The development of language and identity: A sociocultural study of five international graduate students living in the U.S.

Alexandra Dema
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, alexandra.dema@gmail.com

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: A SOCIOCULTURAL

STUDY OF FIVE INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE

STUDENTS LIVING IN THE U.S.

by

Alexandra A. Dema

Bachelor of Arts -- Foreign Language, Translation, and Linguistics
Voronezh State University
2008

Master of Arts -- Foreign Language Translation
Voronezh State University
2008

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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College of Education
The Graduate College

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This dissertation prepared by

Alexandra Dema

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Doctor of Philosophy – Curriculum and Instruction
Department of Teaching and Learning

Steve McCafferty, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Co-Chair

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Interim Dean

Shaoan Zhang, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Kendall Hartley, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

Tracy Spies, Ph.D.
Examination Committee Member

LeAnn Putney, Ph.D.
Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

The Development of Language and Identity: A Sociocultural Study of Five International Graduate Students Living in the U.S.

by

Alexandra A. Dema

Dr. Steven G. McCafferty, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Applied Linguistics
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purpose of this sociocultural study was to analyze the longitudinal process of identity development of international graduate students as their lives unfolded across time and experience in the second languaculture. Furthermore, it was aimed at exploring what role is attributed to second language in this process. The study relied on the mainstream sociocultural perspectives on individual development that originated from Vygotsky’s work and were further elaborated by his followers to address the issues of identity and language development of second language learners. As part of such perspectives, it integrated the unit of perezhivanie into the examination of individual experiences in a new languaculture and explored how perezhivanie as related to different aspects of such experiences figured in transforming identity and second language development. The dissertation employed qualitative methodology, such as in-depth interviews, reflection journals collected over the course of five months, and a focus group, to explore the experiences of five individuals and how the participants made meaning of themselves with regard to such experiences in the context of the U.S. The findings are discussed in relation to the participants’ experiences with second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic practices, and personal life, which appeared to play prominent roles in their identity development in the second languaculture. The data revealed that the issues related to the second language were
particularly meaningful indicators of identity development of the non-native speaking graduate students. However, such issues figured differently in each participant’s identity. In some cases, the meanings that the individuals attributed to their English language competence changed over time as a result of internal work of consciousness in the process of *perezhivanie*. Furthermore, it was found that the individuals’ intentions to adjust in the second lenguaculture did not necessarily imply that they were willing to adapt to it by absorbing new cultural forms. Instead, in some cases, they were able to find their safe place and restore a psychological equilibrium in the new cultural context by engaging with the cultural practices of their native country that were available to them in the context of the U.S. The data also revealed that the participants’ engagement with academic activity, as a meaningful aspect of their emotional experiences, played a prominent role in their overall identity formation in the U.S. and allowed them to integrate into the broader culture of the U.S. Finally, the participants’ emotional experiences in the second lenguaculture depended much on their intentionality to engage with informal social networks in the context of the U.S. It was also found that the female individuals’ inability to realize goals in personal life evoked strong emotions and internal conflicts that shaped their perceptions of themselves and the surrounding world in the ways not found for the male participants.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am truly indebted to the five participants of this dissertation study who openly shared their experiences with me. I want to thank them for volunteering and dedicating their time for this research. Their involvement, enthusiasm, and insightful reflections were tremendous in completing this dissertation.

Last, but not least, I wish to thank my sister, Oxana Clarke, who has accompanied me on my journey of exploration. Her consistent support and encouragement have been invaluable to my doctorate and my life.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Aleksandr and Nina Dema, who have always supported me throughout my doctoral journey and life and encouraged me in my moments of crisis. Your unconditional love, wisdom, and good examples have inspired me and given me courage and strength to chase my dreams. I could not have done it without you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................... iii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ....................................................................................................... v

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................... vi

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................................... xii

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................... xiii

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1
  Overview and Statement of the Problem .............................................................................. 1
  Focus of the Study .................................................................................................................. 2
  Non-native English Language Speaker Identity .................................................................... 3
  Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................. 5
  Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 6
  Definitions of Terms ............................................................................................................ 6
  Organization of Dissertation ............................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW .......... 10
  Sociocultural Perspectives ................................................................................................. 10
    Introduction to the Vygotskian Aspects of What Has Become Known as Sociocultural Theory ................................................................. 12
    Sociocultural Activity and Higher Mental Functions ....................................................... 12
  Second Language Acquisition and Sociocultural Theory .................................................. 13
    Mediation and Second Language Development .............................................................. 14
      Mediation Through Private Speech .............................................................................. 16
    The Zone of Proximal Development and SLA ............................................................... 18
    Internalization in L2 Learners ......................................................................................... 21
    Thinking for Speaking in Second Language Development .............................................. 23
  Activity Theory .................................................................................................................. 25
    Activity Theory and Second Language Learning ............................................................ 27
  Sociocultural Perspectives on Identity .............................................................................. 28
    Origins of Identity in Cultural-Historical Psychology ................................................... 28
    Sociocultural Perspectives on Identity ........................................................................... 30

Perezhivanie ......................................................................................................................... 37
    Unity of Surrounding Conditions and Individual Characteristics ................................. 38
    Unity of Affect and Cognition ......................................................................................... 39
    Meaningful Experience ................................................................................................... 40
    Porazhivanie as Resolving a Crisis ................................................................................. 41
    Perezhivanie as a Productive Activity ............................................................................ 42
    Perezhivanie and Imagination ....................................................................................... 43
    Perezhivanie: the Past and the Future ........................................................................... 44
    Perezhivanie and Second Language Identity .................................................................. 44
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 61
Purpose of the Study ........................................................................ 61
Worldview ......................................................................................... 61
Qualitative Design ........................................................................... 62
Multiple-Case Study Design ............................................................... 63
Sociocultural Theoretical Perspectives .............................................. 65
Selection of Participants ................................................................... 65
Participant Profiles .......................................................................... 67
Data Collection Procedures ............................................................... 67
Timeline of Research Activities ......................................................... 68
Skype ............................................................................................... 69
Language of Data ............................................................................. 70
One-on-One Interviews .................................................................... 71
Focus Group Interview ..................................................................... 72
Reflection Journals .......................................................................... 74
Data Analysis ................................................................................... 75
Role of Researcher ............................................................................ 77
Limitations ....................................................................................... 78
Ethical Considerations ..................................................................... 78

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS ...................................................................... 80
Organization .................................................................................... 80
Profile ............................................................................................ 80
Timeline of Events .......................................................................... 80
Themes ............................................................................................ 81
Second Language Issues ................................................................. 82
Navigation Between Cultures ......................................................... 82
Academic Activity ........................................................................... 83
Personal Life ..................................................................................... 83
Case 1 – Maria ................................................................................. 83
Maria’s Profile ................................................................................. 83
Second Language Issues ................................................................. 85
Challenges as Related to Second Language ..................................... 86
Academic Language ....................................................................... 86
Everyday Language ........................................................................ 88
Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development ......................................................... 89
Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language .................................... 92
Navigation Between Cultures ......................................................... 95
Challenges in the New Culture ....................................................... 96
Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies .................................... 97
Preserving Russian Cultural Identity .............................................. 98
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS ................................................................. 200

Organization ........................................................................................................... 200

Second Language Issues ....................................................................................... 201
  Second Language Identity ..................................................................................... 201
  *Perezhivanie* as Related to Second Language and Identity ...................... 204
  Second Language Development ....................................................................... 207

Navigation Between Cultures .................................................................................. 211
  Identity Development in Cross-Cultural Contexts ......................................... 211
  *Perezhivanie* as Related to Identity in Cross-Cultural Context ............... 214

Academic Activity ..................................................................................................... 216
  Academic Identity Development ....................................................................... 216
  *Perezhivanie* as Related to Academic Practices ....................................... 218

Personal Life .............................................................................................................. 221
  The Impact of Personal Life on Identity ........................................................ 221
Perezhivanie as Related to Personal Life .......................................................... 224
Summary ........................................................................................................... 225

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS ........................................... 227
Conclusions .................................................................................................... 227
Implications and Future Research ................................................................. 231

APPENDIX A ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .................................... 233
APPENDIX B FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ................................. 236
APPENDIX C REFLECTION JOURNAL PROMPTS ............................................ 237
APPENDIX D SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ACROSS THE CASES ............ 238
REFERENCES .................................................................................................. 241
CURRICULUM VITAE ....................................................................................... 256
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Participant Profiles</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Timeline of Research Activities</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>One-on-One Interviews</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Reflection Journals</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10</td>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11</td>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12</td>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14</td>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15</td>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16</td>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 18</td>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 19</td>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 20</td>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 21</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 22</td>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 23</td>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 24</td>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 25</td>
<td>Personal Life</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Timeline of Events for Maria</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Timeline of Events for Victoria</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Timeline of Events for Denys</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Timeline of Events for Anna</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Timeline of Events for Alexander</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview and Statement of the Problem

In recent decades, the United States has experienced a prominent influx of immigrants. People leave their countries due to various reasons, either by choice or necessity, to come to the U.S. temporarily or reside in this country for good. Among the most common reasons why immigrants choose the U.S. are greater work opportunities, better education, political asylum, higher standards of living, etc. In most cases, immigration is challenging and is accompanied by profound transformations in all aspects of a person’s life. Instead of familiar social settings and cultural practices, in which an individual is normally engaged in his or her country of origin, he or she has to face a different sociocultural environment and seek new cultural and linguistic affiliations and sources of support to adapt to the new languaculture. This may be a burdensome process that takes years in some cases and a lifetime in others.

Every newcomer’s experience is linked to the concept of identity development that is caused by the relocation to a new country and the change in activities. A transformation of an individual’s identity depends on his/her perceptions of himself/herself and the choices that he/she makes based on them, and thus determines in large part whether he/she will succeed or fail to succeed in the new country. The process of identity development is complex and multidimensional. As such, it is accompanied by a range of feelings and emotions that lead an individual to the reevaluation of his/her prior values and ideals in an attempt to reach a balance in his/her emotional state. In this struggle, new identity options emerge and choices are made. The process of identity formation of individuals who relocate to a new country is significantly impacted by the new language use, as in most cases language presents a considerable obstacle in
entering a new language culture. Regardless of the means of the English language acquisition and the settings, whether formal or informal, such individuals can be considered second language learners as they actively develop their English language skills in the U.S.

**Focus of the Study**

Whereas identity development is an issue of concern in the case of every individual who comes to a new country for various reasons, the focus of this dissertation is on individuals who move to the United States to pursue a university degree in various areas of study. In recent decades, educational opportunities in the U.S. have been a compelling magnet for those willing to receive quality education. The annual Open Doors (2014) report shows a strong increase in the enrollment of international students in U.S. institutions during the past several years, which proves the fact that the U.S. continues to be one of the most popular destinations among international students and a number one choice as an excellent investment in their prospective careers. According to the Open Doors (2014) report, the 2013-2014 academic year marked an 8%-increase in the population of international students in the U.S. in comparison to a year ago. The enrollment of international students in 2014 reached 886,052. Among countries from which there has been a considerable influx of students in recent years are Brazil, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, and Spain. Statistical numbers also show that there are more international students in graduate programs than undergraduate ones with this gap slowly narrowing. The number of international applications to graduate schools has been increasing steadily for the last nine years (Open Doors, 2014).

Whereas generally statistical numbers are the center of attention in educational communities, few reports focus on the psychological aspects of the relocation of such students to the U.S., coping with language issues, and embracing the culture of U.S. academia. Despite the
fact that they come to the U.S. voluntarily and thus accomplish their educational goals, which is a positive influence on their identities, such individuals go through periods of internal struggle and negotiation of choices, perceptions, and emotions due to a great change in the cultural environments and activities in which they were previously engaged and the ones that they encounter in the new languaculture.

In order to expand the body of literature that examines the issues mentioned above, this study focuses on international students who move across geographical boarders and immerse themselves in new cultural, linguistic, and academic environments of the U.S. Specifically, the individuals of interest are international students from Russia who relocated to the Unites States to pursue graduate degrees. As is further explained, some of them had already completed their degrees and found jobs in the U.S. whereas others were still students at the time of data collection who planned to apply for jobs upon completion of their degrees and continue their journeys in the U.S.

**Non-Native English Language Speaker Identity**

Identity construction is an ongoing process of creating a new sense of self under the influence of multiple dimensions: race, ethnicity, age, gender, geographical locale, social class, etc. Identity is better understood when all of these aspects are considered together rather than examined separately (Pavlenko, 2003). Due to the fact that individuals need to balance and negotiate diverse contexts in their lives and move from one state or condition to another because of different contextual surroundings, identity is not something stable and fixed, but it is “fragmented and contested in nature” (Block, 2007). According to Block (2007), “when individuals move across geographic and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that they enter periods of struggle to reach a balance” (p.
This also supports Bhabha’s (1994) approach to a fragmented nature of identity through which he introduces the concept of “hybridity” and the “third place”, which makes it possible for a different or alternative identity to emerge. Some researchers including Gunesch (2004) and Schaetti and Ramsey (2006) connect the concept of identity with a state of “liminality”, which means that individuals “occupy the space ‘in-between’ the ending of one set of attachment and the beginning of the next” (Gunesch, 2004, p. 261). On the other hand, Block (2007) defines identity in terms of a “half-and-half proposition” stating that “an individual becomes half of what he or she was and half of what he or she has been exposed to” (p. 864). The notion of “nearness and farness” proposed by Papastergiadis (2000) also describes the process of identity formation and metaphorically points to the state of feeling “near” this or that sociocultural group, but at the same time with feelings of “not belonging” to the group.

Whereas Block (2007), Bhabha (1994), and Papastergiadis (2000) view identity as multifaceted and contested in nature yet a holistic entity which displays various sides in diverse contexts and the construction of which is accompanied by the constant negotiation of difference, resolving conflicts, and choosing between options, other researchers emphasize the existence of multiple identities in a person simultaneously. Grimshaw and Sears (2008), for example, compare identity with a pack of cards. According to Grimshaw and Sears (2008), “social actors can play a particular identity card in order to manage the impression that they make upon a specific interlocutor” (p. 271).

Another issue central to the understanding of the concept of identity is whether we view identity as ‘chosen’ and constructed solely by an individual through the practices he/she engages in or whether it is imposed on individuals by others and to what extent. “Whenever we talk about identity, we need to differentiate between ‘achieved’ or ‘inhabited’ identity – the identity people
themselves articulate or claim – and ‘ascribed’ or ‘attributed’ identity – the identity given to someone by someone else” (Blommaert, 2006, p. 238).

Second language learners almost by definition are concerned with the negotiation of identities and how identities are constructed when people are exposed to a foreign culture. Obviously, their position is different from that of native speakers who acquire the language in a natural setting. Second language learners construct identity not necessarily in tandem with learning a new language, which makes the process of identity development very complex. For instance, adult immigrants form their identities at a much older age. As part of this process, they have to negotiate identities developed earlier with those associated with the second language and culture. More research is needed to investigate the processes of identity formation and transformation through exposure to a second languaculture, what opportunities and challenges language learners face in the new sociocultural environment, and how they affect such individuals’ identity formation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is, by employing sociocultural theoretical perspectives, to examine the process of identity development of non-native English language speaking adults who came to the United States from Russia to pursue a graduate degree. As an integral aspect of this process, the research is aimed at understanding the role of English language proficiency in identity formation of such individuals. Importantly, the study employs a unified sociocultural theoretical framework that considers both cognitive and affective dimensions of individual development to explore the issues of identity and second language development of such a population. Particularly, it integrates the unit of emotional experience, known within the sociocultural theoretical framework as *perezhivanie*, in order to examine how individuals
construct meanings of themselves and the surroundings through subjective experiences in which affective elements are inseparable from cognitive and sociocultural environmental dimensions.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation study attempts to answer the following questions about the topic of identity development in Russian graduate students who immigrated to the U.S.:

1. How does sociocultural theory inform the process of identity formation of international graduate students through exposure to a second language/culture?
2. What role in the process of identity formation is attributed to a second language?

**Definitions of Terms**

*International graduate student* is an individual who has moved to a foreign country to pursue a M.A. or Ph.D. degree in any area of study.

*Non-native English language speaker* is an individual who speaks English as a second language and comes from a non-English speaking background and country.

*English language learner (ELL)* is an individual whose first language is other than English but who has achieved a certain level of proficiency in English, although still needs specialized instruction in the English language. The term “English language learner” is often used interchangeably with “non-native English language speaker”.

*First language (L1)* is a native language; refers to the language learned from birth.

*Second language (L2)* is a non-native language; refers to contexts where the language is spoken outside the home country settings. Second language is different from foreign language. The later refers to the language that is not spoken in the immediate environment of the learner. “Second language” term can refer to a third, fourth, etc. language that an individual learns in the contexts outside the home country settings.
Identity (social science definition) is “the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group.” (Wikipedia)

Sociocultural context (also called sociocultural environment) refers to the setting or milieu where people live, communicate with other people, engage in activities and interact with the culture. Sociocultural context is viewed by Vygotsky (1978) as a primary and critical factor in the development of advanced forms of thinking/feeling.

Languaculture is a term introduced by Michael Agar, an American anthropologist, in 1995. According to Agar, language and culture are parts of the same whole since language use cannot be understood outside the cultural milieu where it is used. Specifically, in order to understand and explain the nature of a linguistic system, which includes sounds, symbols, gestures, etc., used by members of a community for communication it is necessary to consider belief systems, rules, conventions, and behaviors that guide this community (Agar, 1995). The concept of languaculture is useful in the construction of an understanding of the relationship between language, culture and society in a globalizing world (Risager, 2005).

Second languaculture combines the notions of second language and second culture and points to the fact that the two are inseparable phenomena.

Activity is a sociocultural practice, such as people’s interaction with each other and with objects (socioculturally constructed artifacts). Activity in a broader sense refers to participation in a social practice. Within sociocultural framework, activity is used to describe “aspects of social practice that are believed to provide conditions for psychological development” (Hedegaard, Chaiklin, & Jensen, 1999, p. 19).
Perezhivanie is a particular form of internal activity directed at resolving an inner conflict, restoring a psychological equilibrium and constructing new personal meanings that serve as an indication of individual development (Vygotsky, 1994).

**Organization of Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter one provides background information on the issues of non-native English language speaking graduate students in the U.S. and their identity development in the context of a new country. This chapter also introduces the focus and purpose of the study, an overview of the notion of identity, research questions, definitions of key terms, and organization of the dissertation.

Chapter two provides a description of the theoretical framework adopted in the study and reviews related literature. This chapter includes sections on major components of sociocultural theory such as mediation, private speech, the zone of proximal development, internalization, thinking for speaking, sociocultural activity, and activity theory, and discusses how each of them contributes to the explanation of issues surrounding the development of second language and identity of non-native speakers of English. Furthermore, this chapter incorporates an in-depth discussion of the role of affect, and ultimately, *perezhivanie* in such processes.

Chapter three of the dissertation outlines the methodology for the study. It indicates the rationale for a qualitative multiple-case study approach and discusses the process of participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. This chapter also includes the discussion of the role of the researcher, ethical issues, and methodological limitations of the study.

Chapter four contains the findings presented separately for each participant. The analysis of each case is organized around the four themes: *second language issues; navigation between*
cultures; academic activity; and personal life. Each of the four themes, including subthemes, within each case is first outlined in a tabular form to help organize the major findings that emerged in the course of data analysis. The tables are followed by in-depth descriptions and analyses of each theme that include excerpts from the data to illustrate main points.

Chapter five offers a discussion of the findings introduced in chapter four through the lens of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and the literature reviewed in chapter two of this dissertation. Consistent with the organization of the findings in chapter four, the discussion of the findings in this chapter is presented in four sections: second language issues; navigation between cultures; academic practices; and personal life. Each of the four sections synthesizes the findings across the five participants and discusses issues of identity development as related to each of the above aspects of the sociocultural activity in the U.S. languaculture.

The final chapter is devoted to the discussion of conclusions as well as implications and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Sociocultural Perspectives

Sociocultural theory (SCT, 1978), rooted in the works of Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, has become increasingly popular in the field of applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, and second language research (Lantolf, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Watson, 1999; Wertsch, 1985, 1991, etc.). Although SCT is oftentimes associated with Vygotsky’s research, Vygotsky himself did not use this term. A scientific problem that Vygotsky tried to explain in his works was human development and the difference between humans and animals (Vygotsky, 1929). Together with A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev, Vygotsky founded a new “instrumental” or “cultural-historical” psychology, currently formulated by some as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which focused on mediation of actions through tools that play a central role in the formation of “the cultural habit of behavior” (Miller & Chen, 2005). Later, signs and acquired knowledge are passed over to the next generation. Thus, humans’ development can be viewed as a social and cultural-historical process (Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1999). Ironically, the ideas rooted in the Russian cultural-historical psychology were adopted in the West, while the terminology was abandoned. Instead, Wertsch (1985) introduced the term ‘sociocultural’ and encouraged its appropriation in the Western psychology (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The term ‘sociocultural’ is widely used to refer to social and cultural contexts where human beings live, participate in activities, and interact with each other. Moreover, it is “heavily focused on the impact of culturally organized and socially enacted meanings on the formation and functioning of mental activity” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 2).
The first part of the following overview of the theoretical framework includes the explanation of the main facets of sociocultural theory and the application of the theory to second language development. The remainder of the chapter explores the origins of the concept of identity within the cultural-historical tradition; the discussion of the role of the affective component in an individual’s development represented by the category of perezhivanie (lived-through experience); and the application of the concept of personality and perezhivanie to non-native speaking individuals’ identity development.

The sociocultural theoretical perspective within applied linguistics provides an elaborate framework to conceptualize cognitive development, language acquisition, and identity development of non-native speaking individuals. The process of language development for non-native speakers of a foreign language can be never-ending. Even advanced users of English (such as graduate students at U.S. institutions or recent M.A. or Ph.D. degree graduates) from time to time face moments of struggle in putting across their thoughts or grasping ideas expressed by native speakers, especially when colloquial language is used or when pragmatics are different. Moreover, high academic expectations imposed on such individuals can exclusively be met if one is highly skilled in both oral and written modes of language, as one can only demonstrate his/her proficiency in the discipline and establish credibility as a capable student or competent professional through language. As indicated in research (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2008), the above puts enormous psychological burden on such individuals and inevitably affects the way they view the surrounding world and position themselves in it. In order to understand how SCT contributes to the understanding of non-native speaker identity development issues, first it is necessary to clarify how SCT explains second language development, the process that is directly related to second language identity formation.
Introduction to the Vygotskian Aspects of What Has Become Known as Sociocultural Theory

The arrival of sociocultural perspectives, such as Vygotsky’s, has opened a new era in understanding of the formation and functioning of mental activity. SCT rejects the traditional school of thought that views thinking as activating of inborn abilities as a reflex-like behavior, and instead is heavily focused on the impact of social milieu on cognitive growth. Lantolf and Appel (1994), who have been strong proponents and interpreters of Vygotsky’s work as applied to the field of second language acquisition (SLA), wrote:

Although biological factors constitute the necessary prerequisite for elementary processes to emerge, sociocultural factors, in contrast, constitute the necessary condition for the elementary natural processes to develop. In other words, development does not proceed solely, or even primarily, as the unfolding of inborn faculties, but as the transformation of these innately specified processes once they intertwine with socioculturally determined factors. (p. 5).

Whereas various theories of cognitive development do not reject the fact that social contexts contribute to mental development, Vygotsky saw sociocultural context as a primary and critical factor in the development of advanced forms of thinking. The major distinction of Vygotsky’s theory from the traditional cognitive ones is that according to sociocultural views “the social dimension of consciousness [i.e. all mental processes] is primary in time and fact. The individual dimension of consciousness is derivative and secondary” (Vygotsky, 1979, p. 30).

