. Gender may play an important role in the way people experience and make sense of acculturation and should be investigated more directly in further research.

Third, to what extent did the fact that I, an Argentinean woman, conducted this research affect the outcomes of this research? Of course, this is difficult to say, and, in a way, *any* qualitative study can be criticized for this reason. Nonetheless, it will be important for researchers with other cultural backgrounds to investigate the acculturation of Argentinean professional immigrants in Montreal in order to build a sound case of comparison.

Finally, it will be important to conduct studies that do not only rely on interview (or survey) data. For example, future studies could use participant observation in various organizations to gain more insight into the way organizational and national acculturation occurs through everyday interactions that involve verbal and nonverbal communication. This kind of research will show even more clearly that acculturation is a two-way street and uncover host as well as immigrant communication strategies.

6.4 Conclusion

The main goal of the study proposed here was to develop a communicative understanding of the way immigrant experience and make sense of their organizational and national acculturation process. Studying the acculturation of Argentinean professional immigrants was important because voices of immigrants tend to be marginalized. It is known that professional immigrants or "skilled workers" (as they are called by the *Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration*) are most often recruited because of their "employability." Many quantitative studies (e.g., Godin, 2005; Lochhead & Mackenzie, 2005) have been conducted to

examine how long it took immigrants to find a job, what their starting salary was, what kind of job they found (related or unrelated to their previous profession), how long they stayed with the organization, how they were able to integrate (or not), etc. In turn, many of these studies highlighted the psychological aspects of acculturation and downplayed communicative aspects. I hope that this exploratory research has demonstrated the importance of counterbalancing this kind of research by conducting studies that help us understand how immigrants account for their own organizational and national acculturation and, in so doing, help us gain deeper insight into this complex process that so many people are living today.

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Appendix I: Interview Protocol

(1)   When did you decide to emigrate from Argentina to Canada?

(2)   What reason(s) did you have for emigrating?

(3)   How would you describe the kind of job you had in Argentina?

(4)   Where did you start working when you arrived here in Canada?

(5)   In case you had an interview for your first job, how would you describe this

interview experience?

(6)   How would you describe your first interactions with people when you started

working? How did you feel? Do you remember anything in particular from these

initial interactions? For example, how were you introduced to your colleagues?

(7)   How did the other employees react to the fact that French/English is not your first

language?

(8)   What has changed in your interactions with your colleagues at work during the

time you have been working there?

(9)   If I ask you to compare how people work in Argentina and in Canada, what would

you say? What would be the most important differences between how people

interact with colleagues in Canada and in Argentina? And with supervisors? To

what extent have any of these differences created problems for you?

(10)   Please tell me if you see differences in the workplace between Argentina and

Canada in terms of the following aspects: (a) dress, (b) greeting people, (c)

showing emotions, (d) being punctual, (e) being formal, (f) discussing politics, (g)

discussing religious matters, (h) interacting colleagues from the opposite sex.

How have these differences influenced you during these past years?

(11) What has been your best experience in terms of working here in Canada? And what has been the worst?

(12) If I were to ask you if you feel "integrated" in Canada, what would be your reaction?

(13) To conclude, is there anything you would like to add to what you have said; that is, something that you think is important that we didn't talk about during this conversation?