Sociocultural Activity and Higher Mental Functions

Vygotsky proposed that activity is an important prerequisite of the development of human consciousness. By activity, he meant sociocultural practices, such as people’s interaction with
each other and with objects (socioculturally constructed artifacts). For Vygotsky (1978), the development of higher forms of mental activity is possible through mediational capacities of tools and signs, such as language, that have been culturally constructed and passed from prior generations. The tools necessary for human mental development are provided by the culture and represent elements of the culture. The child’s development is to a great extent dependent on the nature of tools, both physical and mental, available. Both, first language development and second language learning can be viewed as sociocultural activities mediated by the social contexts and the learning environment where they take place.

Second Language Acquisition and Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural approaches, such as Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, entered the SLA research arena in the 1980s and gained their popularity among researchers of second language acquisition in the mid-1990s. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory considers language development as a socially situated process and emphasizes the importance of engaging in social interaction for language development to occur. Similar to other cognitive processes, language development takes place when the mediational tools and sign systems (e.g., language) provided by sociocultural contexts are adapted in the course of meaningful activity. Then “learners gain control over their own mental activity and [...] begin function independently” (Zuengler & Miller, 2006, p. 39).

Adopting a sociocultural perspective to second language research helps examine and analyze second or foreign language development as a sociocultural activity where learners interact with a social learning environment and are actively involved in gaining understanding and constructing meaning. In order to understand the impact of sociocultural theory on second language research, it is necessary to review primary concepts of sociocultural theory, such as
mediation, the zone of proximal development, internalization, private speech, inner speech, and thinking for speaking as related to second language development. Although oftentimes these concepts are discussed separately, they are closely interrelated and understanding of each of them is not possible without understanding of the others.

**Mediation and Second Language Development**

Mediation, one of the main concepts of sociocultural theory, helps explain how the development of consciousness occurs (Vygotsky, 1978). The central idea of mediation is that human mind is mediated. Vygotsky argued that human higher mental functions are mediated by sociocultural tools and signs (such as language) adopted by an individual in order to reach a goal. In defining mediation, Kozulin (1990), one of the important interpreters of Vygotsky’s work, connects external and internal planes and states that external sociocultural activities are transformed into internal, mental functioning through the use of tools, i.e. mediation, which is a mechanism of cognitive transformation.

Vygotsky distinguished between mechanical (physical) and psychological (symbolic) tools. Individuals use both physical and symbolic tools to establish a mediated relationship between themselves and the world. For Vygotsky, mechanical tools are created by people under the influence of specific cultural and historical contexts. Psychological tools, in contrast, are artifacts that serve “for directing and controlling their physical and mental behavior” (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 8). Language activities, writing, and speaking are the primary symbolic mediational means that humans use for mediating between the external world and their minds. However, the mediational processes occurring in first language development and those typical for second or foreign language learning are different. When children acquire their first language they rely on their linguistic experiences in their native language and the immediate objects in the
environment to provide connections to concepts and words. However, when learning a foreign
language, individuals use their first language as a mediator between the immediate objects and
the language that they are learning (Vygotsky, 1986). In particular, language learners rely on
their native language semantics that serve as a foundation for acquisition of new language forms,
at least initially. Thus, learning a foreign language is to some extent dependent on the level of the
native language development. Ushakova (1994) conducted a study in which a group of native
speakers of Russian were asked to memorize 20 words in an artificial language. The findings
showed that the participants significantly relied on their first language when working on the task.
In particular, in order to memorize the articulations and meanings of the words, they tried to
integrate them into the phonological and semantic systems of the Russian language. However, it
is worth noting that language learners incorporate the second language into the classification
system available in the first language only until they recognize that linguistic categories of the
second language do not conform to the arrangement of their native language.

There are two types of person-related symbolic mediation that are applicable to second
language acquisition: other-mediation and self-mediation (Aimin, 2013; Bruner, 1986). Other-
mediation is mediation through dialoguing with others who are more knowledgeable and
experienced in the second language. By using scaffolding and other support systems, individuals
in the role of mediators can help language learners transform new language material from the
interpsychological to the intrapsychological plane and advance themselves to higher levels of
language proficiency. Mediation between peer language learners, similar to expert-novice
mediation, has proved to promote language development (Donato, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Ohta,
2001). Donato’s (1994) study on peer interaction among French as a second language learners
working on a language task as a group indicates that individuals working collaboratively formed
a “collective expert” and thus were able to complete the task that they were unable to accomplish individually as expressed by Lantolf & Thorne (2006).

**Mediation Through Private Speech**

Whereas other-mediation is dialoguing with the other, self-mediation in second language development refers to dialoguing with the self, which includes such important aspects as private speech and inner speech (Aimin, 2013; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky distinguished between three forms of speech: external (social) speech, private speech, and inner speech. External speech is regular communication in which people engage to talk to each other. Private speech, in contrast to social speech, is external speaking directed to the self for the purpose of self-regulation (Diaz & Berk, 1992). Lantolf (2000) defines private speech as “speech in which we ask ourselves questions, answer these questions, tell ourselves to interrupt a particular activity, tell ourselves we are wrong or that we cannot do something, and that we have completed a task” (p. 15). When an individual has achieved self-regulation private speech transforms into inner speech, which is inaudible:

> Inner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech - it is a function in itself. It still remains speech, i.e. thought connected with words. But while in external speech thought is embodied in words, in inner speech words die as they bring forth thought. Inner speech is to a large extent thinking in pure meanings. (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 149).

The use of private speech, as a mediational means, has been observed among learners of a second language working on a language task and documented in research studies (Ahmed, 1994; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985; Lantolf, DiCamilla, & Ahmed, 1997; McCafferty, 1994b). It has been found that second language learners produce private speech in the form of talking or whispering to themselves in order to facilitate problem solving (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, Donato
DiCamilla and Antón (2004) analyzed private speech of adult Spanish language learners working on a collaborative task to produce a composition in Spanish. The data were collected from fourteen pairs of students enrolled in beginning, intermediate, and advanced classes of Spanish. The analysis of the data collected from three sessions of the Spanish composition class revealed that the participants used private speech in its different forms as described in second language literature. Their speech was marked with low volume, mumbling, whispering, etc. The students also asked themselves questions; answered their own questions; repeated language forms to themselves; and gave themselves commands. DiCamilla and Antón (2004) argued that the language learners working on the writing task used the above forms of language for thinking. In particular, private speech helped them focus attention and create the psychological distance necessary for completing the task. Focusing and distancing themselves from others helped the participants “set cognitive activity in motion” and generate new ideas, words, and language expressions (Sigel, 1993, p. 143).

Lantolf’s (1985) study that aimed at investigating private speech of adult English and Spanish language learners presented the findings similar to the those of DiCamilla and Antón’s (2004) study reviewed above. In particular, it was found that adult language learners use private speech when they are challenged by a difficult task and seek control over it. By engaging in private speech, language learners experiment with the language before using it freely and with confidence. Another finding of the same study as well as two more studies conducted by Lantolf and Frawley (1984) and Frawley and Lantolf (1985) at about the same time compared the use of private speech by first and second language learners. In each of the studies it was found that adult language learners’ private speech is analogous to private speech of children developing
their first language.

The findings of a more recent study, conducted by Ohta (2001) who investigated private speech of seven first and second year Japanese language learners, revealed three features of private speech: 1) vicarious response, i.e. the response produced by students covertly or in their minds when the question is addressed to another student or the whole class; 2) repetition, which Ohta (2001) defines as covert repetition after the teacher, another learner, or him/herself in a low voice; and 3) manipulation, that is, repetition of linguistic forms and structures in order to manipulate and experiment with grammatical, morphological, and semantic features. All of these forms of private speech indicate that language learners at various levels of language proficiency engage in private speech by speaking to themselves, which facilitates internalization of language.

The brief review of the studies above demonstrates that second language learners at different levels of language proficiency, when challenged by a new language, use private speech in the target language as a problem-solving or mediational tool in order to plan, guide, monitor, and gain control over the performance of language activity.

**The Zone of Proximal Development and SLA**

The concept of mediation through psychological tools discussed above allows us to formulate the distinction between two levels of an individual cognitive (as well as second language) development, i.e. actual and potential. The difference between these two levels is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Actual development, according to Vygotsky, is the level at which a child can solve problems without guidance and support of a more
knowledgeable individual, in other words what he/she can do independently. The potential level of development means that the child can achieve a higher level of development, that is, perform mental functioning above the level of his/her current development with assistance from a more knowledgeable other. The independent performance on the actual developmental level is possible due to the fact that past acts have been accumulated, practiced, and stabilized, whereas on the potential level of development they have not been stabilized yet. Johnson (2004) presented the idea of the ZPD as a mathematical formula: “The potential level minus the actual level equals the zone of proximal development” (p. 109, emphasis in original). However, the above interpretation, though useful in itself, leaves out an important point as related to the concept of the ZPD, particularly – the idea of actual mediation - that it differs with individuals and contexts, which means that in some contexts it may not exist at all.

Vygotsky’s notion of the ZPD sheds new light on the current understanding of the processes involved in second or foreign language acquisition. The study conducted by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) attempted to apply the construct of the ZPD to SLA by examining types of teacher’s corrective feedback (ranging from less to more explicit) on L2 learners’ writing within the ZPD. The researchers concluded that learners with visibly similar levels of actual development may vary in their ZPDs and thus may need different kinds of assistance. The teacher’s role is to evaluate and determine the minimum level of assistance necessary for a learner to accomplish the task effectively. The assistance offered by the instructor needs to be graduated, i.e. from less explicit to more explicit assistance, depending on the student’s progress; and contingent, which means that it should be offered only when the student needs it and should be minimized when the learner’s performance starts improving, which indicates that he/she is gaining control over his/her performance in the task (Lantolf, 1994).
Another application of the construct of the ZPD is discussed in Washburn’s (1998) study where she examined the underlying differences in fossilized and non-fossilized language learners. Similar to Aljaafreh and Lantolf’s (1994) study, Washburn’s (1998) exploration of fossilized vs. non-fossilized language behavior advocates for focusing on the learner’s ZPD rather than the actual performance as the roots of fossilization lie in the ZPD. The findings of the study indicate that the students, who continuously made the same kind of mistake in language forms, were eventually able to produce the correct forms with appropriate assistance, which implies that these students are still able to improve, and the development takes place at potential rather than actual levels. Thus, fossilization, though a stabilized feature of language behavior, is possible to overcome with a special type of mediated assistance in the learner’s ZPD.

Lantolf (2000) notes that whereas a considerable amount of research emphasizes that the progression to higher mental functioning within the zone of proximal development is driven by social interaction between a novice and an expert (for example, children’s interaction with parents or teachers), the concept of the ZPD can also be applied to the process of knowledge construction through interaction between peers (for example, students working as a group). Lantolf (2000) further explains this idea by stating that “people working jointly are able to co-construct contexts in which expertise emerges as a feature of the group” (p.17). He continues by defining the ZPD as “the collaborative construction of opportunities for individuals to develop their mental abilities” (p. 17).

An example of collaborative linguistic knowledge construction within the ZPD is discussed in Ohta’s (2001) study that focused on a collaborative peer interaction of two Japanese language learners working on three different tasks. Among the three assignments, the translation task yielded the most interesting insights into students’ foreign language development in the
ZPD as it resulted in particularly enhanced communication and collaborative assistance between the two students. The important finding of this study was that the partners in the dyad could sense implicit signals from one another indicating that the help was needed; and could intuitively understand when the partner had gained self-regulation in the task and the assistance was not needed any more. Thus, consistent with the notion of the ZPD, the learner who was not able to accomplish the task on her own at first was able to gain control over the task as a result of peer-mediated help in the ZPD and complete it independently. Despite the fact that in general one of the learners provided more assistance than the other the more proficient learner benefitted from the participation in the task as well as a result of engaging in a language learning activity that entailed explicit analysis and discussion of linguistic forms.

The idea of peer collaboration in the ZPD has also been discussed in relation to an individual’s identity construction in the ZPD, which, similar to cognitive and language development, is a collaborative process taking place as a result of participation in a joint activity. As a higher psychological function, individual identity develops in the zone constituted by social conditions (Fuhrer, 2004). It originates first on the social plane as a culturally shared cognition; then it is negotiated and reshaped through the acquisition of mediational tools; finally, it becomes internalized and self-regulated.

**Internalization in L2 Learners**

The concept of internalization is closely related to mediation and the zone of proximal development and has been implied in the sections discussed above. It is known as one of Vygotsky’s key concepts relevant to the construction of knowledge through social interaction. Internalization is the “convergence of thinking with culturally created mediational artifacts, above all those which are linguistically organized (for example, conversations, metaphors,
narratives, poetry, writing, etc.) [...] or the reconstruction on the inner, psychological plane, of socially mediated external forms of goal-directed activity” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 13). For Vygotsky, internalization of such artifacts leads to the development of higher thinking functions. The idea of internalization is reflected in Vygotsky’s general genetic law of cultural development. According to the law, internalization starts with social interaction or engaging in social activity, i.e. other-regulation. This process, then, results in self-regulation, when patterns of a social (interpersonal) activity are reconstructed, self-organized, and transformed to the intrapersonal plane. In his discussion of internalization, Leontiev (1978) noted that it is “not the transferal of an external activity to a preexisting internal plane of consciousness” but rather “the process in which the plane is formed” (as cited in Wertsch & Stone, 1985, p. 163). Vygotsky noted that although the process of internalization originates on the interpersonal plane, it is by no means an exact copy of the interpersonal plane. Instead, “internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions” (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163). Thus, due to the transformation, the behavior on the intrapersonal plane reflects the behavior on the interpersonal plane, but does not replicate it.

Gal’perin (1967), Vygotsky’s student and later colleague, distinguished between three levels of internalization: a) making an external action maximally explicit; b) transference of its representation to audible speech; c) transference of its representation to inner speech (as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p. 66). Audible speech in the above is also referred to as private speech. Private speech, discussed earlier, being a semiotic tool that mediates mental processes, plays an important role in the internalization process. The transformation of private speech into inner speech serves as an indication of achieved self-regulation and internalization.
De Guerrero (1994) discussed implications of the relation of inner speech to L2 acquisition by examining mental rehearsal, which is an important practice used by L2 learners as a way to covertly practice their foreign language. The study of inner speech used by L2 learners helps shed light on how second language learners express their thoughts and comprehend the language. De Guerrero (1994) pointed out that due to the fact that inner speech originates verbal thought, it spreads into all four modes of language (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in which an L2 learner is engaged. An important finding of De Guerrero’s (1994) study on form and function of adult language learners’ inner speech was the idea that the more L2 input students get and the more advanced their level of L2 proficiency, the more elaborate and complex their L2 inner speech is (in terms of both form and function).

**Thinking for Speaking in Second Language Development**

One of the concepts that connect inner speech and second language development is thinking for speaking. The theory of thinking for speaking was introduced by Slobin (1987) to refer to the idea that in the act of communication speakers organize their thinking to conform to the organizational requirements of the language they speak. “The expression of experience in linguistic terms constitutes thinking for speaking – a special form of thought that is mobilized for communication” (Slobin, 2003, p. 76). Slobin continued that “thinking for speaking involves picking those characteristics of objects and events that (a) fit some conceptualization of the event, and (b) are readily encodable in the language” (ibid.). In other words, in the act of speaking we “filter” our experiencing of the world to verbalize it in the linguistic categories (grammatical and lexical) that are available in the language. According to Slobin (2003), children developing their native language acquire particular forms of thinking for speaking. Speakers of different languages have varying patterns of thinking for speaking that are language
specific. The activity of second language learning thus entails learning new ways in which the second language categorizes and conceptualizes the world - new ways of thinking for speaking. These new ways of conceptualizing the world are mentally stored by second language learners for future speaking, thus making thinking for present speaking become thinking for potential speaking (Slobin, 2003).

The theory of thinking for speaking is an elaborated version of an older hypothesis introduced by Sapir and Whorf (Sapir 1929, 1958) and known as the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis. While thinking for speaking focuses on the online process of thinking and language production, Sapir-Whorf’s hypothesis refers to the ideas that language influences and determines thought and that different languages affect thought differently. Moreover, culture is inseparable from this relationship. All of the three entities are “deeply interlocked”, thus resulting in language being “associated with a distinct worldview” (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996, p. 2). The channel that makes it possible to get insight into an individual’s worldview and identity is inner speech due to the fact that inner speech is comprised of both generalized meanings developed by the culture and personal understanding or sense of these meanings based on the individual’s unique experiences (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory supports the linguistic relativity hypothesis in that it also views language as a psychological tool that mediates thinking and leads to internalization and transformation of cognitive processing. The internalization of a new language or a new sign system results in the development of new cognitive processing and new inner speech specific for a given language. According to Lucy and Wertsch (1987), a language “provides its speakers with a ready-made classification of experience which may be used as a guide for thought. However, this linguistic classifications vary considerably across languages” (p. 73). The above idea provides an explanation why some of the
errors that language learners make in their speech tend to persist and why their speech patterns mistakenly follow conventions of their first language. “People tend to assume that categories and distinctions of their language are natural and common to all people. Typically, they are unaware that other languages are different substantively as well as formally” (ibid.). Thus, language learning can entail changing one’s cognition and acquiring new thinking patterns to use the target language effectively.

**Activity Theory**

Similar to Vygotsky, an important research problem for Leontiev, a Russian psychologist and one of Vygotsky’s colleagues, was to explain the specific aspects that differentiate human mind from animals. Trying to solve this problem, Leontiev (1978) formulated activity theory. Activity theory presents an important aspect of cultural-historical tradition as it helps shed light on the aspects of social practice that serve as prerequisite conditions for psychological development (Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1999).

… Not only can one point to the importance of social practice, as other research traditions have done … but with the activity concept (and associated concepts such as action, motive, goal, leading activity, and motive hierarchy), it is possible to provide an elaborated set of concepts that can be used to give a differentiated analysis of social practice. (Chaiklin et al., 1999, p. 19).

Even though Leontiev himself acknowledged that his theory is closely related to Vygotsky’s theory, the focus of activity theory is different from that of the mainstream sociocultural theory, initially formulated as CHAT. Whereas CHAT focuses on the progression from the interpsychological to intrapsychological plane as a result of mediation by cultural artifacts in a sociocultural context, activity theory takes human purposeful activity as a unit of
analysis and views it as the primary condition of the development of consciousness and the self within specific cultural-historical contexts. In other words, human mind and the self are “produced from within, out of, and … driven by the logic of evolving activity that connects individuals to the world, to other people, and to themselves” (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004, p. 486). By activity, Leontiev (1978) did not mean merely doing something, but it is doing something in order to fulfill a cultural need (e.g., the need to get promoted at work) or a biological need (e.g., the need for food).

Among other distinctive characteristics of activity theory is the hierarchical structure of an activity system, a feature specific to Leontiev’s activity theory but missing in the mainstream sociocultural theory, nor articulated as such by Vygotsky. Leontiev distinguished between three levels of abstraction, i.e. activity, actions, and operations. Activity, that presents the highest level of the hierarchy, is a human behavior that is inextricably linked to a motive, as motive serves as a driving force for activity (Leontiev, 1981a). Motives arise out of biological or cultural needs when the needs become object-oriented. In addition, motives are not simply based on human personal choices and decisions, but stem from human collaborative practices. At the second level, activity and motive are presented as actions and goals. Action is an intentional human behavior, or strategy employed by an individual and directed toward a specific goal. Individuals can use different actions to accomplish the same activity. Conversely, the same action can be used to fulfill different activities. At the third level, actions and goals are further conceived as operations and conditions. Operations, in contrast to actions, are associated with automatic, rather than intentional, modes of behavior and are carried out under certain material conditions.

In order to illustrate the application of activity theory framework to human development, I will analyze an activity of career advancement as an example. Using the theoretical concepts,
the first level is presented by the activity of getting promoted at work that is driven by the motive of increased benefits, improved job security, financial payoff, and self-satisfaction with one’s achievements. A more specific objective or goal, formulated on the second level of the hierarchy and reflecting the general motives, can be expanding knowledge and skills in the profession and acquiring the necessary qualifications in order to get a promotion at work. A purposeful action that can be performed to meet the goal is receiving an advanced academic degree in the related field. On the third level, the above action can be actualized through concrete operations, such as applying to a university and enrolling in classes. The conditions or circumstances constraining the realization of the goal may be availability of funds to pay for education and availability of the necessary program and degree at a local university. As mentioned above, the activity of career advancement can be realized by means of another strategy or action, driven by a different goal, depending on the circumstances. For instance, in order to get promoted at work one may need to learn a foreign language rather than receive an advanced degree. In this case, the operations and conditions will not be the same. In his conceptualization of activity theory, Leontiev, and later Engeström (1987), noted that internal contradictions and conflicts between the elements of activity within an activity system are inevitable and completely normal considering the nature of the human mind. Moreover, they are regarded as a driving force of transformation and development of human consciousness and the self (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999; Kozulin, 1998).

**Activity Theory and Second Language Learning**

Activity theory has been widely used as a lens to examine second language development processes (Ahmed, 1994; Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Duff, 1991; Gillette, 1994; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Wertsch, 1981, 1985, 1991). One of its major contributions is in the role that
activity theory assigns to agency, which may be defined as a way a person uses tools. In their discussion of the implications of activity theory to SLA, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) noted that SLA is “about much more than the acquisition of forms: it is about developing, or failing to develop new ways of mediating ourselves and our relationships” (p. 145). Thus, the concept of agency is crucial to understanding how language learners act when learning a foreign language.

In activity theory, agency is not a “personal possession” but something that is in the constant process of construction and negotiation, due to the influences of the surrounding culture and society (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In application to second language development, language learners construct agency through the use of mediational symbolic and material tools available in the culture as well as through participation in specific communities of practice. Learning strategies and motives for improving a foreign language may be different depending on an individual’s experiences and history.

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Identity**

**Origins of Identity in Cultural-Historical Psychology**

While identity was never directly discussed in Vygotsky’s texts, he was concerned with individual development, referred in his writings as “personality”, the understanding of which helps shed light on the developmental processes of what today we identify as the study of identity. In his short career, Vygotsky repeatedly referred to the category of personality as a fundamental concept of cultural-historical psychology although he did not have enough time to explore it in full. Despite the fact that the followers of the cultural-historical tradition agree on the importance of this concept for the understanding of human development, the category of personality has received relatively little attention in research. Throughout his work, Vygotsky used this term with slightly different meanings. However, all of the meanings are united by the
same idea, in particular, personality generally refers to human cultural development achieved through the self-regulation of emotions and behavior. “We are inclined to put an equal sign between the child’s personality and his cultural development” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 242). Vygotsky further indicated that “it [personality] is not innate, but arises as a result of cultural development because ‘personality’ is a historical concept. It encompasses unity of behavior that is marked by the trait of mastery” (ibid.). Interestingly, the semantics of the original word lechnost that stands for personality in the Russian language and was used by Vygotsky has a similar idea – that an individual is not born with personality but rather develops it. In the Russian language, it is incorrect to say: “She has a lechnost”. However, it is right to say: “She is a lechnost”, which indicates that she has become a lechnost rather than possessed it from birth.

Vygotsky also noted that personality develops only in adolescence due to the fact that an individual is capable of mastering higher psychological functions only as an adult.

Leontiev, who was also interested in the concept of personality, viewed personality as formed through an individual’s actions in an activity system. Leontiev (1978) wrote: “The real basis of personality is that special structure of the entire activity of the subject that occurs at a given stage of development of his human connections with the world” (p. 127), where the special structure of activity refers to “those hierarchical connections of motives that form the ‘knots’ of personality” (p. 126). Leontiev also noted that the hierarchy of an individual’s motives is often comprised of conflicting motives. The development is directed by how an individual handles the conflicting motives (Chaiklin, 2001). While Chaiklin’s (2001) example of conflicting motives refers to pupils facing a choice of attending a party or preparing for an exam, the following example refers to personality development of a non-native speaker of English in the U.S. A non-native speaking individual from Japan currently residing in the U.S. is invited to two different
parties – one by American friends and the other by her Japanese friends. Both of the parties are held on the same day, so, the student has to make a choice. The two options present conflicting motives for the non-native English-speaking individual. On the one hand, she wants to go to the American party, as her goal is to integrate better into U.S. culture and practice her English; on the other hand she would like to spend time with her Japanese friends as she bonds with them better and feels more relaxed in a company of native speakers of Japanese. Depending on the choice that she will make, and thus how she resolves the conflict, she can either be completely happy with her choice or regretful that she has not chosen the other option. The personal meanings ascribed by the individual to the choice that she has made comprise “the hierarchical connections of motives that form the ‘knots’ of personality” (Chaiklin, 2001).

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Identity**

Although Vygotsky (1978) offered only rudimentary ideas about identity, sociocultural theory concepts such as higher-order mental functions, mediation, the ZPD, internalization, inner speech, and thinking for speaking reviewed earlier, are often discussed in relation to identity development. Penuel and Wertsch (1995) identified three themes of sociocultural theory that help understand how sociocultural processes shape individual identities. Among them are the use of genetic or developmental analysis to study individual functioning; the claim that individual mental functioning has origins in social interaction; and the idea that tools and signs mediate human action (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 85).

Vygotsky’s genetic method holds the idea that an individual’s functioning must be studied from the perspective of its place in the development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that:

We need to concentrate not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are established… To encompass in research the process of a given
thing’s development in all its phases and changes – from birth to death – fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for “it is only in movement that a body shows what it is.” Thus, the historical [that is, the broadest sense of history] study of behavior is not an auxiliary aspect of theoretical study, but rather forms its base. (As cited in Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 85).

Based on the above, the sociocultural perspective views identity formation as a constantly changing and developing process. For Vygotsky, it is necessary to study a phenomenon or individual in its development and action as transformation and change that underlie them help understand the nature and direction of such development best. Vygotsky’s claim about the importance of studying the process rather than the product has particular value for understanding identity development of non-native speakers who relocated to the U.S. as international students. Such individuals’ identities are continuously shaped and reshaped as a result of new sociocultural experiences that they encounter and meanings that they ascribe to them. The nature of identity development of individuals who constantly deal with two or more cultures and languages is particularly dynamic.

The second theme, that individual cognitive development has sociocultural origins, is formulated in Vygotsky’s general genetic law of cultural development. For Vygotsky, higher mental functions first appear as a result of external factors (social, cultural, and institutional contexts), that is, on the interpsychological plane. Later, the individual internalizes patterns of the sociocultural activity and is ready to perform them individually. The transition from the interpsychological to the intrapsychological plane takes place as a result of conscious/unconscious mediated activity in which language plays a central role. Vygotsky’s
general genetic law is applicable to the concept of identity as identity can be equated to higher mental functions. Indeed, Holland and Lachicotte (2007) wrote:

“In Vygotskian terminology, an identity is a higher-order psychological function that organizes sentiments, understandings, and embodied knowledge relevant to a culturally imagined, personally valued social position. … As a higher-order psychological function, identities constitute a relatively organized complex of thoughts, feelings, memories, and experience that a person can, more or less, durably evoke as a platform for action and response” (p. 113, p. 116).

Based on the above, similar to Vygotsky’s concept of higher mental functions, identity formation results from mediated activity and is directly assisted by language use.

Both higher mental functions and an individual’s identity are mediated by tools and signs among which language plays a key role, which is the third theme identified by Penuel and Wertsch (1995). The important idea here is that, “the mediational properties of signs, in particular, are not ancillary, but integrally related to thinking and other higher mental processes” (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 86). Identity development takes place when an individual transfers cultural resources available on the social plane to the intrapersonal plane and applies them to himself/herself. Thus, tools and signs, including language, which are originally used in social practices, transform and mediate human mental functioning and identity. Penuel and Wertsch (1995) developed this idea further by proposing that the role of language in identity formation is greater than just auxiliary. Rather, language shapes identity:

By speaking and listening to others, the claim may be made, the signs as incorporated into the flow of action actually construct, or build up, the sense of self by providing terms to individuals they may employ when talking about themselves to others. It is for this
reason [that] we suggest that identity be conceived as a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values to meet different purposes. (p. 91)

The idea of identity as mediated by language is powerful for understanding how second language use affects identities of non-native English speaking graduate students in the U.S. Second language proficiency is an important prerequisite for academic success in a graduate program in any discipline. For most international students, it both serves as a channel and an obstacle to entering diverse communities of practice in the U.S. (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009). As a channel, language serves as a necessary tool for engaging in activities and creating a positive self-image. However, as an obstacle, the lack of English language proficiency can threaten self-esteem and prevent students from self-expression, thus negatively affecting their academic identity.

Like Penuel and Wertsch (1995), Holland and Lachicotte (2007) examined cultural resources as important elements that contribute to the understanding of identity formation. The researchers argued that identity must be studied in its relation to culture, as cultural resources in many aspects shape identity. “Identities are social and cultural products through which a person identifies the self-in-activity and learns, through the mediation of cultural resources, to manage and organize himself or herself to act in the name of an identity” (Holland & Lachicotte, 2007, p. 114).

Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) extended the idea of the mediation of identity by symbolic tools and suggested that identity is also mediated by social formations such as immediate, distant, or even “imagined” communities of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991), whose works focus on the social aspect of learning, noted that through participating in communities of
practices, in particular, through speaking, observing, acting, improvising, reflecting, and making meaning, individuals internalize patterns of behavior and relations common for this community and develop as individuals as a result. Commenting on the centrality of the individual as a holistic entity in this process, Wenger (2000) argued that “this meaning-making person is not just a cognitive entity. It is a whole person, with a body, a heart, a brain, relationships, aspirations, all the aspects of human experience, all involved in the negotiation of meaning” (p. 2). The concept of communities of practice is particularly applicable to international students who relocate to the U.S. and build new identities in the new sociocultural environment as members of diverse communities of practice. Over time, new members of both academic and non-academic communities in the U.S. learn to “appropriate voices of core members, engaging in the act of ‘ventriloquation’ ” (Jackson, 2008, p. 45). Non-native speakers’ identities are mediated through the act of ‘convergence’. In particular,

Individuals adapt their communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., languages, accents, speech rates), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance length), and nonverbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become familiar to their interlocutor’s behavior (Bourhis, el-Geledi, & Sachdev, 2007, p. 37).

According to Jackson (2008), such strategies employed by non-native members of a community of practice help them reach “harmonious relational outcomes” and develop positive identities.

Norton’s (2006) theorizing of identity, although within the broader sociocultural domain, contains similar themes. However, it extends the understanding of identity formation by introducing new concepts that bridge language and identity, the themes that help shed light on how non-native speaking individuals construct their identities in second language contexts.
Norton (2006) defines sociocultural theory of identity by identifying five characteristics of a sociocultural conception of identity:

1. Identity is conceived as dynamic and constantly changing over time. A great number of research findings demonstrate a changing and fluid nature of identity. Transition is a commonly identified feature of identity. In the case of second language learners, such individuals’ identities are marked by fluidity and transition too as they find themselves in a constant process of redefining who they are and repositioning themselves due to changes in their lives such as relocation to a new country and overcoming their language barrier.

2. Identity is a “complex, contradictory, and multifaceted” notion, as opposed to a simplistic understanding of identity (Norton, 2006, p. 3). Indeed, second language learner identity formation is affected by numerous factors, all of which impact the process of identification, and thus make it complex.

3. Identity affects language use and is affected by language. To explain this idea, Norton (2006) cites Pavlenko (2004), who wrote that: “Language is seen in this paradigm as the locus of social organization and power, and as a form of symbolic capital as well as a site of struggle where subjectivity and individual consciousness are produced” (as cited in Norton, 2006, p. 3).

4. It is important to examine identity in a broad social context that presents diverse relations of power and can be either that of collaboration or coercion (Norton, 2006). Power is an important aspect that greatly affects identity construction (Pennycook, 2001).

Block (2007) notes that power that exists on all levels of human activity can be either positive when individuals are accepted in a community of practice and function as legitimate
members of the community, or negative when individuals are not given full access to the community of practice and are constrained in their actions. Negative relations of power often result in self-conflict and refusal to accept the new community of practice, both of which lead to the negotiation and reconstruction of identities.

5. Educational practices impact identity formation. The key finding here, according to Norton (2006), is that it is essential that learners become reflexive not only about what they learn and how they learn but also about who they are as different aspects of their lives (e.g., cultural and historical background) affect the way they use language and acquire knowledge (Canagarajah, 1999).

The five themes identified by Norton (2006) indicate that a sociocultural conception of identity views identity formation as a complex, multifaceted, and dynamic process. Identity develops as a result of various sociocultural relations and relations of power in which an individual engages in both social settings (for example, home, workplace, etc.) and “more grounded practices associated with particular groups (cultural)” (Norton, 2006, p. 4).

The above theorizations of language learner identity development both within Vygotksy’s sociocultural framework and the broader sociocultural domain (Norton, 2006), although valuable and comprehensive in themself, view identity primarily as a cognitive and behavioral formation and crucially overlook the role of affective properties in this process. Although not fully elaborated due to his early death, Vygotsky’s investigation of human development heavily relied on the “indissoluble unit of intellect and affect” (Vygotsky, 1993c, p. 233; 1987a, p. 50) and was the continued focus of his works (Vygotsky, 1971; 1987a; 1993a; 1993b; 1993c; and 1999j). The psychological concept of perezhivanie, introduced by Vygotsky, presents a powerful tool to capture the unity of affect and cognition in human identity development.
Perezhivanie

The concept of *perezhivanie* was first introduced into cultural-historical psychology by Vygotsky in his later work and until recently had been in large part ignored by psychologists in the West. The lack of researchers’ interest in this concept can be explained by two reasons. First, it is the lack of precise understanding of the meaning of *perezhivanie* due to the fact that an equivalent concept is nonexistent in the English language. Second, the notion of *perezhivanie* by definition heavily relies on the primacy of the affective component in human development, the idea that had not been dominant in cognitive psychology until recently. Despite the fact that the Soviet psychologists had access to the original work of Vygotsky, who emphasized the unity of affective and cognitive processes throughout his work, surprisingly, the concept of *perezhivanie* had also been a blind spot in Soviet psychology until 1990s (Davydov, 1996; Leontiev, 1992, 2001).

_Perezhivanie_, as defined by Vygotsky, has been translated from the Russian language as an emotional experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2009), lived experience (van de Veer and Valsiner, 1998), lived-through experience (Ferholt, 2009; Hakkarainen, 2004), experiencing (Vasileyuk, 1992), and intensely-emotional-lived-through-experience (Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010). In addition to the above translations, the transliterated words _perezhivanie_ (singular form) or _perezhivaniya_ (plural form) are used to denote this concept. Although the above translated versions render the general conception of the notion of _perezhivanie_, in reality this term is much more complex and cannot be translated into English with just one or even two words. Vygotsky (1994) explains _perezhivanie_ as follows:

An emotional experience is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced, - an emotional
experience is always related to something which is found outside the person - and on the other hand what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e. all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in an emotional experience... So in an emotional experience (perezhivanie) we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the emotional experience (perezhivanie). (p. 342).

As viewed by Vygotsky and his followers (Bozhovich, 2009; Gonzalez Rey, 2009; Kozulin, 2003; Vasilyuk, 1992; etc.), perezhivanie is an important indicator of individual development. The way an individual emotionally experiences and lives through a situation or event in his/her life determines the course of his/her development. As is evident from Vygotsky’s definition above, perezhivanie, as a theoretical concept, embeds two important ideas (Chen, 2014). First, it is a unity of individual characteristics and the environment. Second, perezhivanie is an integration of affect and cognition.

**Unity of Surrounding Conditions and Individual Characteristics**

The underlying idea of perezhivanie is how an individual perceives the environment and events of his/her life and how he/she copes with them. However, it is not just the surrounding conditions that play a key role in an individual’s development but the surrounding conditions “refracted” through the prism of an individual’s consciousness (Vygotsky, 1994). The same environmental situation and events can influence various people’s development differently depending on what events or conditions this particular individual has chosen to be important for him/her. The dynamic relation between the surrounding conditions and the individual thus is a focal point of perezhivanie.
Perezhivanie, or living through the surrounding conditions and interpreting them through one’s own consciousness, results in obtaining new meanings of the surrounding world/situation, which leads to reevaluation of self-worth and a shift in behavioral patterns. Perezhivanie thus causes the change in perceptions of the surrounding world, personal values, and oneself, the change that serves as an indicator of human development.

**Unity of Affect and Cognition**

Vygotsky (1994) used the term “dual dependence” to explain the unity of affect and cognition. Affect and intellect dialectically and dynamically influence and/or depend on each other (Chen, 2014). Each of these concepts presents a different facet of the same entity. According to Vygotsky, the entity that unites affect and cognition is consciousness (Michell, 2012).

Among the higher psychological functions there are present in some measure functions of an affective nature and functions of an intellectual nature. The whole point is that thought and affect are parts of the same, single whole and that whole is human consciousness. (Vygotsky, 1987a, p. 336).

In his other work, Vygotsky (1994) wrote that experiencing constitutes human consciousness and, as a fundamental unit of consciousness, represents a unity of both affective and cognitive processes. Gonzalez Rey (2011) explained the notion of emotional experience “as a unity for the analysis of development, which carries out the integration of cognitive and affective into a new qualitative system that characterizes human development” (p. 49). Both Roth (2007) and Chen (2014) enriched the notion of perezhivanie by integrating act into the unity of affect and cognition and claiming that the three inseparable attributes of consciousness determine human development. In Chen’s (2014) study on children’s development of emotional
regulation, act is defined as “the visible process of verbally, facially, or bodily doing which is consciously or unconsciously driven by the psych (e.g. affect and intellect) and is directed towards a certain purpose” (p. 14).

Meaningful Experience

Perezhivanie can only occur when an event, surrounding conditions, or an experience is meaningful for an individual. Due to diverse constitutional characteristics, histories, worldviews, and other external and internal factors, the way one comprehends and signifies the situation differs from how another one does. Insulting in a foreign language will not be offensive for an individual who does not understand that language (Blunden, 2010). Similarly, the loss of a large amount of money will result in a greater stress and anxiety in a single mother with a low income than in a wealthy individual with a stably high income. Yet another example of a different significance of the same situation (and thus different types of perezhivanie) is the fact that a non-native speaking student generally feels more confident and comfortable expressing his/her ideas in English in the classroom of international students all of whom speak English as a non-native language rather than in a context where he/she is the only international student in the classroom of native speakers. Particularly, the findings of Pappamihiel’s (2002) study indicate that language anxiety for non-native speakers of English is significantly higher in mainstream classes than in the English as a second language classroom. Thus, it is not the experience per se that matters and impacts development but the significance of this experience for an individual. In his exploration of children’s perezhivanie and how it affected their development, Vygotsky (1994) noted that the age and level of development corresponding to this age determine what kind of emotional experience an environmental event will elicit in an individual. The same is true about adults. One and the same event can be experienced differently by the same individual at different
ages and stages of his/her development. The above idea indicates the fluidity and constantly changing nature of an individual’s identity.

**Perezhivanie as Resolving a Crisis**

The definition of the Russian everyday concept “perezhivanie” covers a range of meanings, from experiencing to suffering (Kozulin, 2003). In an everyday context, one goes through *perezhivanie* over a book forgotten on the bus, in front of the mirror before the first date, waiting for a university entrance exam score, before a job interview, or over a broken vase that was a gift from a dear person. *Perezhivanie* is multifaceted. While the above situations can elicit strong emotions, there are other situations that are more significant for an individual due to an inner conflict that such situations can cause. Vygotsky (1994) and Vasilyuk (1992), who made a considerable contribution to the interpretation of Vygotsky’s concept of *perezhivanie*, were concerned with this particular type of experiences that evoke a psychological crisis. However, as indicated by Vasilyuk (1992), the question of interest in the theory of experiencing is not why and how the surrounding conditions or events bring about a psychological crisis and not even how one goes through the crisis, but how one resolves this crisis on the emotional plane and how his/her consciousness and identity transform as a result. “If the psychological theory of activity studies, figuratively speaking, the way in which a human being travels life’s road, then the theory of experiencing studies the way in which he or she falls and rises again to continue the journey” (Vasilyuk, 1992, p. 27). *Perezhivanie*, as a crisis, is usually characterized by high intensity of emotions, uncertainty, and controversy between the existing understanding and new knowledge brought by the new experience. The emotions and thoughts evoked by the new experience are directed at resolving the conflict. The resolution of the crisis happens as a result of intensive “work” of consciousness, i.e. reflection on the new experience, reevaluation of the surrounding
conditions and self-worth, and obtaining new meanings. The transformation of consciousness and identity, that happens as a result, leads to the change in behavior. Through perezhivanie, an individual seeks answers to important questions, takes decisions, and makes choices (Uzikova, 2009). All of these actions present internal and external planes of an individual’s activity system.

**Perezhivanie as a Productive Activity**

Vasilyuk (1992) who views perezhivanie as living through a crisis and obtaining new meaning, defines it as

a special activity, a special kind of work reconstructing a psychological world and directed towards the establishment of correlation between consciousness and existence in terms of meaning, the overall aim of the world of experiencing being to give greater meaningfulness to life (p. 31).

Vasilyuk’s (1992) definition enriches Leontiev’s activity theory by presenting perezhivanie as a productive process or labor of consciousness. Without rejecting Leontiev’s idea of practical activity directed at fulfilling a cultural or biological need and resulting in the development of higher mental functions, Vasilyuk (1992) added to the theory by introducing the idea of producing meaning through perezhivanie. According to Vasilyuk (1992), when an individual’s object-oriented or cognitive activity cannot help fulfill the internal necessities and help obtain meaning then the need for perezhivanie arises. However, perezhivanie should not be viewed as an “auxiliary functional mechanism within activity” (Vasilyuk, 1992, p. 29). Rather, perezhivanie is itself activity “representing, along with external practical activity and cognitive activity, a special type of activity processes, characterized first and foremost by their product – meaning (meaningfulness)” (ibid.). Moreover, both the psychological functions of the mental activity (such as, reflection, perception, imagination, etc.) and direct external actions (such as,
behaviors developed within the native culture) are involved in the process of experiencing. Vasilyuk (1992) refers to Freud’s metaphor of a theater play to explain the role of emotions in the meaning-producing activity of consciousness:

In the productions of experiencing the whole theater company of mental functions is usually brought on stage, but in each play one function performs the leading part, taking upon itself the lion’s share of the work of experiencing, i.e. of the work required to resolve an insoluble situation. The “stars” are often emotional processes…; but… it must be especially stressed that emotion has no sole right to the starring role in the actualization of experiencing. The main part may be played by perception… and thinking..., and by attention…, and by other mental “functions”. Only it must be stressed that in carrying on the work of experiencing, mental processes operate in a specific capacity – that of processes of consciousness (but not necessarily conscious processes). (Vasilyuk, 1992, p. 30).

It is evident from Vasilyuk’s metaphor that perezhivanie is an active work of consciousness where emotions are a driving force that stimulates developmental processes of consciousness.

**Perezhivanie and Imagination**

In order to provide a holistic account of perezhivanie it is necessary to examine another psychological construct – imagination. Imagination as a form of consciousness is an integral component of any human activity. Through imagination individuals engage in the act of creation, the activity “that gives rise to something new” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 2). An individual’s productivity, and ultimately creativity based on imagination, results in the production of artifacts but most importantly – thought that precedes this production of artifacts. Imagination and experiencing are interdependent constructs since imagination is based on experiencing and
experiencing is based on imagination (Ferholt, 2009). “Imagination becomes the means by which a person’s experience is broadened, because he can imagine what he has not seen…” (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 12). The affective dimension of experiencing is central to imagination since no act of imagining is possible without emotional involvement. Furthermore, imagination plays a crucial role in perezhivanie. The outcome of perezhivanie, i.e. how the internal conflict will be resolved, depends on the internal work of consciousness, of which imagination is an integral part.

**Perezhivanie: the Past and the Future**

The exploration of the concept of perezhvanie can provide interesting insights into how an individual’s past experiences can inform his/her future personality development. In particular, such characteristic of perezhivanie as its orientedness to the past and the future simultaneously, connotes how an individual’s consciousness and identity transform as a result of an emotional experience. “All individual psychological phenomena and processes must be understood not only in connection with the past, but with an orientation toward the future” (Vygotsky, 1993, p. 101). Perezhivanie, by definition, is a future-oriented experiencing of past events achieved through reflection on the prior experiences and reevaluation of the personal self and the surrounding conditions that lead to the resolution of the inner conflict and brings about development. The nature of emotional experiences that an individual goes through determines his/her future identity orientations and shapes his/her perspectives on the surrounding world and his/her place in it.

**Perezhivanie and Second Language Identity**

In the existing SLA research, the concept of perezhivanie has never been linked to either second language development or the issues of identity development of language learners. However, perezhivanie can be a powerful psychological construct for exploring the processes
that guide identity transformation of individuals who relocate to a different country to pursue academic goals and establish themselves as legitimate members of the new linguistic and cultural community. As has been mentioned earlier, socioculturally oriented SLA research overlooked *perezhivanie* primarily because the category of affect in general has not been fully integrated in the SLA research. Despite the fact that neither the category of affect nor the notion of *perezhivanie* has been investigated in the studies of identity development of international students in the U.S., some research studies have discussed these concepts indirectly without explicitly theorizing or naming them. With the above theorization of second language development, identity development, and the category of *perezhivanie* in mind, in the sections below, I will review several of the existing research studies that explore the processes of international students’ identity and language development and factors that underlie them. The following section reviews research studies on second language identity development divided in two sections: identities of international students in a new linguistic and cultural environment and identities of sojourners in study-abroad contexts.

**Identities of International Students**

This section presents an overview of the studies that focus on international students who relocate to the U.S., Australia, or Canada to receive a graduate or undergraduate degree. Similar to the participants of the present dissertation study, the participants of such studies are non-native speakers and advanced users of the English language. Such individuals’ identities have multiple dimensions and are shaped by various factors, such as language proficiency; roles that they play in academic communities, such as students, researchers, teachers, etc.; cultural differences; emotional experiencing of the events in their lives, etc.
One of the recent studies that explored international students’ identities was conducted by Halic, Greenberg, and Paulus (2009). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine linguistic, cultural, and identity experiences of international graduate students in a U.S. university. In order to understand international graduate students’ experiences, Halic et al. (2009) adopted constructivism as a paradigmatic orientation. The participants were eight male and female international graduate students majoring in engineering, arts and sciences, nursing, and education. The data were collected through informal one-on-one interviews that were transcribed and analyzed using an interpretative analytic approach (Hatch, 2002). The findings were organized into four themes: “You know you sound wrong”; “English is alive”; “I feel I'm in-between”; and “You have to start all over again”. The theme “You know you sound wrong” points to the idea that the participants realized that, despite their advanced levels of English language proficiency, they had difficulty understanding language variations and accents and were limited in expressing their ideas, all of which caused frustration and the feeling of insecurity. The second theme, “English is alive”, indicates that the participants perceived English both as a barrier to express ideas and access to academic development. The idea “English is alive” emerged out of the students’ perceptions that the English language used in the context of the U.S. was authentic and ‘alive’ as opposed to the language learned in foreign language contexts. Consistent with the third theme, “I feel I'm in-between”, the participants’ answers revealed that some of them adopted only some elements of the host culture and retained other elements of their native culture. The fourth theme, “You have to start all over again”, points to the fact that the students had to restore their reputation and gain respect from others in the new academic environment.

As a result of such experiences, the participants went through shifts in their perceptions
of who they were. They had to negotiate their identities of knowledgeable and respected individuals with those that they gained in the new academic environment. The identity formation was affected by their experiencing of language proficiency and intellectual abilities, self-esteem, and anxiety.

Myles and Cheng (2003) conducted a similar study that explored international students’ experiences in a new country. The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions and beliefs of international graduate students about their cultural and social lives when they relocated to a new country and entered new educational communities. To conceptualize the study, Myles and Cheng (2003) brought the idea of *adaptability* defined as “the capacity for an individual to suspend or change behavior common to his or her native culture, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways and ultimately “find ways to manage the dynamics of difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying stress” (Kim, 1991, p. 268)” (p. 249). Among other key theoretical aspects was the idea that communication is a central aspect of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim, 1994); and the idea that intercultural adaptation is affected by both external (university environment) and internal factors (feelings and perceptions about the new culture and readiness to accept it) (Kim, 1994). The participants of the study were twelve male and female international students from Asian and European countries who were pursuing M.A. or Ph.D. degrees in such areas as engineering, social sciences, and urban and regional planning in a Canadian university. The data were collected from informal interviews. Myles and Cheng (2003) identified four major themes based on the participants’ responses: relationships with mentors; teaching experiences in the role of graduate assistants; contacts with peers; and social life. The study contributes to existing research by examining how non-native
English speaking graduate students enter various academic communities of practice and adapt to the new sociocultural norms and ways of behavior.

Similar to Halic et al. (2009), the findings of Myles and Cheng’s (2003) study indirectly imply that identity development of individuals crossing geographical borders to receive university degrees abroad depends in large part on internal factors that bring about change and transformation of their consciousness.

Both studies reviewed above, although valuable due their in-depth explorations of international graduate students’ experiences abroad, provide little indication of the role of affect in such individuals’ identity development. Nevertheless, Halic et al. (2009) agree that the findings of their study point to the need to focus on affective issues in future explorations of identity development of non-native speaking university students. Although the authors do not provide an analysis of such issues, there are a few indirect indications of international students’ identity transformation through experiencing in both of the studies. First, the findings imply the dialectic relations between the surrounding conditions (academic communities) and individual characteristics (level of confidence or lack thereof, reflectiveness, perceived levels of English language proficiency and academic expertise, etc.). As a result of “refracting” the environmental conditions through the prism of their consciousness, international graduate students obtained new meanings and new perceptions of themselves. Second, the findings entail the idea, though indirectly, that the participants’ communication in English with professors, students of the classes that they taught, and American peers constituted meaningful and significant experiences that brought about mixed feelings and emotions and resulted in inner conflicts. In particular, although they possessed the necessary communication skills, they felt restrained from fully accessing the academic community due to the perceived lack of knowledge and inability to
contribute to the learning community. Despite the fact that the notion of *perezhivanie* was not introduced in Halic’s et al. (2009) discussion of the findings, all of the above combined with a feeling of “not living up to their own expectations” and frustrations point to the participants’ *perezhivanie* that gave rise to personal development.

Among the most recent research studies that examined identity transformations of international students at U.S. universities is an exploratory qualitative study conducted by Kim (2013). The author was interested in patterns and features of psychological identity development among undergraduate-degree seeking international students and the role that academic and social contexts played in such development. The participants of the study were twenty-two international students majoring in various disciplines and ranging in academic levels from sophomores to seniors. Ethnographic data were collected through in-depth interviews and unobtrusive observations and analyzed by means of grounded theory techniques. In the course of data analysis, the International Student Identity (ISI) model emerged and was proposed a conceptual framework for the study. The model includes six phases of international students’ identity transformation where each phase builds on the previous one and can be defined as “fluid psychological conditions in interaction with the environment rather than as a linear progression or stepped stages” (Kim, 2013, p. 107). At the first stage, known as pre-exposure (inheriting self), students have not yet arrived in the U.S. but are only preparing to study overseas. The support systems for identity are grounded in home culture values and norms. After the pre-exposure stage follows exposure (opening self), the phase when students get familiar with the new cultural environment and experience challenges negotiating the cultural differences. At this stage, students start acquiring independence in thinking and taking decisions. The third stage is enclosure (securing self). It is characterized by the desire to distance oneself from the
surrounding environment, discontinue contacts with American students, and, instead, communicate with individuals from the same cultural background. Such a desire is said to be caused by feelings of insecurity due to non-nativeness. The enclosure phase is followed by emergence (disclosing self). This is when students leave their “shells” and try to establish contacts with Americans in an attempt to gain an integrated identity. At the next stage, called integration, students cope with difficulties and positively transform their identities by reevaluating their perceptions about the new culture. However, only at the final stage, called internalization (globalizing self), do international students reach balance by accepting and respecting the differences in educational and cultural contexts.

Despite the fact that the above model cannot be applicable to every international student’s case as each individual’s identity is shaped by the factors pertinent to their particular life histories and experiences, it enriches the body of literature on identity formation issues and contributes to the understanding of psychological adjustment and individual growth issues of international students. The ISI model adopted in the study reflects the stages of students’ identity transformation and going through and resolving the psychological crisis caused by the change of environmental conditions. Unlike the previously reviewed studies that indicated, though not explicitly, how and why external conditions or events bring about inner conflicts, Kim’s (2013) study provided insight into how the participants resolved such conflicts on the emotional plane and how their identities transformed as a result, although, again, Kim (2013) does not go into such an analysis.

Kim (2013) was also interested in the exploration of identity construction among international graduate students, although at an Australian university. The author adopted sociocultural perspectives of second language in use, particularly the role of agency in
participation, to examine Ph.D. students’ informal daily departmental interactions with peers, staff, and academics, and what role such interactions played in the construction, development, and negotiation of legitimate institutional identities. The data were collected through recordings of second language interactions and two focus group interviews with four students from China, Indonesia, and Nepal. The data analysis revealed three constructs of institutional identity: self-conserving, self-engaging, and self-isolating. The participant who adopted a self-conserving approach chose to develop his professional identity through completing research and studying on his own rather than engaging in interactions. Two other students viewed their engagement in departmental interactions as a necessary means that helped them survive loneliness and isolation from a broader outside-the-university society. As a result of self-engagement, the participants constructed identities of valued and legitimate members of the academic community. Finally, the self-isolating approach adopted by the fourth participant was a consequence of her negative experience in the past when she was put in the position of an incompetent English language user by a more knowledgeable person. Such experience resulted in the desire to identify with home-culture rather than host-culture members.

The reviewed study argues that institutional identity development can be a challenging experience that depends on various internal and external factors and conditions. The three constructs of institutional identity adopted by the four participants, although not considered by the author, point to an underpinning of perezhivanie as formulated by Vygotsky. The same experience can influence various people’s development differently depending on what emotions play a key part in the actualization of their experiencing and the meaning-producing activity of consciousness that they choose important for themselves. In other words, the participants who adopted a self-engaging identity in Kim’s (2013) study were guided by the desire to integrate
into the local academic and broader cultural community. Both of these participants put significant effort into developing a sense of belonging, which reflects Vygotsky’s idea (though not introduced in Kim’s (2013) study) of internal work of consciousness directed at obtaining membership and legitimacy in the new community. The participant who adopted a self-isolating identity, in contrast, was guided by a different affective process. In particular, her shy personality and perceived lack of English language proficiency played decisive roles in her self-marginalization. It is clear in the study, though not discussed by Kim (2013), that the participant’s past negative linguistic experiences helped determine her future identity orientations and the course of personal development.

**Second Language Identity Development in Study-Abroad Contexts**

This group of studies explores identity issues of students who come to a foreign country as participants of short-term study abroad programs. Despite the fact that their academic and non-academic goals and roles differ from those of international students who cross borders to receive a university degree and frequently decide to stay in this country afterwards to pursue their career goals, sojourners, as is evident from the literature, have experiences similar to those of long-term international students in a new country, especially at early stages of their study-abroad programs. The similar experiences usually extend to second language influences on the learner’s sense of self and the possibilities of positioning through the second language use. Although the unit of *perezhivanie* has not yet been applied to the exploration of such issues, it is necessary to include a review of studies on second language identity development in study-abroad programs due to the fact that, in addition to a wide range of study-abroad related issues, they provide insight into individuals’ identities as related to second language and cultural development and experiences of second language use and cultural learning refracted through the
prism of their personal understanding and meaning-making, the issues that the present study is particularly concerned with. Furthermore, sojourners’ identities reflect a dialectical relationship between the inner and outer aspects of the self, formed as a result of participating in diverse sociocultural practices.

Jackson’s (2008) ethnographic multiple case study is an extensive exploration of L2 sojourners’ experiences and voices in an English speaking country through the analysis of their narratives from sociocultural perspectives. In particular, it examined the nature of language learning, identity transformation, and the development of intercultural communicative competence and intercultural personhood in L2 sojourners (Jackson, 2008). The longitudinal study followed four Hong Kongese female student sojourners’ development from their home environment to the host culture and back. The data were collected through surveys, one-on-one interviews, and narratives in which the participants reflected on their cultural identity, intercultural encounters, perceptions of their language skills, concerns, emotional struggles, and adjustment in the new culture.

In order to trace identity transformation over time and space, Jackson (2008) gathered and analyzed the data in three stages: pre-sojourn, five-week sojourn, and post-sojourn. The data analysis revealed that, prior to the sojourn, the participants’ identities were never fixed and static, which supports Norton and Toohey’s (2002) claim that identity is “contradictory, dynamic, and changing over historical time and space” (p. 121). Rather, the participants who lived in Hong Kong were constantly searching for their place in the world in part due to the political isolation of Hong Kong from China. The expressions of their evolving sense of self changed through the use of the English language in Hong Kong that helped them feel connected to the wider international community through the English language resulting in the emergence of the “global
The participants’ identities also shifted as a result of social relationships and through events in their lives. Depending on the particular contexts, circumstances, and people with whom they had contacts, the participants enacted different identities. The examination of the participants’ expectations and aspirations about the impending sojourn yielded important findings about the imagined future that they constructed prior to going to England and how that impacted their stay and development in a new country. Interestingly, some of the participants had unrealistic expectations of their social, cultural, and linguistic experiences in England; thus, they were psychologically unprepared to deal with the actual issues of intercultural adjustment and use of the English language (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005).

The analysis of the data collected during the sojourn revealed important themes about the participants’ identity transformation under the influence of the new sociocultural environment. As is typical of border crossers, all of the participants went through the stage of “honeymoon” followed by culture shock. One of the first issues that led to an enhanced state of self-awareness among the Hong Kongese participants was their race. The sojourners immediately became ‘members of a visible minority’ (Jackson, 2008) in England, which resulted in feelings of insecurity, misplacement, and emotional vulnerability. In this transitory stage, when “the individuals’ identity appears to be stripped of all protection” and “previously familiar cues and scripts are suddenly inoperable”, the participants lost psychological balance due to the change in daily activities, the necessity to establish new relationships and reconstruct the self (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 117 as cited in Jackson, 2008). However, the initial stage of confusion and misalignment did not last long. The participants’ attempted to regain emotional and mental equilibrium through developing a habit of reflecting on the problems that they
encountered, the causes of such problems, and the ways to overcome them. Two of the helpful strategies developed and utilized by the four women in order to understand their experiences and obtain new meanings were confiding in others (hosts and friends from the same backgrounds) and writing diaries where they expressed their emotions and thus engaged in the activity of consciousness to overcome the emotional crisis.

Although Jackson (2008) did not include an analysis of the findings from the perspective of perezhivanie, both of these activities serve as indicators of the sojourners’ perezhivanie, in which they engaged in “a special inner activity or inner work by means of which an individual succeeds in withstanding various … events and situations in life, succeeds in regaining the mental equilibrium which has been temporarily lost - succeeds, in short, in coping with a crisis” (Vasilyuk, 1992, p. 18). The strategies allowed the students to understand the unfamiliar behaviors of native speakers of English, suspend judgments about the new culture, and change their focus from negative experiences onto positive ones as well as helped them decide what they needed to do in order to facilitate their transition to the new culture and benefit from staying in England. As a result of such activities, the sojourners were able, to a certain degree, to resolve inner conflicts and obtain new perspectives and meanings. However, not all of the participants were equally successful in developing a sense of belonging to the new community of practice due to variations in personality dispositions. Despite the fact that all of the four sojourners lived in identical conditions in England, had a similar proficiency level in English (advanced), and shared the same cultural and linguistic background, their emotional investments were different. Particularly, two of them were more flexible, positive, open, and receptive to cultural differences whereas the other two were more reserved, less willing to self-disclose, and unwilling to compromise their Hong Kongese identities. In line with the theory of perezhvanie, the two
groups of the participants encountered new experiences differently because of diverse constitutional characteristics, histories, worldviews, and other external and internal factors, and the ways the sojourners signified the situation.

Although, again, not discussed with reference to perezhivanie, the findings indicate that the participants’ different emotional experiencing and living through the novel events in a new sociocultural context were also manifested through their varying investments in the English language and cultural learning. The two sojourners who were positive and open to the new possibilities willingly engaged in experiments with novel forms of linguistic and cultural expression and appropriated the voices and styles of communication of native speakers, and thus were able to develop a sense of belonging. In contrast, the other two participants’ development followed a different path. Due to inner anxieties, lack of self-confidence, and the fear of losing their Cantonese, they were not willing to invest in the new language and cultural learning as much as the other two did. Interestingly, the above was evident even through the choices of language that each of the groups made when interviewed about their sojourn experiences when they returned back to Hong Kong. The first two chose English whereas the second two preferred to be interviewed in their mother tongue, as it gave them a strong sense of belonging. As is evident from the data collected at the post sojourn period, the two groups of sojourners perceived, interpreted, and most importantly, coped with the surrounding conditions and events in England differently, and thus followed different paths of identity development.

Another, though more recent, extensive longitudinal study that explored second language identity development in narratives of study abroad was conducted by Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, and Brown (2013). Similar to Jackson (2008), Benson et al. (2013) were interested in Hong Kongese sojourners’ experiences in several English-speaking countries and collected data
through diaries and interviews. Whereas the book includes case studies of different categories of individuals, from secondary school students participating in a 10-day overseas exchange program to university students studying abroad as exchange students or as international students of undergraduate or postgraduate programs, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will only focus on the experiences of the latter category. In the course of data analysis, Benson et al. (2013) developed a model of second language identity development in study abroad programs that combined the following three dimensions, or outcomes, of study abroad: identity related second language proficiency, or sociopragmatic competence; linguistic self-concept; and second language related personal competence. The main claim that the authors made in the book is that the above three dimensions are inseparable and serve as constituent elements of the broader construct of second language identity development. The examination of the participants’ identity-related second language competence indicates sociopragmatic and second language development among the participants. The findings also point to the fact that sociopragmatic competence is directly linked to second language identity since sociopragmatic competence is “largely a matter of using the second language to represent oneself as a fully functioning person in transactional and interactional encounters” (Benson et al., 2013). It is also evident from the data that, in contexts of study abroad language learning, sociopragmatic competence presented an important component of non-native speaking participants’ emotional experiencing of the situations and events that happened to them in the new sociocultural context. All emotional ups and downs of the participants of Benson’s et al. (2013) study were linked to the failures and successes in their sociopragmatic encounters and communication. As is implied in the study, the living through meaningful and personally significant experiences, resolving an emotional crisis, and obtaining a positive sense of self depended in large part on how successful they were in
dealing with sociopragmatic challenges in various contexts of interaction in the study abroad program, such as interactions with host families, second language encounters in university contexts, public transport or supermarkets, etc. Benson et al. (2013) explicitly discussed the affective dimension in the analysis of the second sub-area of the model, i.e. linguistic self-concept, which refers to “how learners perceive their ability as users and as learners of a second language, and also to their beliefs and emotions” (p. 80). Similar to Jackson (2008), the authors did not apply the notion of perezhivanie to discuss the findings but found that the participants’ experiences were accompanied by a range of emotions that affected their investment and effort in language learning.

As can be inferred from the findings, however, the participants’ perezhivanie in relation to their linguistic self-concept resulted in overcoming psychological barriers (such as a lack of self-confidence, loss of motivation, concerns about language proficiency, etc.) and obtaining new conceptions of themselves as language learners and users. Thus, some of the participants were successful at creating new language affiliations, regaining confidence about their language proficiency, and getting in control when using English, which allowed them to view themselves not solely as language learners but as both learners and users of English.

Finally, the exploration of the third dimension of the model, i.e. second language-mediated personal competence, demonstrated that the subjects’ personal growth extended to three areas: personal independence, intercultural competence, and academic competence as related to second language use. The findings revealed that some of the participants were not able to resolve inner conflicts in each of the above aspect. One of the students was not able to cope with significant differences between the university cultures of Hong Kong and the English-speaking country and thus felt disappointed with the academic side of his study-abroad
experience even after a one-year-long period. The academic work became the most challenging aspect for the student’s life due to numerous problems with academic English, in particular such aspects of it as speed of delivery, subject-specific terminology, and the expected volume of reading in English.

With reference to Vasilyuk’s (1992) category of perezhivanie, the participant’s psychological crisis and perezhivanie stemmed from the realization that his perceived high level of the English proficiency was not sufficient for coping with the academic demands in the new country. The student’s linguistic self-concept and confidence about his language competency were threatened as a result. Despite the participant’s external efforts, such as consistent hard work on academic assignments, and intensive ‘labor’ on the internal plane, such as his continuous reflection on his academic and linguistic experiences, asking questions, and seeking answers to them, he was unable to achieve positive identity outcomes in relation to the academic aspects, as is evident from his disappointment with his academic life. Instead, the participant was able to obtain new personal meanings in his part-time job of an interpreter, which brought him more satisfaction and increased the feeling of self worth. Furthermore, the student’s negative experiences in the new cultural, linguistic, and academic context resulted in strengthening of his sense of Hong Kongese cultural identity.

**Summary**

The reviewed literature reflects the application of the main tenets of sociocultural theory, such as cognition, mediation, the ZPD, internalization, private and inner speech, thinking for speaking, and sociocultural activity to the phenomena of second language and identity development. It also discusses those aspects of sociocultural theory in relation to second language identity development that have not received much attention in previous research. In
particular, the concepts of personality, affect, and *perezhivanie* are described and linked to the construct of second language identity of international students and participants of study-abroad programs.

As the above review of the theoretical concepts and research studies indicates, the topic of second language and identity development in international students would greatly benefit if explored from sociocultural theory perspective that incorporates both cognitive and affective dimensions of humans’ personal development. Thus, this study will contribute to the existing body of research by integrating the notions of emotions and, particularly, *perezhivanie* in the analysis of identity and language development of international students in the U.S.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, methods, and procedures of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The main goal of this study is to understand the nature of identity development and transformation of five graduate students from Russia over the course of their stay in the U.S. In particular, the study is intended as a sociocultural exploration of the processes through which international graduate students negotiate the novel experiences as related to their activity systems in the second languaculture and construct new meanings about themselves and the surroundings. The research questions that motivated and guided this study are:

1. How does sociocultural theory inform the process of identity formation of international graduate students through exposure to a second languaculture?
2. What role in the process of identity formation is attributed to a second language?

Worldview

A qualitative approach was identified as appropriate for this study since the current research includes the examination and analysis of subjects’ experiences, positions, and views that they construct. According to Creswell (2008), “worldviews are the broad philosophical assumptions researchers use when they conduct studies” (p. 554). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) distinguished between three major worldviews: postpositivism, constructivism, and pragmatism. Each of these worldviews is associated with different research approaches. While positivism is typically associated with quantitative approaches and pragmatism can be
characterized as being particularly associated with mixed methods research, a constructivist worldview is associated with qualitative approaches.

Constructivism reflects a philosophy in which knowledge and reality are constructed by the researcher within his or her context, thus the critical role of the researcher in qualitative research design (Lichtman, 2010). Creswell (2007) states that in constructivism “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views, rather than to narrow the meanings into categories or ideas” (p. 20).

**Qualitative Design**

This study employed qualitative methodology in order to better understand how international graduate students negotiated identities in a second language culture. Qualitative methods benefitted this study for a number of reasons. First, the central goal of qualitative research is “to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience […] to describe and understand human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 12), and qualitative research tends to ask ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. This form of inquiry helped interpret results received from various sources of data and allowed understanding how the participants positioned themselves and why they signified particular experiences that determined the course of their language and identity development in the U.S. As noted by Merriam (1998), the goal of qualitative research is to explain “the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of the world and experiences they have in the world” (p. 6, emphasis in original).

Second, since in qualitative research there is “no single way of doing something” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 13), I organized the study in a unique way in order to uncover important
information about the nature of identity development and meaningful aspects of the participants’ engagement in sociocultural practices and how they impact their individual development in the second language culture. The freedom that qualitative approach gives also allowed presenting my interpretation of the findings based on the theories adopted in this study and the reviewed literature as well as my own thoughts and understanding of the issue.

Third, rather than setting up experiments and testing hypotheses, I was interested in examining the issue of identity development as it exists, that is, in natural settings, and gaining the participants’ perspectives, i.e. by adopting emic view which is characteristic of qualitative methods of inquiry. Thus, I was able to obtain objective information based on the participants’ responses about their identity and language development and analyze it based on what I saw, heard, read, and thought. From the perspective of sociocultural theory, a qualitative form of inquiry presents the only type of analyses possible if a researcher is interested in the phenomenon of individual development. Indeed, consistent with Vygtosky’s sociocultural theoretical perspectives, “any analysis of human mental activity must be carried out in natural environment, which encompasses natural and culturally constructed objects and artifacts, abstract objects and ideas, as well as the world of other human beings, that is, the sociocultural world” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 144).

Finally, by using the style of writing typical of qualitative research, which is less technical and more informal than traditional research, I was able to better present the participants’ experiences, provide a grounded explanation and interpretation of collected data, and organize the data to make a meaningful whole.

**Multiple-Case Study Design**
This research adopted a multiple-case study form of inquiry in which five cases bounded by time and space were examined and compared to gain understanding and provide different perspectives on the issue of Russian graduate students’ identity development in the U.S. languaculture (Creswell, 2005, 2007).

A case-study design, characterized by extensive data collection and rich descriptions and analyses of a phenomenon, was adopted to explore the issue of identity development in depth without dismissing the slightest nuances that could provide explanation of specific aspects of the issue. The exploration of identity formation asks for focusing on the process rather than results as the nature of this phenomenon is in its never-ending development, change, and transformation that occur under the influence of a social environment. According to Merriam’s (1998) characteristics of a case study approach, “the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19).

A multiple-case study approach was beneficial because by comparing and contrasting several single cases varying from each other within the multiple-case study, I was able to better understand the individual differences and varying trajectories that the participants followed as their identities expanded. Yin (2003) noted that even if it is just a two-case study, the findings are more compelling in comparison with results of a single-case study. This supports Miles and Huberman’s (1994) arguments for a multiple-case study design: “By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where and, if possible, why it carries on as it goes” (p. 29, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the inclusion of multiple cases in a study increases trustworthiness of qualitative data.
Another benefit that a multiple-case study approach offers is the fact that it allows moving between cases and adjusting procedures based on how themes unfold throughout the development of the study, and thus helps gain the most out of the data. Consistent with Lichtman (2010), “qualitative researchers do not always know […] what they will study. Qualitative researchers feel free to modify protocols as they progress through the ever-changing landscape of those they study” (p. 13).

Sociocultural Theoretical Perspectives

As discussed in the previous chapter, sociocultural theory is used to analyze data, interpret findings, and construct meaning based on them. Sociocultural theory is a particularly beneficial lens of qualitative data analysis as, by taking sociocultural experience as a unit of analysis, it is possible to understand the nature of individual development, in particular, how individuals interact with a sociocultural environment, appropriate new positions and stances in the course of activity, and obtain new meanings of the surrounding world. As the purpose of this study is to trace identity development through exposure to a second languaculture, sociocultural theory served as a holistic method of exploration of the processes of change and transformation, as both external and internal processes, that occurred over the course of several years in the U.S. under the influence of cultural contexts and tools available in the second languaculture, among which was the second language.

Selection of Participants

The recruitment of participants was guided by the purpose of this study, which was aimed at understanding the identity transformation of Russian graduate students in the U.S. and the role of the second language in this process. Purposeful sampling strategies were employed in order to help elicit different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Patton (2002) noted that “the
logic and power of purposeful sampling […] leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research …” (p. 46, emphasis in original). The following criteria were employed for the selection of participants:

1. Participants were born and raised in Russia.
2. Participants’ native language was Russian.
3. Participants’ age ranged from 25 to 35.
4. Participants relocated to the United States within the last ten years.
5. Participants’ goal of relocating to the U.S. was to receive a graduate degree.
6. Participants were either enrolled in a graduate degree program at a U.S. university at the time of data collection or had graduated with a M.A. or Ph.D. degree from a U.S. university.

The participants of this study were recruited from the individuals who had been members of Voronezh Regional Educational Advising Center (VREAC) before they relocated to the U.S. As I was engaged with VREAC and attended educational courses and activities organized by it before I moved to the U.S. as well, I personally met all of the participants at that center located in Voronezh, my hometown in Russia, in the period between 2007 and 2009. VREAC is an organization whose mission is to encourage the educational mobility of the Russian people. The educational center provides various advising services on the application process for studying at international colleges and universities. The participants of this study engaged with VREAC activities for 1-3 years as part of their preparation for applying to U.S. universities and during the application process. As is further discussed, these individuals relocated to the U.S. in the period
from 2007 to 2011 depending on the year in which they got admitted for graduate degree programs in the U.S.

**Participant Profiles**

Two male and three female international graduate students from Russia were recruited to participate in this study. The participants’ university majors in the U.S. included Marketing, Pharmacy, Psychology, Economics, and Engineering. Two of the five individuals completed their graduate degrees in 2012 and one – in 2013. Upon completion of their degrees, each of the three individuals found a job in the U.S. The other two participants were pursuing their doctoral degrees at the time of data collection. The participants’ age ranged from 27 to 30 years old (Table 1). In order to ensure anonymity, the participants’ names in Table 1 and further in the dissertation are replaced with pseudonyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Area of Study</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Number of Years in the U.S.</th>
<th>Married, Dating, or Single</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Ph.D., 2012</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>Ph.D. in progress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denys</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Ph.D. in progress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>M.A., 2013</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Ph.D., 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
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**Data Collection Procedures**
In order to increase trustworthiness, the study employed a multiple-data collection method, known as triangulation of data. The goal of triangulation is not “the simple combination of different kinds of data, but an attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each” (Berg, 1995, p. 5). The three data-gathering techniques that were used in the study are semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews, reflection journals, and a focus group. Despite the fact that observation is typically implemented in case studies, this tool of data collection is hardly possible when the phenomenon under investigation is identity development. It is problematic to directly observe people’s thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and transformations of consciousness as related to their experiences, and how they construct meaning of the surrounding world. Therefore, interviews, journals, and a focus group were utilized to get insight into such a process.

**Timeline of Research Activities**

The timeline below indicates the progress of research activities of the current study.

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<th>Table 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline of Research Activities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>One-on-one interviews</td>
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<td>Reflection journals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus group interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting findings and writing report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is shown in the table, data collection lasted for five months. It was initiated in late April and occurred through the end of September 2014. The primary goal of conducting such a
longitudinal study was to provide the participants with multiple opportunities to engage in reflection on their experiences over the course of their stay in the U.S.

All of the one-on-one interviews were conducted during the first four weeks (April – May 2014) of data collection and preceded the reflection journal activity. Such a sequence of procedures was purposefully opted. The initial phase, i.e. in-depth one-on-one interviews, was aimed at introducing the idea of the study to the participants through asking them questions and drawing their attention to the aspects of their experiences that were particularly interesting for the purpose of this study, thus preparing them for the reflection journal activity. The goal of the focus group interview, which presented the final phase of data collection and was conducted at the end of September 2014, was to allow the individuals to revisit the most relevant, as perceived by the participants, aspects of their experiences and provide final thoughts on them. It was also aimed at giving them an opportunity to jointly reflect on some common issues and share their similar or contrasting ideas on them.

**Skype**

Both types of the interviews, i.e. one-on-one interviews and a focus group, were conducted via Skype on appointed dates and at the scheduled time convenient for the participants and the researcher. Skype’s feature known as ‘Group Calls’ allowed me to conduct the focus group interview using this type of technology. Another technological tool that was utilized in the data collection was Call Recorder for Skype, which was downloaded from [www.ecamm.com](http://www.ecamm.com) and installed on my computer in advance. This software allows recording in both video and audio modes. After recording the video calls, they were transformed into QuickTime movies on a Mac computer, which made it easier to transcribe data. In order to ensure that data were recorded and
saved, in addition to the computer software, I used a separate digital recorder to record each interview.

The use of Skype in qualitative interviews is a relatively new feature. This tool seems to be appealing to researchers when participants are scattered and reside at a distance from the researcher and other participants (Cater, 2011). In addition, Skype is usually a preference because face-to-face interviews can be an expensive and time-consuming endeavor for a researcher. Moreover, it seems to be more convenient to coordinate the date and time of a Skype interview in comparison with a face-to-face interview. Therefore, the interviews conducted via Skype significantly reduced the burden of participation for the participants of this study.

Despite the fact that Skype is a convenient technological tool for conducting qualitative interviews, it has some limitations. First, in video interviews conducted via Skype, the researcher can only see the participant’s face and upper part of the body (Cater, 2011). Oftentimes gestures and body language can provide important nuances of information. Second, due to a possible unstable Internet connection on a participant’s or the researcher’s side of the call, Skype interviews can be interrupted. This can cause a distraction for a participant’s thread of thought. Lastly, some people may feel resistant to being interviewed via Skype, although not the case in the present study.

**Language of Data**

In each of the data collection methods, the participants were allowed to use the language of their preference, i.e. Russian or English. The participants’ choices varied depending on a data collection technique. Thus, in one-on-one interviews, Victoria and Denys preferred to respond in Russian, whereas Maria, Anna, and Alexander chose to speak English. All of the five participants used English in the reflection journal. The focus group interview, however, was
conducted in Russian. Due to the fact that I am a native speaker of Russian, the interpretation of the responses, provided in the Russian language, were not affected. I did the translation of the data from Russian into English simultaneously with transcribing them. Given that some of the interviews were conducted in Russian, excerpts from such interviews included in chapter four of this dissertation present translated versions and are marked with “[T]” at the end of each of such excerpts.

**One-on-One Interviews**

In-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews were a primary data source. This method allowed me to directly ask important questions as related to experiences in the second languaculture. A set of questions aimed at investigating the participants’ identity negotiation was created in advance (Appendix A). However, new questions sometimes emerged in the course of interviewing and were added to the existing questions or replaced some of them. As Hatch (2002) stated: “Although researchers come to the interview with guiding questions, they are open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions” (p. 94). In order to gain in-depth understanding of the process underlying identity development through exposure to a second languaculture, I designed the interview questions to address such areas as: general background information; language-related issues; education-related issues, and perceptions of identity. At the end of each interview, I also asked my participants an open-ended question that gave them a chance to share additional thoughts on any of the previously asked interview questions or related issues. Following McCracken’s (1988) suggestions on conducting interviews, I asked the questions in a nondirective and unobtrusive manner in order to “allow respondents to tell their own story in their own terms” (p. 34).
Due to a large number of interview questions, I found it helpful to conduct two interviews with each participant, rather than one as had been originally planned, in order to ensure that the participants were not overwhelmed by the number of questions and the time spent on responses. Thus, I conducted the total of ten one-on-one interviews – two with each of the participants. Each of the interviews contained 13 questions and lasted from around 30 minutes to almost 2 hours depending on the participant. The table below summarizes the main features of one-on-one interviews for each of the participants, such as the date when they were conducted, the length of the interviews, and the language used by the participants and the researcher during the interview.

Table 3

One-on-One Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>04/27/2014</td>
<td>1 hour 5 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>05/10/2014</td>
<td>55 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>04/10/2014</td>
<td>1 hour 3 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>05/07/2014</td>
<td>1 hour 5 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denys</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>04/19/2014</td>
<td>2 hours 3 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>04/26/2014</td>
<td>2 hours 1 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>05/04/2014</td>
<td>53 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>05/07/2014</td>
<td>47 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td>05/02/2014</td>
<td>54 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td>05/21/2014</td>
<td>33 min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Group Interview

According to Lichtman (2010), “focus group interviewing provides opportunities for members of a group to interact with each other and stimulate each other’s thinking. It is not desirable or necessary for the group to reach consensus in their discussion” (p. 139). Among the advantages of this type of data collection, is the fact that, in focus group interviews, it is highly possible that group conversations will prompt new thoughts, examples, and ideas that might not
emerge in one-on-one interviews (Lichtman, 2010). Indeed, the focus group interaction allowed the participants of this study to open up about their experiences in the U.S., compare and reexamine some of their views based on others’ opinions, and thus provide a deeper level of reflection.

Similar to one-on-one interviews, the focus group interview relied on a semi-structured approach. A list of general questions (Appendix B) was developed in advance but used as a guide only to ensure that the participants had a certain degree of freedom in expressing their thoughts on the topics that they wished to discuss. In order to ensure that the date and time for the focus group interview were convenient for each of the participants, I contacted them two weeks in advance and provided them with several options.

Due to the constraints of the free version of Skype, the participants and I were unable to engage in a group video call and, instead, participated in an audio conference. The absence of video image could create an obstacle in communication, especially with more than two participants as in the case of this study, due to the fact that participants of a group call are unable to see each other and read nonverbal cues. However, in order to eliminate potential challenges, I warned the participants about the constraints of a Skype group interview, thus making them aware that they needed to take turns when sharing their answers in order to avoid an overlap of voices and ensure that everyone could hear and understand each other’s replies. The table below summarizes the main features of the focus group activity.
Table 4

*Focus Group Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria, Victoria,</td>
<td>09/30/2014</td>
<td>46 min.</td>
<td>Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denys, Anna,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection Journals**

As part of research activities, the participants were asked to keep a weekly journal within a four-month time frame in which they reflected on their experiences in the U.S. In order to stimulate their thinking, I provided several reflection prompts for them (Appendix C). However, they were free to discuss any related issues as well as provide additional ideas on the questions that I asked them in the one-on-one interviews. For their convenience, I emailed the list of interview questions together with journal discussion prompts to each of the participants in advance. The journal activity was conducted via Google Docs. This application allowed me to collaborate with my participants by adding my thoughts on their entries as well as follow-up questions with regard to their ideas.

Among the advantages of using journals as a data source for this study is that journals allow for self-expression, which is important for the understanding of identity construction. Barton and Hamilton (1998) wrote the following about the benefits of keeping journals by the participants in their study: “People’s interest in documenting their lives very often extended beyond their own life, and was part of a process of situating themselves within the wider context of family, cultural group, nation, and even world history. In the case of minority cultural groups, or those who have been displaced, this can create a sense of identity” (p. 241). Reflective journals provided a richness of data, which allowed me to gain insight into the participants’
experiences. Furthermore, based on the participants’ continuous and deep reflections in the journals, I was able to observe how their views and perceptions had shifted over the course of their stay in the U.S and identify what caused the shift.

An additional benefit of reflection journals was the fact that they provided a nonthreatening environment for the participants to reflect on their lives and gave them unlimited time to recall, analyze, and describe relevant experiences. Furthermore, according to Creswell (2008), “journals provide the advantage of being in the language and words of the participant, who have usually given thoughtful attention to them” (p. 231).

Below is a table of details of the journal activity across the five participants.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>May – September 2014</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>May – September 2014</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denys</td>
<td>May – August 2014</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>June – September 2014</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>June – September 2014</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three forms of data collection, i.e. semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews, semi-structured focus group interviews, and reflection journals, were employed to inform each other and helped the researcher gain valuable insight into the central phenomenon of the research. The combination of the three sources was also used to ensure trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis
The first step of data analysis included transcribing the interviews. As part of this process, I translated into English the four one-on-one interviews and the focus-group interview that were conducted in Russian. After transcription and translation procedures, I organized the data for each participant by name, date, and type. Due to the fact that I analyzed the data on an ongoing basis, I repeatedly added new data to the existing files.

In the analysis of each case, I followed Lichtman’s (2010) model known as *The Three Cs of Data Analysis: Codes, Categories, Concepts* pattern, which is a comprehensible and detailed technique to analyze data. “The goal in the Three Cs analysis is to move from coding initial data through identification of categories to the recognition of important concepts” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 199). First, I identified a large number of codes based on the data from one-on-one interviews and organized them into categories. The initial codes and categories that emerged from the interview data determined some of the reflection journal prompts and follow-up questions that I asked my participants in the journals. As I collected new data from reflection journals, I revisited my initial codes and categories, refined them, renamed some of them, and added new codes and categories in the iterative process of data analysis. The codes and categories that emerged from one-on-one interviews and reflection journals guided the formulation of the focus group interview questions. As I collected data from the focus group interview, I revisited the codes again, reexamined the list of categories to remove redundancies and determine important elements.

In the final phase, I organized the categories into concepts/themes that reflected the meaning of the collected data. In this way, four major themes emerged in the course of data analysis: *second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic activity,* and *personal life*. Taxonomies were constructed to visualize findings from the data and demonstrate
relationships between the categories inside the themes. Additionally, timelines of events were created for each participant in order to showcase major events that occurred over the course of their lives in the U.S. The interpretation and discussion of findings are provided across the cases and presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

**Role of Researcher**

I defined my roles in the research as those of the researcher and the learner (Glesne, 2006). As I recruited participants, established contact with them, conducted one-on-one and focus group interviews, administered reflection journal activity, transcribed, translated, analyzed, and interpreted the data, I was fully involved in the study and acted as a researcher. At the same time, I took a learner’s perspective that allowed me to examine and understand different aspects of the topic, reflect on various aspects of research procedures, and find answers to the research questions. According to Glesne (2006), “as a researcher, you are a curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants. You do not come as an expert or authority. […] As a learner you are expected to listen; as an expert or authority, you are expected to talk. The differences between these two roles are enormous” (p. 46).

Acting as the researcher and the learner, I was responsible for making sense of data and constructing realities through my own interpretation (Lichtman, 2010). In qualitative research, “all information is filtered through the researcher’s eyes and ears and is influenced by his or her experience, knowledge, skill, and background” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 16). As an international graduate student from Russia pursuing her doctoral degree at a U.S. university, I experienced processes similar to those of the participants of this study. This allowed me to better understand the participants’ stances and their experiences as related to identity. However, I was aware of potential biases that I could unintentionally bring due to the fact that my experience was similar
to those of my participants and tried to ensure throughout the study that I restrained from relying on my subjective opinion. In order to reduce bias and subjectivity, I purposefully avoided sharing with the participants my own experience of an international graduate student in the second languaculture, and that of a non-native speaker of the English language. I clearly defined my role as the researcher at the beginning of the interviewing process to ensure that my experience did not influence their responses.

Another way to minimize subjectivity that I employed in the study was triangulation. By having participants reflect on their experiences of identity transformation in different settings (on-on-one interviews, focus group, and journals), I was able to collect data that provided a more accurate picture and objectively reflected each of the participants’ case.

**Limitations**

The study has one limitation. As observed by Guba and Lincoln (1981), “case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusion about the actual state of affairs” (p. 377). Due to the fact that the participants’ reflections on their identity shifts were highly impacted by their individual perceptions, feelings, and understanding of their experiences, the data of this study cannot be generalized, and thus the findings cannot represent the entire population of international graduate students and English language learners in the U.S. As Patton (2002) noted, “the purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (p. 460).

**Ethical Considerations**

When conducting a qualitative study, it is the researcher’s responsibility to follow the basic tenets of ethical issues related to respect and protection of the participants. In order to
minimize the risks of unethical treatment of the participants in this study, I was guided by the following major principles associated with ethical conduct, formulated by Lichtman (2010).

Do Not Harm. It was highly unlikely that any of the participants was harmed in any way or experienced substantial stress caused by the procedures of this study. However, throughout one-on-one interviews, focus group, and online correspondence in the reflection journal activity, I paid attention to the way my participants responded to the questions to ensure that the potential emotional distress, discomfort, and/or adverse reactions would have been prevented by allowing the participants to discontinue his or her participation in the study or a particular activity of the study.

Privacy and Anonymity. All of the participants of this study were guaranteed privacy and anonymity. No specific mention of the university or names of the participants appeared on any report of the research. Instead, names of the participants were substituted with pseudonyms and generalizations were used when referring to the name of their institutions and places of their residence in the U.S.

Confidentiality. All the information obtained from any of the participants was treated in a confidential manner, i.e. it was not revealed to anyone. Instead, it was controlled by the researcher only, and was kept locked.

Informed Consent. All of the participants were informed about every activity of the research and about the nature of the study. They were also notified in advance that if any of them had decided to withdraw from the study they would have been free to do so.

Rapport and Friendship. Due to the fact that I shared cultural and linguistic background with the participants and knew each of them in person, I had good chances of establishing a trustworthy and friendly environment.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Organization

This chapter presents a description and analysis of each of the five participants’ cases in the U.S., including major challenges and transformations that they faced in relation to their linguistic, cultural, academic, and personal lives in the second languaculture. Each analysis is presented separately for each participant and entitled: Case 1 – Maria; Case 2 – Victoria; Case 3 – Denys; Case 4 – Anna; and Case 5 – Alexandra. Each of the cases includes a participant profile, timeline of events, and the discussion of four major themes.

Profile

A profile for each of the five participants presents general background information and briefly describes his/her history before relocating to the U.S. In particular, each of the profiles touches on such elements as:

- age and year in which he/she moved to the U.S.;
- university major in Russia and in the U.S.;
- goals and expectations as related to relocating to the U.S. and pursuing a graduate degree;
- prior experiences in the U.S.; and
- preparation for entering the new languacultural and academic communities.

Timeline of Events

Within each of the cases, the participant’s profile is followed by a timeline of events. The timeline presents a graph of major events in chronological order as they occurred within the timeframe of the participant’s relocation to the U.S. to the start of data collection. The events
marked on the timeline indicate major academic accomplishments, such as completing a master’s or doctoral degree, and important changes in the participants’ lives, such as moving to a different state, changing a major, getting married, etc. The timeline of events points to the milestones in the participants’ journeys in the U.S., particularly those that exerted direct or indirect influences on development and transformation in the new lenguaculture. In addition to the turning point events, each timeline marks the years in which a participant traveled to Russia and thus reflects the extent of contact with the native lenguaculture through the course of their living in the U.S.

**Themes**

The timeline of events is followed by the analysis of the four themes identified in the course of data analysis: *second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic activity*, and *personal life*. A division of this sort should not be viewed as absolute due to the fact that an individual’s identity is a holistic entity with no strict boundaries within itself. However, the domains listed are used in order to conform to a standard tradition of presenting findings typical of qualitative research designs. The above domains present integral components of the participants’ activity systems that constitute areas of identity negotiation and point to their linguistic, cultural, academic, and personal development in the U.S. The category of *perezhivanie* is not explicitly named in the findings at this stage due to the fact that it presents an area of theoretical analysis and, instead, is discussed in the following chapter. Nonetheless, the category of *perezhivanie* is implied throughout each of the four themes as is evident from the descriptions of the participants’ emotional states and transformations as related to the four themes, their individual perceptions of the surrounding conditions, and their inner conflicts and the ways they resolved them by constructing new meanings.
Each of the four themes, including subthemes, within each case is first outlined in a tabular form to help organize the major findings that emerged in the course of data analysis as related to each category. The tables are followed by in-depth discussions of each theme including excerpts from the data to illustrate main points.

**Second Language Issues**

The “Second Language Issues” theme was identified as one of the major aspects of international graduate students’ socialization and identity development in the new languaculture. Furthermore, due to the nature of this dissertation study and the research questions posed in it, the domain of second language and identity development as related to English language use presents a crucial component of the findings. Within each separate case, this theme is discussed with reference to the three subthemes identified in the data analysis: 1) challenges as related to second language; 2) strategies, adjustments, and other forms of linguistic development; and 3) perceptions of self in relation to language. The subtheme “Challenges as Related to Second Language” identifies areas of difficulty that the participants had in relation to academic and everyday language use in the U.S. The subtheme “Strategies, Adjustments, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development” reflects the participants’ explicit actions as well as subconsciously developed strategies directed at overcoming the challenges and resolving internal conflicts. It also indicates the shifts in first and second language use that occurred over time as a result of bidirectional cross-linguistic influences. Finally, the subtheme “Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language” presents the analysis of the participants’ changing feelings and views of themselves as related to their second language development as well as shifts in the perceptions with regard to their first language, and thus reflects their identity transformations.

**Navigation Between Cultures**
Similar to the “Second Language Issues” theme this theme includes the discussion of “Challenges in the U.S. Culture”. This is followed by the subtheme “Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies”, which focuses on the goal-directed behavior that the participants adopted in order to ease the challenges and become legitimate members of what they perceived as U.S. culture. The following subtheme “Preserving Russian Cultural Identity” indicates the participants’ attempts to reach a psychological balance between the new culture and their native culture by bringing to the forefront their Russian cultural identity and making efforts to preserve it. The last subtheme “Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures” reflects the shift in their perceptions as related to the Russian cultural background and the U.S. culture that occurred over the course of their stay in the U.S.

**Academic Activity**

This theme is aimed at exploring the role of academic activity in the participants’ identity development. The subtheme “Academic Practices” discusses the participants’ responsibilities and related academic challenges with reference to such components of their graduate degrees as coursework, graduate assistantship (teaching and research), and additional academic practices which were part of their academic activity. The second subtheme “Academic Identity” focuses on the participants’ feelings and perceptions as related to their academic development as well as shifts and transformations thereof.

**Personal Life**

The findings under this theme are organized to, first, reflect the participants’ social networks in the U.S. and their role in the participants’ psychological well-being as presented in the subtheme “Social Networks”; and, second, to address the participants’ views on the
importance of family and personal life for them, as discussed within the subtheme “Views on the Family”.

**Case 1 – Maria**

**Maria’s Profile**

Maria arrived in the U.S. in July 2007 at the age of 23. Before coming to the U.S., she had received her undergraduate and Master’s degrees in Economics of Healthcare Services in Russia. She completed her M.A. degree a year prior to relocating to the U.S. In her hometown in Russia, Maria worked as a researcher in the marketing industry, full time in her final year before leaving the country and part time while she was still a student. She changed several jobs during that period of time and realized that she needed to expand her knowledge and obtain a set of skills in the marketing industry to become familiar with different industries and markets. Maria did not have a clear understanding of what a Ph.D. program entailed but was confident in her intention to receive an overseas educational experience. She chose the U.S. as she considered it one of the best places to master the art of advertising through research and practice in the biggest marketing companies in the world. Maria was also tempted to move to the U.S. as she had visited the country twice while she was still a student in her undergraduate program. She spent six months in the U.S. overall as a participant of a travel-abroad program for students, popular in Russia and Eastern Europe, known as Work and Travel USA. Maria felt that both of the visits helped her improve her English and learn about the U.S. culture and had contributed to her desire to return to the U.S. Maria was open to life-changing opportunities and was convinced that her relocation to the U.S. would bring a lot of positive changes into her life. In order to complete the entrance requirements for the Ph.D. program, Maria attended VREAC, in which she participated in TOEFL and GRE preparation classes and received professional recommendations and
guidance from educational advisors. Before she moved to the U.S., Maria had considered herself an advanced user of the English language and did not think that she would have challenges with the language in her Ph.D. program in the U.S. Below is the timeline of major events in Maria’s life since the time that she relocated to the U.S.

Figure 1

*Timeline of Events for Maria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Arrived in the U.S. (PA)/Started Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age: 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Received Ph.D./ Found a job/ Moved to OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Moved back to PA/ Changed jobs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maria spent five years on her Ph.D. program in Pennsylvania. Following her graduation in 2012, she moved to Oregon where she was hired as an Assistant Professor in Marketing. However, one year after relocating to Oregon, Maria resumed her job search and accepted another faculty position of the same rank at a university in Pennsylvania. Maria moved back to PA in 2014. Below is the discussion of the findings as related to the themes introduced above and organized in tables.

**Second Language Issues**
Table 6

Second Language Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges as Related to Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More difficult to communicate with native speaking faculty or fellow students than with non-native individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of opportunity to practice English in everyday contexts (during the entire period of Ph.D. program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listened to by interlocutors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working on pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking with a slower pace and higher volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitating English intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental rehearsal before presentations, phone conversations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Pretend you know” - avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on negative linguistic experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different sense of identity when speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing personal academic achievements over language proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence about language proficiency (academic contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence due to accent &amp; lack of fluency (non-academic contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about how perceived by others due to accent (non-academic contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not proficient enough to engage in conversations with native speakers (non-academic contexts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges as Related to Second Language**

**Academic language.** Maria’s second language proficiency presented one of the most prominent areas of concern for her, not only at the beginning of her Ph.D. program but also during her entire stay in the U.S. In the first year of her Ph.D. program, Maria found academic language particularly challenging. Her major difficulties with academic English were lack of
academic vocabulary and challenges keeping up with academic reading and understanding complex texts:

I remember when I was taking the Behavioral Methods class, the professor gave us a lot of reading. We had to read a lot of articles every week. It was really difficult. I couldn’t understand, honestly. I think it was partly due to my language and partly due to the specific terminology. (Interview)

Furthermore, Maria felt that her second language proficiency interfered with her ability to express her ideas when discussing subject-related topics:

We had to discuss some economic mathematical equations. It was just impossible for me. I couldn’t express myself. It was really-really difficult. You have to do math and to speak English at the same time… I would say the first 1-2 years of taking such classes as economics, economic modeling, and statistics classes was pretty difficult. It is really difficult with all those new theories and concepts in Marketing. Not only in terms of new knowledge – of course, it was also an issue – but also in terms of communicating with someone in English about that specific area. (Interview)

Maria felt especially conscious about her language proficiency when interacting with native speaking professors and graduate students in her program. Maria commented that she felt fortunate that her advisor as well as the majority of her peers – other graduate students in her program - were non-native speakers of English:

… I was not the only one. A lot of graduate students in my program were international, so it was not too stressful to speak with each other. When I am surrounded by non-native speakers, I think, my English is great. I don’t have any trouble. My advisor was Korean,
so I didn’t have trouble communicating with him either because it’s always easier to understand a foreigner, you know. (Interview)

Maria viewed her experiences with non-native speaking individuals in academia as more positive due to the fact that she felt more relaxed and less concerned about her language when communicating with them. She thought that non-native speakers were able to understand what she was going through and put themselves in her position because they had also gone through similar linguistic experiences in the past.

**Everyday language.** Maria’s everyday language presented a different kind of concern for her. The lack of social bonds outside the university due to an intense workload in her Ph.D. program deprived her of the opportunity to practice everyday language:

I didn’t even use it [everyday language], you know. In the first couple of years of graduate school you just study - at least it was my experience - you just read, read and read. And you can’t really evaluate how good or bad your everyday language is. (Interview)

Maria became more aware of her challenges with everyday language communication only later in her program when she had spent several years in the U.S. and even more so when she moved to Oregon where she was more successful at establishing social connections with native speakers of English outside the university. Furthermore, in Oregon, Maria started dating an American and spending more time in a company of his American friends. During that period of time, Maria realized that her everyday language was a barrier for entering and becoming a legitimate member of the U.S. languaculture. She felt that it was difficult to be the only non-native speaker among native speakers of English. Maria expressed the challenges that she experienced at that period of time in the journal:
When I moved to Oregon I got to know new people, mostly Americans… I have more social life here. I would go out with my American colleagues or friends and I would be like, oh my God, it’s just so difficult. They all speak perfect English. It’s hard to be part of this group where everybody speaks English as a native language and you are the only one who speaks with an accent. I always felt that I have to speak more slowly and louder. It would make them kind of stop and listen to me, I guess, because my language is harder to understand for them. (Journal)

As is evident from the excerpt above, Maria considered her accent one of the major reasons for her concerns. She felt particularly inadequate when native speakers paused when Maria started speaking in order to better hear and understand her speech.

**Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development**

Maria mentioned that she was consciously aware of the aspects of the second language that she had difficulties with and put a lot of effort in order to improve her language. As is evident from the data, some of the strategies that Maria used presented specific actions that she deliberately employed, whereas others were subconsciously developed in response to the challenges. Thus, Maria naturally developed a habit of speaking with more volume and at a slower pace in order to articulate sounds more distinctly and to be understood, which, she realized, made her stand out in a company of native speakers. Maria also mentioned that she listened carefully to native speakers’ pronunciation, compared it to the way she articulated certain sounds, and tried to imitate the proper pronunciation:

I usually pay attention to the way I pronounce words and the way Americans do. When I hear that my pronunciation differs from that of native speakers I try to correct myself and make sure that I say it right next time. (Interview)
Among other features of oral communication that Maria was working on were intonation and stress. She was also aware of the differences between the intonation patterns in the Russian and American English languages and practiced her intonation to sound more like a native speaker:

My intonation changes depending on what language I speak. Intonation in Russian is high, it goes up. In English, intonation is going down… I am exploring the role of intonation in commercials and writing a paper on that. So, I think, when I speak English I speak with a falling intonation because I try to catch the patterns that are typical for American English… (Journal)

Maria admitted that in order to sound more American she tried to catch and imitate those intonation patterns that are typically used by native speakers of English in the U.S. Maria felt that she sounded more confident when she spoke English than when she interacted in Russian. She attributed her confidence to the falling intonation characteristic of the English language that signals a sense of finality, certainty, and belief in the content of the message. In contrast, the rising use of intonation that prevails in the Russian language indicates some kind of uncertainty and hesitation.

The above finding indicates that Maria was consciously aware of many of her language-related challenges. Furthermore, she engaged in continuous reflective processes and analyzed her linguistic encounters in the U.S. as they constituted meaningful aspects of her experience in the second languaculture:

I do reflect on my experiences. I think not that much on educational as on linguistic… For example, talking on the phone is difficult for a non-native speaker. Even now when I talk on the phone, for example with my friend, I would notice if it’s going well or not. If it
goes well I would be like: “Oh, I understand her so well, I feel proud, we’re having a good conversation”. I would feel really good if the conversation goes well on the phone cause it’s not always the case. Or when I am at work, my phone would ring and I would pick it up… And I will reflect if the conversation went well or not. I always think about it… (Interview)

In addition to the above strategies, Maria engaged in mentally rehearsing her speech in advance in order to speak proper English and sound more confident at presentations or during phone conversation:

Usually, when I prepare for teaching a class, or before an important meeting I would practice my speech in my head. It helps me get ready for speaking because I practice formulating my thoughts in my head. (Journal)

Besides the above strategies that Maria adopted over her stay in the U.S. with the goal of improving her English and integrating in the U.S. languaculture, she developed specific subconsciously driven behavioral patterns aimed at overcoming problematic situations when her knowledge of the language and her external strategies were insufficient. Maria shared the following experience as related to the above:

I teach consumer behavior and it’s a very interactive topic. I always ask my students to give me examples … they always have examples. And sometimes they say something and I don’t understand what they say (laughing). And I am like “Ok, good example” and then I move on. Well, it’s not that I don’t understand it at all. But they would mention the name of a brand that I don’t know. And I am a Marketing Professor I don’t want to sound like I don’t know the brand name… So, basically, I ignore that, I don’t acknowledge the
fact that I don’t understand. And I guess it also translates to a lot of other situations.

(Interview)

As is clear from the excerpt above, Maria was unwilling to expose her incompetence with regard to linguistic and cultural forms in the content area that she taught, and therefore she purposefully disregarded the encounters that put her professional image at risk.

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language**

As was evident from Maria’s responses, as a result of assuming an active stance in confronting language-related challenges, Maria was successful at overcoming psychological barriers over time and gained confidence in her linguistic abilities. Maria’s overall improved self-esteem can be attributed to the fact that she had made considerable academic progress over the course of her Ph.D. program, which helped her start valuing her academic achievements above her language proficiency. Maria realized that English language proficiency played a secondary role in her academic development whereas the primary role was assigned to hard work, intellectual abilities, and persistence in achieving goals. The excerpt below points to the fact that Maria’s improved confidence had a positive impact on her perceptions of her self-worth when she was looking for a job:

We discussed this [the issue of being a non-native speaking professional] with other international students sometimes – that it could be more difficult for us. But when I was applying for a job I realized that I was not concerned about it. I had several publications. I knew that it was more important than the fact that I am a non-native speaker. My record of academic achievements rather than my language shows what I am capable of.

(Interview)
Despite the fact that Maria was successful at resolving major inner conflicts as related to the role of her language proficiency in her academic life, her everyday language, though improved over time, presented a psychological barrier even over the course of several years in the U.S. and remained an important aspect of her identity as it greatly impacted her perceptions of herself and the surroundings.

I have this inferiority complex that I am the only one who doesn’t speak English like a native speaker… I think I still have it… It’s just as if I feel that they feel it… though they probably don’t even care. (Interview)

Maria felt that some of her goals in everyday communication were difficult to achieve due to her perceived lack of English language competence. Maria shared the following example in the interview:

I don’t think that I wouldn’t be able to reach my academic goals because of my language but I think my language can be on my way when I need to speak in everyday life. For example, let’s say I have to go and speak to a manager of a store because I want to use the store as a site for my research. I will need to ask for his permission to allow me to conduct experiments there. I would definitely think that he will most likely say ‘no’ to me. Because of my English, he will just think that I am not competent enough. (Interview)

Maria brought yet another example that illustrates her perceptions of herself in relation to her English language proficiency:
My American friend and I were flying to Puerto Rico and there was a problem with her ticket. She went to the desk and started to complain and argue about it because it was a problem on their side. I was thinking: “Oh, my God! I would never be able to do the same if I were in her situation.” Because English is not my native language they would never listen to me. As soon as I open my mouth they will be like: “Ok, she is a foreigner, we can do whatever we want.” (Interview)

Both of the examples above serve as an indication of Maria’s lack of confidence due to her accent and the lack of fluency in English. Despite the fact that she had never experienced the above-described situations in real life, she could clearly imagine the outcomes and tied them with the fact that she was a non-native speaker of English.

Maria’s lack of confidence in her English language skills resulted in the shift in her communication habits and identity. She considered herself a rather outgoing person who liked to establish contacts with new people and engage in conversations with them. However, her accent and low self-esteem caused by it restricted her from interacting with people.

Recently, one of my American colleagues invited me for a baby shower… I was the only person who spoke English as a foreign language and I felt it so strongly… At events like that I would just not talk, and I would feel extremely uncomfortable because of that because I like to talk. I like to be social and I am a social person. But I would just keep silent. And that would be a horrible night for me. I would be so tired at the end. I would go home and I would be like “What’s wrong with me? I don’t like to be someone like that”. (Journal)
As is evident from the above excerpt, Maria’s linguistic experiences in everyday contexts evoked mixed feelings and emotions. On the one hand, she refused to speak and thus remained silent and “unnoticed” because she tried to avoid being judged by native speakers for her accent and a lack of fluency in English. On the other hand, Maria resisted taking a passive stance in communication with others as it contradicted her identity of “a social person”.

**Navigation Between Cultures**

**Table 7**

*Navigation Between Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in the New Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived different by Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal-directed learning about the U.S. culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking opportunity to spend time with Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preserving Russian Cultural Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Member of Russian-speaking community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Russian traditions: holidays, food, movies, music, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending Russian cultural and social events; concerts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willing to be “the same as Americans”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“No matter how much time I’ve lived in the U.S. I will always remain Russian”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Becoming true Russian again” - Emergence of Russian identity in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am not the same as people who live in Russia any more”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud to have multicultural experiences</td>
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Challenges in the New Culture

Maria’s reflection on her culture-related experiences in the U.S. comes primarily from her journal. Maria noted that one of the challenges that she faced during the entire period of her stay in the U.S. was a lack of cultural knowledge. She shared her experience in the journal:

My boyfriend Jim, my friend Ramona, and I went to Astoria, a city on the Coast of Oregon. In Astoria, there is a house where the movie “Goonies” was filmed. “Goonies” is a popular movie for children from the 80s, I believe. Maybe some Russians are familiar with this movie but I am not. So, Ramona and Jim were so excited to see that house, they shared so much joy about visiting the house from their favorite childhood movie. I couldn’t relate to that. I felt as an outsider. (Journal)

Maria also noted that she became tired quickly when listening to American music that was popular in the 80s and 90s because she was not familiar with it. She mentioned that when her boyfriend and she were listening to that music on long road trips she sometimes took breaks from it by switching to the Russian songs that she liked and listening to them through her earphones.

Among other challenges that Maria pointed out in the interview was the fact that she found it frustrating to be perceived as different by Americans. Maria was particularly aware of the fact that she was “different” from the majority of the population in the U.S. when she was asked about her country of origin and in the conversations when the topic of cultural differences emerged:

Well, I found it annoying to be asked all the time where I am from. It’s annoying to know that there are stereotypes and prejudices against me. It’s annoying to be perceived as different all the time. (Interview)
Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies

Despite her challenges to integrate into the broader culture of the U.S., Maria did not feel completely isolated from it due to the fact that she had a strong connection to the U.S. academic culture. Maria mentioned:

I guess I fit really well in the U.S. academic culture. I feel part of it. If you ask me about the American culture, in general, I would say less so. But as for academic culture I do feel part of it. (Focus Group)

Maria explained this by the intense workload in her Ph.D. program that deprived her of the opportunity to invest in learning about the broader culture of the U.S. Maria continued:

I put most of my effort to fit into the academic culture. I succeeded there more. I put less effort to fit in the U.S. general culture. I think I am still going through this process of fitting into the culture. (Focus Group)

Maria’s above idea that she was “still going through this process of fitting in” indicates that she was open to learning about the U.S. culture and was not discouraged by the culture-related challenges that she encountered in the U.S. Rather, she willingly took the opportunity, whenever time allowed, to spend time with her American friends, watch American movies, or read about U.S. history:

I am very excited every time my friends or colleagues decide to go out or invite me to come over for an event or a party. I see every such event as an opportunity for me to integrate better into the U.S. culture, to learn about it and experience it myself… (Journal)
In the focus group interview, Maria also reflected on her willingness to integrate into the U.S. culture:

I am actually trying to learn more of American culture. I try to watch more American classic movies and listen to American music. It’s my way of learning the culture. But it’s just so difficult. You can’t just absorb the whole culture. You have to grow up with it.

(Focus group) [T]

The data indicated that Maria had conflicting emotions regarding her cultural belonging. She noted that at the initial period of her stay in the U.S. her desire to integrate into the U.S. culture was so strong that she limited her communication to Americans and was not interested in bonding with Russian speaking individuals living in Pennsylvania.

**Preserving Russian Cultural Identity**

Despite the fact that Maria was unwilling to be affiliated to Russian speakers during the entire period of her life in Pennsylvania, five years later, when Maria moved to Oregon, she quickly became a member of a Russian community. Her new affiliation made her reevaluate her position in relation to the two cultures and evoked in her the feelings of strong connection to the Russian culture:

When I came to the U.S. I didn’t even want to have Russian friends, I wanted to become a part of American culture, American society. I did succeed to a certain extent but I couldn’t get rid of my Russian roots. This is something that you cannot just change. I miss Russian culture and traditions for sure. (Journal)

Maria believed that she could understand people with Russian cultural background much better than those who were born and raised in the U.S. and felt more relaxed communicating with the
Russians. Although there were a number of people among Americans whom she considered close friends, Maria realized that the emotional connection with her Russian friends was much stronger than with the Americans. Maria enjoyed spending time with her new Russian friends and participating in Russian discos, song contests, and other events organized by the Russian community.

My Russian/Ukrainian friends from the Russian speaking community here got together several times for the past year to celebrate Russian holiday. We cook Russian food, watch Russian movies and sing Russian songs on such events. The best thing to do ever! This is so exciting, so uniting, so close to home. I really miss that. (Journal)

Maria described her perceptions of such experiences as follows: “These were the best memories of my past 1-2 years in Oregon - becoming “true Russian” again”.

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures**

As is evident from the above, Maria had mixed feelings and perceptions regarding her cultural belonging, which shifted and progressed depending on the stage of her personal development. In the initial years in the U.S., she clearly identified her willingness to become “the same as Americans”, as she at times felt inadequate due to her foreign cultural and linguistic background in the U.S.:

Well, I found it annoying to be asked all the time where I am from… I wanted to get rid of that feeling and integrate more. (Interview)

Furthermore, Maria’s eagerness to become closer to Americans was evident from the fact that she intentionally avoided affiliations with Russian-speaking people, as discussed above.
However, over the course of several years, Maria reevaluated her perceptions of her cultural belonging as is clear from the excerpt below:

When I got to know the Russian community I realized how much I missed it before. It was something that I had been missing for five years. I’ve realized that no matter how long I’ve lived in the U.S. I will always remain Russian… forever. It will never change.

(Journal)

Despite the fact that Maria regained her Russian identity, she felt that over the years spent in the U.S. she had become different from those Russians who lived in Russia. Her rich experience in the U.S. had changed her in the following way:

I think I am more open-minded than they [people living in Russia] are. I have different values and aspirations because I have the worldviews and perspectives from two different worlds. (Interview)

Maria pointed out numerous benefits of being bicultural and stated that her academic and non-academic cultural practices in the U.S. greatly enriched her cultural perspectives and impacted her perceptions of self and the surroundings.

Academic Activity
Table 8

*Academic Activity*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Practices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coursework</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language-related challenges</td>
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<td>Content-related challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intense workload</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language-related challenges</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressful experience but stress viewed as normal for teaching profession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive experiences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publications</td>
<td></td>
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<th>Academic Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity as a student</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive perceptions of self-worth shaped by productivity in research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifted values - prioritizing academic achievements over linguistic competence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity as faculty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respected in academic communities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distanced by others in non-academic contexts due to professional status</td>
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**Academic Practices**

Maria’s identity in the U.S. was shaped in large part by her academic practices as a Ph.D. student and later faculty at a university. In the initial years of her doctoral program, Maria encountered problems that are typical not only for international but also domestic students. Among them were unfamiliar content in the courses, complex concepts and theories, extensive academic reading and homework, and the overall workload of courses. In addition to the above challenges, Maria experienced second language-related issues. However, after two years in the program many of the challenges became less significant as a result of accumulating content and linguistic knowledge and the experience of taking classes. Maria’s academic experience as
related to content, language, and workload are described in the “Second Language Issues” category discussed above.

Maria was a graduate assistant in her department during the entire period of her Ph.D. program. She admitted that her experiences as a graduate assistant were generally positive. She was assigned to teach only in her fourth and fifth years in the program when she already felt rather confident about taking teaching-related responsibilities. Nevertheless, Maria viewed teaching as a stressful experience. Maria also mentioned that she did not think of her stress as of something unusual in her profession and was convinced that teaching was “stressful for any instructor including very experienced professors” (Interview). Her confidence in teaching increased considerably when she became a faculty member. Maria mentioned that her professional status was the main factor that contributed to her improved self-esteem:

…I was scared of many things. I am not any more. Now I feel more stability and confidence. Even with students – I teach classes – I am confident about my knowledge, I know what I have to teach them and that my classes are very interesting… I think the confidence comes with your status too. People respect you because of your status as well. (Interview)

Despite the fact that Maria had occasional problems with English when teaching native speakers, she was less concerned about them as a professor. Maria wrote in the journal that she even learned to treat such problems with humor, which helped her establish a positive environment in the classroom:
My students and I sometimes laugh about the way I pronounce words. I even ask my students to tell me how to say certain words correctly. Then I try to pronounce them and we all friendly-laugh. It’s like a way to bond. (Journal)

Maria’s research practices both as a student and a faculty member constituted positive academic experiences. Throughout interviews and reflection journal activity, she continuously mentioned that she enjoyed doing research and envisioned herself in academia primarily as a researcher. She showed interest in conducting research early in her Ph.D. program, and her research potential was quickly spotted by her academic advisor and other professors in her department:

I was assigned as a teaching assistant to my advisor. I had to help him with teaching: set up the projector before class, grade students’ works, communicate with students. But he said: “Well, I’ve looked at your research potential and I’ve decided to take away teaching responsibilities from you”. So, in two months he took away all the teaching from me and gave me research. I was not even assisting him with his research. I was doing my own research. (Interview)

When Maria was a doctoral student she was honored to represent her department at one of the largest international consortiums in marketing. Maria explained that the department chose only one doctoral student each year to send to this annual event. The selection of a representative was usually guided by students’ academic achievements where their accomplishments in research played a primary role.

Maria continued to excel in research when she became a professor. In the first two years of her tenure track, she managed to initiate several research projects and publish a number of
articles in top-tier journals. She was particularly enthusiastic about presenting her research at national and international conferences and establishing professional connections with people in the field of marketing.

**Academic Identity**

Maria admitted that her research practices in both her doctoral program and faculty job presented a vital aspect of her academic identity. Maria emphasized that her progress in research and positive feedback from more experienced professionals in marketing had helped her reevaluate her perceptions of herself and regain confidence in her abilities.

She realized that her English language competence was a less important feature of her professional image than her academic skills and experiences. When applying for faculty positions in the final year of her doctoral program, Maria was convinced that her English proficiency would not be an obstacle in finding a job:

> I honestly didn’t think that my English would be on my way. I had several publications. I knew that it was more important than the fact that I am a non-native speaker. My record of academic achievements rather than my language shows what I am capable of.

(Interview)

When I asked Maria how she felt about her achievements in research and what perceptions she thought others had about her when she became a professional, she replied that she felt very confident as a professor and that her confidence stemmed primarily from her successful research endeavors. Maria added that she felt that she was respected by her colleagues at her department and in a broader academic community.

Whereas in academic communities Maria felt accepted and a legitimate member, outside the academic world she sometimes was distanced by others due to her professional status. In
Oregon, where Maria moved to work as an assistant professor, she lived in a small university town with a large student population. Maria mentioned that she could sense how people’s attitude to her changed immediately when they found out that she was a professor, regardless of the fact that she was within the same age group with them and that they met in non-academic contexts. Maria felt that those individuals were intimidated by her status because the majority of them were students. Maria recounted in the interview:

I really love salsa dancing. When I go to salsa classes I get to know people and in a conversation they can ask me what I am doing for living. When I say that I work as a professor in marketing at the university I can see how their faces change. Some of them don’t talk to me as much any more. This creates a distance, some kind of. It’s a social boundary. Most of them are students there, and even despite the fact that I am very close to them in age or even of the same age there is still this gap between us that I wish there wasn’t. It’s annoying sometimes. It’s great in terms of self-respect but on the other hand it creates a boundary between them and me. (Interview)

Maria attributed such “distancing” to the fact that the town where she lived was very small and she was convinced that her experience in a larger city with a less divided population would have been different.

**Personal Life**
Table 9

*Personal Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social networks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-speaking community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American boyfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views on the family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing family over career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This is missing in my life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to maintain balance between work and personal life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is evident from the data, Maria’s friends in the U.S. presented a source of emotional support that helped her cope with various challenges in the second language culture. In her initial years of her doctorate, the majority of Maria’s friends were her peers working on their Ph.D. degrees in the same department. Most of them were international students. Although Maria met a lot of fellow students in the program and was successful at building positive and supportive relationships with them, an intense workload that each of them had constrained them from the opportunity to meet informally frequently:

… I had very good relationships with each of them… but we didn’t communicate much while I was in the program because we were both busy all the time though we were good friends. And we are still good friends. (Journal)

Despite the fact that Maria was avoiding Russian communities for five years when she lived in Pennsylvania in order to fully integrate into the U.S. culture, she was delighted to reestablish connections with the Russian people when she relocated to Oregon and was introduced to the Russian-speaking community. Maria admitted that the psychological support that she was receiving from spending time with her Russian friends was not comparable to any
other social activities. Maria was so enthusiastic about participating in social events organized by the Russian-speaking community that she managed to allocate time to meet with her Russian friends despite the amount of work that she had as a tenure-track assistant professor. The role of Russian friends and informal social connections in Maria’s life is discussed in more detail in the “Navigation Between Cultures” section introduced earlier in this chapter.

At the time of data collection, Maria was dating an American whom she met when she relocated to Oregon. Maria mentioned that the relationships opened new opportunities for her and allowed her to better integrate in the U.S. culture. With her new boyfriend, Maria started spending more time among Americans in informal settings, which positively impacted her English language development and self-esteem.

In the interview, Maria mentioned that her personal life and the fact that she was not yet married presented an aspect of her life that she was not completely satisfied with. As an individual with the Russian cultural background, she gave a high priority to family. However, family was a missing component of her identity:

My life here doesn’t allow me to stick that much to my family values. To begin with, I don’t have a family here. I can’t invite family members and friends to my house to celebrate a family event because I don’t have either a family or a house. This is missing in my life. And I feel bad about it. (Interview)

When asked why, in Maria’s opinion, the component that was so important for her was still missing in her life, Maria replied that she was unable to invest much effort into her personal life because she was highly focused on the academic aspect of her life.

Maria noted that despite the fact that she had several dating experiences while she lived in Pennsylvania, she was not completely happy in either of the relationships. Maria attributed
many of the problems that she had in her relationships to the fact that she was international. According to Maria, a lot of American men were not enthusiastic about dating a girl from a different linguistic and cultural background because such men were “intimidated” by a differing worldview.

**Case 2 – Victoria**

**Victoria’s Profile**

Victoria arrived in the U.S. in July 2010 at the age of 25 when she got accepted into a Ph.D. program in Health Outcomes at a university in Texas. In her undergraduate degree, which she received in Russia, Victoria majored in Pharmacy. She completed her bachelor’s degree in 2007 and had a job in her major before moving to the U.S. As part of her doctoral program, Victoria completed her Master of Science degree in Health Outcomes in 2014.

When asked about why Victoria chose to study in the U.S. she replied that after she received her undergraduate degree, she joined VREAC where she got to know a lot of people who were already graduate students in the U.S. at that time. She learned from them about the process of applying to a graduate school in the U.S. and an opportunity to receive financial aid from a university, which was crucial for Victoria. Another reason why Victoria chose the U.S. as a destination to continue her education was the fact that she had already traveled to the U.S. twice while she was in her undergraduate program. Both times she participated in the same travel-abroad program for students as Maria did. Victoria commented that she enjoyed both of her trips that allowed her to learn about the country, its culture, and the education system. In order to prepare for the GRE and TOEFL exams, Victoria attended classes in VREAC for two years and received professional help from the educational advisors in the center. Victoria
mentioned that her participation in VREAC’s workshops and sessions played a crucial role in her preparation for the application.

Before she received an acceptance letter from the university, Victoria had been doubtful about her chances of getting accepted into a graduate school in the U.S. and receiving financial aid from the university. Despite her strong desire to come to the U.S. for a doctoral degree, Victoria could not imagine her life in the U.S., as the idea of becoming a Ph.D. student seemed unrealistic, though highly desirable, to her. Victoria shared her thoughts regarding the above in the interview:

I was almost sure that I wouldn’t get accepted in the first year of my application. I thought that I would need to apply the following year again. I planned to try applying for two years in a row, and then if it hadn’t worked out I would have stopped and gone another way. (Interview) [T]

Victoria mentioned that she had a clearer picture of what her life would be in Russia than in the U.S. If she had had to stay in her home country she would then have moved to Moscow, find a job in higher education, and conduct scientific experiments. Victoria was pleasantly surprised when her application for the doctoral degree program turned positive results. Victoria admitted that her excitement lasted for almost the entire first year of her Ph.D. program.

Below is the timeline of major events in Victoria’s life since her relocation to the U.S.:
Below is the discussion of the findings as related to the four themes: second language issues; navigation between cultures; academic activity; and personal life.

Second Language Issues
Table 10

Second Language Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges as Related to Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fluency when discussing complex topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slang words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent (a concern in initial years in the U.S.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on language experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toastmasters club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitating native speakers’ English to better integrate into the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental rehearsal before giving speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-talk to clarify difficult points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-talk for psychological purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding negative linguistic experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence (at the beginning of Ph.D.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling restricted by English language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am not just the language, I am much more”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift in priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less concerned about accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing language as a concern when looking for an academic job in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenges as Related to Second Language

*Academic language.* According to Victoria, her linguistic experiences were not always positive at the beginning of her stay in the U.S. Victoria mentioned that being new to the U.S. education, she was unfamiliar with many norms and conventions of both written and oral
communication, characteristic of the U.S. academic culture. For example, in the second year of her doctoral program, when Victoria was required to select an academic advisor, she felt uncertain and insecure about what language and ways of communication were appropriate when interviewing a potential advisor. The excerpt below points to Victoria’s lack of pragmatic competence:

In my program, we have to choose an advisor after about one year in the program. I had to meet with faculty members and communicate with them in order to understand if I want him to be my advisor or not. I had to tell them something about myself, my research interests and ask them what they do and if they are willing to work with me. At that time I couldn’t quite understand how appropriate it was in the U.S. culture. I mean how I should do it so that it’s appropriate in that context, what questions are ok to ask… It was a challenge for me. (Journal)

Victoria also mentioned that she was self-conscious about her language in such conversations as she realized that inaccuracies and unintentional misuse of verbal and nonverbal cues in her language could result in miscommunication and incorrect impression:

I didn’t know what language was OK to use. I didn’t know if I could come and tell them directly that I wanted to work with him or her. I was thinking about it a lot: is it OK or not? What do I need to say and how do I need to say it? (Journal)

Academic writing presented another concern for Victoria. Specifically, she mentioned that writing academic papers made her particularly distressed as she realized that writing constituted one of the primary components of a doctoral program and that it was necessary for a Ph.D. student to demonstrate excellent academic writing skills. Victoria attributed her problems
partly to the fact that she was a non-native speaker of English and partly to her limited competence of English grammar and vocabulary. Victoria specified that she felt that her grammar and vocabulary knowledge was good overall, however, it was insufficient for expressing complex ideas when writing academic papers:

I didn’t feel confident about many aspects – especially my writing skills… The biggest problem that I had with academic language was my writing. It was hard to express my ideas in English in writing so that all the grammar and vocabulary were at the level of a graduate degree… It was difficult to write academic papers that were expected from doctoral students. I had never written such papers before. Even summarizing things was difficult for me. (Interview) [T]

As is clear from the excerpt above, Victoria had difficulty communicating the meaning of her message with clarity and felt particularly pressured by the high expectations, with regard to academic writing, of her doctoral program.

Victoria’s lack of lexical knowledge presented an obstacle in oral modes of communication as well. In particular, her lack of lexical competence negatively impacted her comprehension. Despite comprehension issues, Victoria did not feel comfortable to ask her interlocutor for repetition especially when communicating with academic faculty:

… A common situation would be that somebody told me something and I realized that I didn’t know a word that he used, and thus I could not understand what he was saying. There were such situations when I didn’t feel comfortable to ask him or her to repeat or to say: “I didn’t know the word that you used, so can you explain it again using different
words?” Especially when it’s a professor or when you have other formal conversations you cannot interrupt a person to clarify what he meant. (Interview) [T]

*Everyday language.* Some of the challenges described above also emerged in non-academic contexts. Victoria’s lack of everyday vocabulary was one such problem. Particularly, Victoria viewed slang words as one of the main reasons for her lack of understanding:

When I had to use English in non-academic settings I knew and realized that I lacked the knowledge of slang words and phrases. I couldn’t understand sometimes what Americans were saying when they used slang. (Interview) [T]

Victoria also mentioned that when abstract ideas were the topic of a conversation she struggled selecting proper words to express her thoughts:

One of my biggest problems is passive vocabulary. I know words but a lot of times I can’t use them myself. I try to be very conscious about the new language that I hear in order to acquire it and be able to use in my speech. However, I can’t use it in my speech immediately after I learn it. (Journal)

When asked whether she viewed her accent as part of the problem, i.e. whether it created a barrier for successful communication with native speakers, Victoria replied that she had expected that it would cause a problem. However, later she reevaluated her perceptions of her accent. Victoria mentioned that in communication with native speakers of English she was consciously aware of her accent, and she purposefully paid attention to how others perceived her accent and whether it prevented them from understanding her. After some time, Victoria
concluded that her accent was not an issue to be concerned about and was not a priority in her life to take care of:

I am not extremely proud of my accent but I wouldn’t spend time on improving my accent, I understand that it is important but I have so many other more important things in my life. (Interview) [T]

**Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development**

Similar to Maria, Victoria was willing to better integrate into the U.S. languaculture and viewed her linguistic proficiency as important to facilitating the process. Victoria was reflective of different problematic aspects of her English language competence and was motivated to improve them. Thus, in order to become a better public speaker, Victoria joined a local Toastmasters club designed to help people learn the arts of speaking and listening at their own pace. Although there were a number of various reasons why she chose to become a member in such an organization, one of her goals was to improve her communication skills.

Furthermore, Victoria noted that in order to sound like Americans she imitated and practiced American English intonation and pronunciation. Furthermore, Victoria acquired nonverbal communicative elements, such as smiling and other facial expressions commonly used among Americans:

I know that English pronunciation and intonation are very different from the Russian language… I try to speak differently - my voice is different - in English than when I speak Russian. For example, in Russian we speak with a more closed mouth, the sounds of the Russian language must be pronounced like that… But in English the sounds are more open. When I speak English I try to imitate native speakers. I smile more when, the
thing that I don’t do much when I speak Russian. Another thing that is different is my pitch… Is it called pitch? Well, I think yes. So, I change it too, I do it on purpose because I try to speak like native speakers to sound more natural and to be understood… and to be closer to native speakers. (Interview) [T]

Among other language-related strategies that Victoria cultivated and commonly evoked was the use of private speech for different purposes. When preparing a speech for a presentation, Victoria engaged in mental rehearsal. Victoria mentioned that she also engaged in self-talk when she did not understand some academic concepts. When Victoria was confused about complex ideas when reading texts she tried to explain them to herself in English. Interestingly, in addition to helping clarify complicated academic content, private speech allowed Victoria to organize her thoughts when she felt confused about something in her life, thus serving a psychological function:

I talk to myself in order to express my thoughts or to organize my thoughts if I am confused about something in my life. When I feel that I need to organize my thoughts I start talking to myself. For example, I’ve just had a season of interviews. So, in order to organize all my thoughts I practiced them in my head using English in order to be prepared with ideas that could be useful… I always did it in English. (Interview) [T]

In addition to the above linguistic behaviors consciously or unconsciously evoked in response to language-related challenges, Victoria mentioned that she had learned to purposefully avoid negative linguistic experiences, as is evident from the excerpt below:
I feel that when I have to argue about something to prove my point of view I prefer not to even start doing it, though I know that by not trying to argue I let the other person win and I automatically lose. Because I know that I won’t be able to handle it. (Journal)

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language**

Victoria viewed her English language proficiency as a particularly meaningful aspect of her overall experience in the U.S. Furthermore, she thought that many of her challenges and her inability to succeed in some aspects of her life were caused by her perceived lack of linguistic competence. Victoria described her options and experiences in the U.S. as “restricted” due to her insufficient language skills as in the excerpt below:

When I first started my Ph.D. I had this terrible lack of confidence. At that time, I thought that it’s because my English was not good enough and I couldn’t express my thoughts well enough. So I felt restricted in some ways due to my lack of English language proficiency. I felt restricted not only in my communication but also in relationships with people due to my language. For example, I felt that I could have been involved in some projects but I was not due to some circumstances as a result of my poor linguistic skills.

(Interview) [T]

However, Victoria’s continuous reflection on her self-worth and the overall role of her non-native English language proficiency in her life in the U.S. helped her reevaluate some of her beliefs regarding the L2 and resulted in improved self-esteem. Her linguistic skills lost their primacy as her priorities shifted to her academic achievements:

… However, as time went, first, my language was improving, but at the same time I started realizing that I am not just the language, I am much more. My academic skills are
more important. If my language is not perfect but I can do quality work, I have publications and there are other good things in my CV, then my language is not the most important thing in the world. So the lack of confidence disappeared as time went on. It was very strong at the beginning but then it went away because I gradually became more confident in my abilities as a student and professional. (Interview) [T]

Victoria’s improved self-esteem is also evident through the change in her perceptions about her accent, as discussed in the subsection “Challenges as Related to Second Language”. In particular, over the course of her stay in the U.S., she realized that her accent was not strong, and thus it did not impede the flow of communication.

Despite Victoria’s overall improved perceptions of herself in relation to the L2, she realized that there were some areas where her linguistic competence could present an obstacle in achieving goals. Particularly, Victoria was concerned about it when she was thinking about searching for an academic job in the future. Victoria was convinced that it was a must for professors in any discipline to demonstrate excellent language skills, even if English was not their native language:

When I think about a job that I would like to get, i.e. to become a professor, I think about my language. When you are a professor teaching is part of your profession. When you teach others it’s absolutely necessary to have perfect language. How can you be a professor and make even minor mistakes in your language? I think it’s not really good. I understand that it is bad and I have to work on it but at the same time it is not something that can stop me from pursuing my goals. (Journal)

Navigation Between Cultures
Table 11

Navigation Between Cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in the New Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited participation in U.S. cultural forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-U.S. cultural background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cultural background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies/TV shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor/Jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived foreign by Americans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrating through academic culture and professional communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection and goal-directed learning about the U.S. culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying American cultural practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts of friendliness (inviting colleagues for coffee/lunch)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preserving Russian Cultural Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased interest in Russian culture in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Russian literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to Russian popular music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching Russian TV shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following Russian news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-speaking friends in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent visits to Russia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of Russian identity in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No perceptions of being “a different Russian” when visiting Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling self-aware of non-U.S. cultural background in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved self-esteem when in a group of international people</td>
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**Challenges in the New Culture**

The subject of navigation between cultures re-emerged in the interviews and throughout the journal several times. Victoria admitted that she frequently reflected on her cultural experiences in the U.S. and the role of her Russian background in her life in the new country. Victoria noted that despite the fact that she had spent four years in the U.S., she still did not completely integrate into American culture. Victoria commented that her lack of English
language proficiency was partly responsible for that. Additionally, Victoria’s limited knowledge of the U.S. culture and her foreign background restricted her from participating in U.S. cultural forms. At the time of the interview, Victoria was doing an internship at a large U.S. pharmaceutical company located in California. As a result of her exposure to the new social environment at the time of the interviews, many of Victoria’s perceptions were shaped under the influence of her internship experience. Victoria shared one of her cultural experiences that demonstrated her inability to fully engage in U.S. cultural practices:

A week ago we had an informal meeting with my colleagues from the company. There were a few new people in the company including me. We were sitting at a round table and talking about different things not necessarily related to our work. At that moment I realized that I couldn’t participate in that conversation. All of them were Americans. They were talking about where they grew up, what those areas are famous for, etc. I was listening and thinking that I was an outsider among them. I understood what they were talking about but I didn’t know much about it. And I realized that I couldn’t add anything about my experience to what they were discussing because it seemed so irrelevant. (Journal)

Victoria continued that her non-U.S. cultural background particularly manifested itself in daily interactions when the topics of discussion were other than education or work-related. Victoria continued that although she realized that she was among “them”, working in the same industry, and living in the same country, she felt that she did not belong to the U.S. culture:

In such situations, I feel lost. Maybe it will get better over time. But now I don’t feel comfortable. I feel a foreigner. (Journal)
When reflecting on other cultural challenges that contributed to Victoria’s limited participation in U.S. cultural forms, Victoria mentioned her lack of familiarity with American movies that were popular in the past, humor and jokes that originated from them, and events in history of the U.S.

Where does humor come from? It comes from books, popular movies that all of us have read or watched. However, in this culture I didn’t receive this cultural component that could help me participate in different cultural activities, interact with people and feel part of the U.S. culture. Especially, when something is based on movies, events, or stories, that are known only here in the U.S… I felt this a lot of times especially at the beginning, I still feel that I lack cultural understanding sometimes. (Interview) [T]

In her journal, Victoria shared a memorable experience that had a significant impact on her perceptions of herself and made her particularly aware of her lack of cultural competence:

My American friend invited me to a party. There were around 12 people there. We decided to play charades where we had to guess names of different movies. We played for at least two hours, and the whole time I felt so uncomfortable and out of place. I was just sitting on my own watching them play. Out of 30 movies I guessed only one. At that moment I realized that only in the academic environment can I contribute and feel part of the community. Outside this community I feel a foreigner. (Journal)

In one of the interviews, Victoria indicated that in addition to her own increased cultural awareness, she felt that others perceived her as foreign as well. Victoria mentioned that occasionally she felt that her interlocutor purposefully avoided certain topics or jokes because he/she doubted that Victoria had the necessary background knowledge to comprehend them:
I kind of subconsciously feel that my interlocutors understand that they need to avoid some topics or humor because they think that I would not be able to understand what they are trying to say because I am a foreigner. (Interview) [T]

**Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies**

Despite the fact that Victoria’s experiences with the broader culture of the U.S. were not always positive, she did not feel completely alienated from it. Rather, she managed to integrate into it through her academic practices and participation in professional communities. In particular, when Victoria started her summer internship she met a lot of international people in the company, and she realized that she was not the only one who had a foreign background and that international professionals are common in that industry. Victoria admitted that that fact immediately increased her self-esteem and allowed her to feel a legitimate member of the U.S. culture.

When I started working for this company as part of my internship, I’ve noticed that I’ve become more confident. I think it can be explained by the fact that I’ve met so many people with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and different accents. In my industry (Pharmacy) there are so many people from different countries. I think this gives me confidence. (Journal)

Similar to the previous participant, Victoria employed different strategies to integrate into the U.S. culture. In oral communication, Victoria was consciously aware and in control of her nonverbal behavior. Specifically, in the U.S. she learned to frequently smile and keep eye contact when necessary. Victoria noted that overall she was highly motivated to integrate into the U.S. culture, as she did not intend to return to Russia after receiving a doctoral degree:
When the conversation is about anything but work I realize that I don’t belong to this culture. This is something that bothers me a lot because I understand that if I am going to stay in this country I have to be able to communicate with people not just at work but also outside the workplace. I realize that I need to do something about it. I need to communicate with native speakers more, read more, etc. (Journal)

Victoria was also reflecting on the means that could help her integrate into the U.S. culture. For example, she realized that she needed to be more friendly and social with her colleagues or peers and occasionally invite them for lunch or coffee, something that is not typical for the Russian culture, however is common in the U.S.

**Preserving Russian Cultural Identity**

Victoria’s reflections on the interview questions and journal hints yielded some interesting insights into her Russian cultural identity in the U.S. Victoria wrote that her curiosity about the Russian culture naturally developed after she moved to the U.S. and spent there one or two years. Victoria commented that she had never been that interested and appreciative of the Russian culture, classical literature, and history when she lived in Russia. She shared her thoughts in the interview:

Surprisingly, I’ve realized that my Russian identity emerged in the U.S. I didn’t reflect much on historical events before. I accepted what I learned from school textbooks or from TV and I never really questioned it until recently. Here, I got interested in all these things. I started valuing the Russian culture much more. I’ve become patriotic to some extent… I started reading books on Russian history. I even reread War and Peace by Tolstoy. The thing that I was mostly interested in, when I was reading the book, is the rich description of Russian culture and historical events, the war with Napoleon. I was
not even interested that much in the love story of Natasha Rostova when I was reading it. I want to read more of Russian books when I go to Russia this summer. (Interview) [T]

In the other interview, Victoria also mentioned:

When I came here I’ve become much more reflective of different things than I was before. Based on these reflections I can say that I’ve become more Russian than I was before… I understand that I am Russian not just by passport. (Interview) [T]

Victoria also noted that despite the fact that she left Russia four years before, she was familiar with its popular music trends, movies, TV series, and newly emerged performers and actors due to the fact that she watched Russian TV and followed Russian news:

Even though I’ve been living in the U.S. for several years now, I don’t feel that I have any gaps in my cultural knowledge about Russia. I watch Russian series online, I listen to Russian popular music, I read Russian news all the time. I am very familiar with what is going on there right now. In that respect I feel as if I have never left Russia. (Journal)

Victoria’s openness to communicating with Russian-speaking individuals living in the U.S. serves as another indicator of her attempts to preserve her Russian identity. Furthermore, Victoria mentioned that she felt a psychological need to travel to Russia frequently as she missed her home country, and her trips helped her stay connected to her family and the Russian culture.

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures**

As is evident from the findings above, Victoria viewed her future in the U.S. and, therefore, was willing to integrate into its culture and expand her knowledge about it. However,
reflecting on her perceptions of her cultural belonging and whether they changed over the course of her stay in the U.S., Victoria clearly identified herself as Russian:

I think that if you ask me about what culture I belong to I will definitely answer that I belong to the Russian culture. Despite the fact that I feel relatively comfortable among Americans and international people I don’t feel American even partially and I don’t think I will ever do. (Focus group) [T]

Interestingly, when she traveled to Russia in the past she noticed a striking difference between the cultures when arriving in Russia and then back in the U.S. Moreover, she felt different than the majority of people during her visits to her home country due to the new cultural elements that she adopted in the U.S.:

I don’t think I feel the same Russian as I had been before I came here. I got used and accepted a lot of things that are typical for the U.S. For example, I like when people smile to each other. I got used to people here in the U.S. who are quite different from Russians… After my first semester in the U.S. when I went to Russia I actually felt more different than I do now when I travel to Russia. I felt that something weird was going on. I saw a huge contrast at that time. (Journal)

However, this contrast gradually disappeared for Victoria. She explained it by the fact that she stopped comparing the two cultures and seeing faults with each of them. She rather learned to accept the difference:

I just returned from Russia and I realized that I am not surprised by the contrast between the U.S. and Russia any more. The more I travel to Russia the less I am surprised by the
difference both when I arrive in Russia and when I return back to the U.S. I am used to
the difference. I don’t get any culture shock any more. (Journal)

When asked whether Victoria’s perceived belonging to the Russian culture made her feel
foreign in the U.S., she replied that it rather made her feel self-aware, as is described in the
excerpt below:

Even when I try to imitate American cultural ways of behavior and even if I’ve reached
the point that I can say that I do it naturally I still can say that I am very aware of such
things as opposed to Americans. They just don’t know the other way. (Focus group) [T]

Victoria also noted that despite the fact that she had internalized many of the U.S.
cultural practices and norms, as indicate above, her non-U.S. cultural background still
occasionally made her feel inadequate among Americans. However, when she was surrounded
by people with international cultural and linguistic backgrounds (as in the case of her summer
internship), she felt that her self-esteem increased and she felt accepted by such a group of
individuals.

Academic Activity
Table 12

*Academic Activity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges with completing assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of prior experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding of research procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited writing skills in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited teaching assistantship assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional academic practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student organizations; workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively engaged (at the beginning of Ph.D. program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus shifted (later in Ph.D. program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional contacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling part of U.S. academic culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic language development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved critical thinking skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic practices helped shape personal worldview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shifted priorities</td>
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</table>

**Academic Practices**

As is evident from Victoria’s recounts of her experiences in the U.S., her academic duties in her doctoral program had a significant impact on her identity development. Victoria commented that doctoral classes seemed intimidating for her in the first semester of her Ph.D. program primarily because of the academic language. Victoria thought that she would have difficulties with comprehending professors and academic textbooks. However, she was
pleasantly surprised that instructors’ explanations were relatively easy to follow due to the fact that they used numerous examples when presenting the material:

I was very concerned about the material and my understanding of it. I thought that it would be very difficult and I wouldn’t be able to understand anything in classes, and wouldn’t be able to participate actively. But when I started taking classes I changed my mind, I realized that I had been wrong. I could understand everything in classes. The books were written in a very accessible easy-to-read way. Professors bring a lot of handouts and examples for students that help a lot. (Interview) [T]

Victoria expressed her overall positive impression of the instructional methods used in her doctoral program. In particular, she enjoyed the fact that the courses that she took fostered the development of critical thinking skills in students, encouraged collaboration inside and outside the classroom, and incorporated activities that had real-life application:

I noted that the U.S. education is aimed at developing students’ critical thinking. I think it is very important for any profession… There is another thing that I like. In the U.S. education, there is a lot of collaboration and contacts on different levels. For example, my department often organizes meetings with representatives of pharmaceutical companies and communities. There are a lot projects. You are just a student but you are already involved in different activities or projects in your field. (Interview) [T]

However, similar to the majority of Ph.D. students starting their doctoral programs, Victoria experienced challenges related to extensive workload, completing assignments, primarily writing papers, and a lack of confidence in her abilities. When asked about challenges that she had at the beginning of her doctoral program, Victoria replied:
The first thing that comes to my mind is workload in classes that I took. There were a lot of assignments. I did not always feel that I was ready to complete an assignment. I didn’t feel comfortable with them... I struggled a lot because I didn’t have any experience. (Interview) [T]

Victoria commented that at the beginning of her program, despite the fact that she received “A”s on her assignments and was praised by instructors for her good work, she constantly felt that she was a low-achieving student. Victoria noted that it took her some time to reevaluate her self-worth as a student, regain faith in her abilities, and begin feeling part of the educational community.

Among other challenges as a doctoral student, Victoria pointed out research practices that were part of her academic curriculum. Victoria noted that at the beginning of her program, she lacked understanding of the research process in general. Victoria was not familiar with the writing genre characteristic of research papers. In her reflection journal, Victoria wrote that in her undergraduate degree in Russia, she had not been taught how to synthesize or summarize information and thus had to learn this skill in her doctoral program. Furthermore, writing in English made her experience even more challenging:

As for research, I experienced a lot of stress at the beginning... I had never even written a summary for an article in my own language before I came here. I didn’t know how to do it. In addition, my language was a barrier. My writing skills were not good. (Journal)

As a doctoral student, Victoria had teaching assistantship responsibilities. In particular, she assisted an instructor with grading students’ written works and providing feedback on them in the classroom. In addition to the above, she taught lab courses during summer terms, which
allowed her to have more exposure to student-instructor interactions. However, due to the fact that her teaching responsibilities in both of these assignments were limited, she did not view them as real teaching experience. Victoria was doubtful about the value of these assignments in her overall academic development and commented on their negative impact on her studies, in particular, that they took a lot of time away from her primary responsibilities.

At the beginning of her doctoral degree, aside from taking courses, conducting research, and fulfilling teaching assistant duties, Victoria actively participated in student-led organizations as well as workshops and seminars organized by her department or university. In her first year, she assumed the role of the officer of the departmental student organization. Later, she became its president. Her responsibilities consisted of organizing various activities, meetings, and events for students of her department. As part of her work, she was contacting professionals who were working in the field and invited them to give lectures or conduct webinars for her department. Victoria noted that she became less motivated to engage in such activities later in her program. She explained it as follows:

… I am not that active anymore. I can’t say that I am not interested anymore. The thing is that my focus has shifted. I am now more focused on my research and my personal academic achievements in my Ph.D. I’ve realized that it’s very interesting to be part of all those workshops and activities but if I don’t do serious work I will have nothing to fill my CV with. What’s the point of attending career development workshops if you don’t do much, in terms of work, to grow professionally? I’ve realized that I spent too much time on this and needed to shift priorities. (Interview) [T]

An important milestone in Victoria’s doctoral study was her experience working as an intern at a large U.S. pharmaceutical company in summer 2014. Victoria commented that the
internship brought her multiple benefits. Among them were, receiving practical experience, establishing professional contacts, and overall improved self-esteem as a result of her exposure to a multicultural professional community.

**Academic Identity**

In her reflection on her perceptions of herself as related to academic duties, Victoria noted that despite the multiple challenges that she faced as a doctoral student her engagement in the academic culture allowed her to integrate into the broader culture of the U.S. and, feel to some extent, a legitimate member of it. Victoria also mentioned that working on a doctoral degree at a U.S. university had multiple positive impacts on her as a person. In addition to her improved English language proficiency over several years in the graduate school, Victoria noticed that she became more reflective of both her academic and non-academic experiences. As part of that, she engaged in practices of questioning things and events that happened in her life and in the world:

> I’ve changed as a person quite a bit. Before, I didn’t reflect that much on many things… My worldview has expanded a lot. I’ve become interested in a lot of things that I didn’t care much about before: history, politics, the psychology of a human being, etc. (Focus group) [T]

Victoria attributed her newly emerged natural curiosity partly to her academic development as a doctoral student and partly to the influence of people whom she met in academic settings. Victoria had gained a number of essential personal insights from these encounters:
What I realized in the grad school is how important it is to constantly develop. Development is what constitutes a human being; it is the meaning of our life. Before, I, kind of, intuitively felt this and that’s why I started my Ph.D., but I didn’t think much about it at that time. This understanding has shaped here, in my Ph.D. degree (Focus group) [T]

Victoria explained that she arrived at such conclusions after realizing that she was capable of achieving goals. As a doctoral student, she learned to overcome internal obstacles that distracted her from pursuing her dreams, which helped her understand that she was capable of much more than she had thought before. Victoria’s academic and daily practices shifted under the influence of her changing views. Specifically, Victoria became more focused on educational rather than social aspects of her life in the U.S. as, in Victoria’s opinion, the benefits of educational practices outweighed the gains from social relationships:

I was a very social person before. I liked to meet with friends and engage in interesting discussions… In the grad school, and the U.S., I think I’ve become lonely. I can’t say that I am not interested in spending time among people… But I guess I now think more about how much I need that. I think: “Ok, so I’ll go out with my friends and spend some time chatting in a coffee shop or at a party. Wouldn’t it be better if I stay home and read something interesting instead? Not necessarily related to my Ph.D. study. It can be something interesting that will enrich my knowledge.” This is how I think now. (Interview) [T]

Personal Life
Table 13

*Personal Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social networks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in social events (in initial years)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>International communities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Toastmasters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited social circle (few close Russian-speaking friends) (in later years)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Views on the family</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unfulfilled expectations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Valuing family over education/career</td>
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Reflecting on personal aspects of her life in the U.S. in one of the interviews, Victoria clearly indicated that despite the fact that she viewed her academic duties as a priority in the U.S., she considered her personal life a crucial component of her identity. In the initial years in the U.S., Victoria invested a significant amount of time into socializing with people and building and expanding her personal networks. Victoria commented that she had an extroverted personality by nature and viewed the importance of social interactions for her personal development. Victoria willingly accepted invitations to various social events hosted by her institution as well as non-academic organizations. Thus, Victoria became a member of a local toastmasters club where she could both establish personal connections and improve her public speaking skills. Victoria also attended European Night events organized by the Eurocircle club based in her city in Texas:

I think I was a very sociable person before. I liked to interact with people engage in interesting discussions on different topics. In my Ph.D. and in the U.S. I think I’ve become more reserved. I can’t say that I am not interested in getting to know new people... But, I think now more about how much I need it... I think: “Ok, so I’ll go out with my friends, we’ll spend some time chatting in a coffee shop. Isn’t it a better idea to
stay home and read something interesting? Not necessarily related to my Ph.D. program but something interesting, something for my personal development.” … I made a lot of friends here in Austin in my first year but I don’t communicate with these people any more. (Interview) [T]

As is clear from the excerpt above, Victoria reevaluated her priorities over time and her focus shifted. She commented that at the time of data collection she had a very limited circle of friends, the majority of whom were Russian-speaking individuals residing in different parts of the U.S. Victoria stated that she had lost contact with many people whom she had met in the initial years in the U.S. due to the fact that she did not invest sufficient amount of time in sustaining relationships with them.

Victoria commented that she was trying to find a balance between her academic duties and personal life. However, the constant pressures and stress that she had to deal with as a Ph.D. student greatly impacted the choices and decisions she made:

I don’t have time to meet with my friends. On the one hand, I understand that I need to communicate with people and have a personal life. But on the other hand, I have so many responsibilities in my Ph.D. program. So, when it comes to making a choice, I do it in favor of my Ph.D. degree most of the time. I am here for my degree, I am fully devoted to it… But, my personal life and friendship suffer because of that. (Interview) [T]

Victoria also mentioned that before moving to the U.S. she had imagined that her life would be different. She thought that she would be fully immersed in the U.S. culture, would make a lot of American friends, and would feel part of this community. However, in reality she
was unable to realize many of those goals. As part of the above, Victoria mentioned that her expectations regarding having a family remained unfulfilled as well:

I had a clear picture in mind when I just came to the U.S. that I would get married before I graduate and then, depending on where my husband lives and whether he can move to a different location or not, I would decide where to look for a job. I was thinking that I would even change my field if necessary and look for another job that I would be able to find in that location… Well, I had this kind of picture in my head, so what? The reality is far from it. (Interview) [T]

When asked about her sense of the world and how she felt about what had happened over the course of her stay in the U.S., Victoria responded that there were a lot of positive aspects of her life that made her happy. Speaking of her doctoral degree, she pointed out the fact that she was glad to have an opportunity to do the things that she loved to do. She also commented on her overall development that was shaped under the influence of her relocation to the U.S. and working on a Ph.D. degree. However, Victoria also mentioned that despite numerous positive changes in her life in the U.S. she did not consider herself completely happy due to the fact that her life lacked an essential component – the family:

Family is an important aspect of anyone’s life. Even if I am successful in my career but I have no one to share it with then it is not real happiness. (Interview) [T]

**Case 3 – Denys**

**Denys’s Profile**

Denys arrived in Texas and started his Ph.D. degree in August 2010 at the age of 26. Denys originally applied and was accepted for a doctoral degree in Instructional Technology.
However, three years later he changed his major to Applied Cognitive Psychology. In order not to waste the three years spent on the education major, Denys instead completed the missing requirements for the Master’s program in Instructional Technology and received the degree in Fall 2014. As part of his doctoral degree in psychology, Denys also needed to receive a master’s degree after completing the necessary requirements. When switching majors, Denys was able to transfer only one course – Statistics.

Denys’s undergraduate degree, which he received in Russia, was in Law. However, Denys’s job in Russia had never been related to his degree. Instead he worked in the area of technology-assisted human learning. In particular, he was responsible for designing educational software. Denys noted that he enjoyed his work at that time and was willing to pursue an advanced degree in that area. Therefore, he selected to apply for a graduate program in instructional technology. However, after having been in that program for some time he became more interested in the theory that stands behind human development. As a result, he decided to switch to Ph.D. in Applied Cognitive Psychology.

Denys chose to apply to an American university because he considered the U.S. one of the best countries for receiving a graduate degree. Additionally, similar to Maria and Victoria, Denys was a member of the educational advising center in Voronezh, Russia, where he learned about the specifics of application process and received professional educational advising support. Furthermore, Denys was familiar with a professor who taught at a U.S. university, who recommended Denys to the program to which he eventually applied. Below is the timeline of major events in Denys’s life in the U.S.
Figure 3

Timeline of Events for Denys

2010
Arrived in the U.S. (TX);
Started Ph.D.
Age: 26

2011
Traveled to Russia

2012
Traveled to Russia

2013
Switched to Ph.D. in Psychology;
traveled to Russia; got married

2014
Received M.A. in Education

Second Language Issues
### Table 14

**Second Language Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges as Related to Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor reasoning skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing conventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic language in Psychology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is perceived as more challenging than in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial expressions/idioms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American dialects and accents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accent</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustments, Strategies and Other Forms of Linguistic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal-directed language development</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open for correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic advisor’s support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English grammar books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching American movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private speech</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental rehearsal before giving speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-talk to clarify difficult points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thinking for speaking/writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidirectional cross-linguistic influences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am a foreigner in this country”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive shift in self-perception over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am a non-native speaker. It’s OK to make mistakes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughing at own accent together with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different sense of identity when speaking English and Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-conscious about language use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accent</strong> is not part of identity</td>
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</table>
Challenges as Related to Second Language

Academic language. The data obtained from the interviews and reflection journals indicated that Denys’s non-native English language proficiency played a remarkable role in his adjustment and integration into the new language culture. At the beginning of his stay in the U.S., Denys felt that his lack of fluency caused by his limited vocabulary presented the main linguistic challenge for him in academic contexts:

At the beginning it was quite difficult for me to communicate… It was difficult to express my thoughts in English. I felt that I didn’t know the necessary academic vocabulary and terminology. It’s easier now but there are still some areas where I need to develop. (Interview) [T]

Additionally, in educational contexts, Denys encountered difficulties with academic writing. Denys viewed his poor grammar preparation, limited vocabulary, and a lack of reasoning skills, as the primary reasons for such issues:

Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is writing. I think English grammar and analytical aspects are my biggest challenges. Also, synonyms that help express ideas better and more clearly. I really feel that my English is a kind of primitive. I realize that written language needs to be more elaborate and advanced when it comes to sentence structures and vocabulary than the language of oral communication, especially in academic papers. (Interview) [T]

Denys also found the genre of academic writing particularly challenging due to the fact that he was unfamiliar with stylistic rules and guidelines, such as tones and conventions of grammar usage and sentence formation:
When I started my Ph.D. I didn’t know how to write papers, how to organize them, what structure to follow, what words to use, what style to follow… Some people recommended to find an article related to my topic and follow its structure. No way! It didn’t help at all! I read it and didn’t understand anything in it. I lacked that linguistic approach that could help me in writing academic papers. (Interview) [T]

Despite the fact that Denys’s writing improved over the course of several years in his doctoral program, he felt that some of the problems persisted. Denys noted that when he transferred to a Ph.D. program in Psychology, he immediately realized that language expectations in that program were higher than in Education. Denys explained it by the fact that international students were almost nonexistent in the field of psychology at his university, whereas in education non-native speaking students and faculty were common. Therefore, professors in education typically adapted their language to help such students comprehend the material.

*Everyday language.* In addition to the areas of difficulty pertinent to academic language, Denys continuously encountered language-related challenges in daily contexts. For example, he was unfamiliar with conversational colloquialisms:

There are a lot of idioms and other conversational phrases that I don’t know. Sometimes I don’t understand what people say because of that. And obviously I can’t use them in my speech either. It lets me down. (Interview) [T]

Throughout the interviews and reflection journal, Denys repeatedly noted that listening comprehension issues presented an obstacle in his communication with native speakers. In addition to his limited competence of colloquial expressions, which prevented him from
understanding, Denys mentioned that he was sometimes unable to comprehend American dialects and accents:

Sometimes I have a hard time understanding what people say. For example, recently I went to one office on campus to apply for reimbursement for my conference travel. The lady spoke with a Texan accent that I couldn’t understand at all. I felt bad. I still feel that sometimes I don’t understand what people say. At such moments I have a strong feeling that I am a foreigner and that I am not in my shoes. (Journal)

As is evident from both of the excerpts above, Denys’s limited linguistic skills caused emotional distress and a feeling of being different.

When asked about his own accent and whether in Denys’s opinion it presented an obstacle in his communication with native speakers, Denys responded that he did not think that people with whom he interacted frequently had a problem understanding his accent since they were accustomed to it. However, he noticed that when he spoke with people, who heard his speech for the first time, his accent could easily result in miscommunication.

**Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development**

In the journal Denys wrote that his awareness and continuous reflection on the challenges that he had as a non-native speaker of English allowed him to confront them by actively seeking ways to improve his English. Denys viewed others’ correction of his mistakes and comments on his oral and written language as an opportunity to expand his knowledge about the language. Thus, he explicitly asked his academic advisor, who was aware and understanding of Denys’s challenges, to give him feedback on language-related issues based on the writing assignments that Denys submitted to him:
I told my advisor at the beginning that I am willing to improve my language. I asked him to correct my grammar and word choice when I make mistakes. He has a BA in English – he is very good at explaining language rules. He tells me what aspects of the language I need to work on. He told me to begin with articles and prepositions, - these are my biggest problems. He also suggested that I go the writing center on campus. So, I recently went there. I brought one of my assignments and we went through every sentence of it with a tutor. They also gave me handouts for future reference. I am planning to start working on other areas too, in addition to articles and prepositions. (Journal)

Denys noted that he was appreciative of his mentor’s support and found the way that his academic advisor guided him in his language development helpful. In particular, Denys liked the fact that his mentor did not correct his mistakes explicitly but did it in an implicit way, as though recasting, as in the excerpt below:

I am glad that my advisor understands my situation and accepts that I am international. I am very grateful to him. I recently mispronounced the word “expertise” – I said /ek-sper-tahyz/ instead of /ek-sper-teez/. So, he corrected me. By the way, what I liked most is that he didn’t do it by saying “You’ve made a mistake” but he repeated this word in his context, and thus pointed to my mistake (Interview) [T]

With the help of his academic advisor and the professionals from the university writing center, Denys developed a systematic approach to improving his English grammar. As part of this approach, he practiced his English by completing grammar exercises and vocabulary quizzes that he found in English grammar books. In order to expand his vocabulary further, in his free time, Denys watched American movies.
Among other forms of Denys’s linguistic development was the adoption of private speech in English. Similar to Victoria, Denys’s private speech served two important functions: mental rehearsal before speaking publicly, as is evident in the first excerpt that follows, and self-talk directed at clarifying difficult concepts and organizing ideas, as indicated in the second excerpt below:

… For example, when I prepare for a conference and I rehearse my speech. I rewind the whole scenario that I can expect at my presentation to prepare myself better. I try to use the same language that I am going to use in the presentation. I imagine that I will be asked questions, I try to predict them and answer them. (Interview) [T]

I’ve also noticed that I talk to others in my thoughts when I try to understand something myself. For example, I’ve read something but I haven’t understood it. So, what works for me is I start retelling the whole thing as if I’m talking to somebody and trying to explain it to him. While I explain the ideas I understand them better… In order to understand something I have to put it in words. I organize my thoughts in such a way. (Interview) [T]

Furthermore, Denys noted that after spending several years in the U.S. he noticed a change in his communication patterns. In particular, under the influence of the communication patterns generally followed by Americans, Denys integrated polite words and expressions into his speech in both English and Russian.

I’ve developed a habit of saying “Have a good day/night” and “Thank you”. I didn’t do it before. I have even taught all my family members – my parents and grandparents – to do the same. (Journal)
In addition to the above transformations of linguistic practices, Denys noticed that he naturally developed a habit of code-switching when speaking Russian to the Russian people who were also proficient in English. Denys noted that his word choice depended on which language came first to his mind. Besides switching between English and Russian lexically, Denys occasionally subconsciously integrated English syntax when speaking Russian:

I notice sometimes that I now transfer English structures into Russian as well. My parents noticed it too and they told me that I used some English clauses in my Russian… I am sure the same is true about my English language. Of course, I bring even more from my Russian language into English, I think especially when it comes to sentence structures and prepositions. I think it’s unavoidable. (Interview) [T]

As is evident from the above, although Denys’s English language had significantly improved over the course of his stay in the U.S. and as a result of his engagement with academic practices, his Russian linguistic background manifested itself through mistakes that he made in English and the unintentional use of Russian language forms such as sentence structures and prepositions in his speech in English.

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language**

Denys noted that despite the fact that he put a lot of effort into improving his English and tried to remain optimistic about his linguistic experience in the U.S., occasional encounters reminded him of the negative effects of his non-native English language proficiency and frequently led to emotional distress:

At such moments I become particularly aware that I am a foreigner in this country. It really frustrates me. (Focus group) [T]
Regardless of the above, Denys admitted that his views about his English language proficiency generally improved over time, first, as a result of his hard work, and second, due to the shift in his perceptions of his non-nativeness. Denys realized that as an individual who spoke English as a second language he was allowed to make occasional mistakes:

At the beginning it bothered me that my English is not perfect… But now I think differently. I think it [making mistakes] is natural for anyone who speaks a foreign language. After all, I am a non-native speaker. It’s OK to make mistakes. I try not to focus on it. I’ve developed a so-called protection mechanism. It doesn’t bother me too much any more. (Focus group) [T]

Denys noted that over the course of his stay in the U.S., he gained confidence in his communication skills and even learned to approach it with irony:

A week ago we had a party at my office mate’s house… We had a lot of fun and were playing jokes on each other a lot. And at one point my officemate said: “I would speak like Denys with a Russian accent” and started imitating my accent. I was not mad or anything. Well, yes, I have an accent. So what? I just laughed at it like everyone else. She didn’t say anything bad about me after all. I just replied: “You haven’t heard a real Russian accent”. And I said it with a thick Russian accent on purpose. Everyone laughed. (Interview) [T]

As discussed in the previous section, after spending several years in the U.S., Denys realized that he had changed as a person under the influence of newly accumulated linguistic forms and adopted language-related practices that are typical of the U.S. culture:
The English-language environment changed me a lot… I’ve become a little different when I speak Russian and when I come to Russia… First, I’ve developed a habit of saying “have a good day/night” and “thank you”. I didn’t do it before… I think I sound softer now in terms of the language that I use. I especially feel the difference when I travel to Russia. (Interview) [T]

The above finding indicates that Denys’s English language development in the U.S. impacted his identity as both a Russian and English language speaker. He became self-aware of what language he used and how he used it. As part of the above, he noted that from his observation of the U.S. culture he learned about the issues that could lead to an argument between him and his American interlocutors. Therefore, in order to avoid it, Denys preferred to stay away from commenting on particular issues. According to Denys, his shifted practices sometimes had negative effects:

I try to always control what I say and how I say it. I think that because of that I now have more distance between me and other people, regardless of the language I use. (Interview) [T]

**Navigation Between Cultures**
Table 15

*Navigation Between Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in the New Culture</th>
<th>Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies</th>
<th>Preserving Russian Cultural Identity</th>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of U.S. cultural background knowledge</td>
<td>Copying American cultural practices</td>
<td>Engaging with Russian cultural forms</td>
<td>Feeling foreign in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies/TV shows</td>
<td>Culture-specific language</td>
<td>Reading Russian literature</td>
<td>Increased sense of belonging to the Russian culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor/Jokes</td>
<td>Culture-specific nonverbal cues</td>
<td>Celebrating Russian holidays</td>
<td>Feeling “a different Russian” when visiting Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived foreign by Americans</td>
<td>Culture-specific email conventions</td>
<td>Cooking Russian food</td>
<td>Different sense of identity due to influences of the U.S. culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge of U.S. email conventions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Preserving Russian moral values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concept of modesty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges in the New Culture**

In the context of the U.S. culture, Denys felt that he was unable to fully integrate and participate in the cultural forms common for Americans. Denys noted that due to his limited knowledge of American movies and understanding of American humor and traditions he felt challenged when interacting with Americans, especially in informal contexts:

There are some cultural things that make it challenging. First, I am not familiar with all the humor and jokes that are popular here. I don’t watch series and movies that they
watch. When I came here I was overloaded with all the new information. There were a lot of things to learn and do. (Interview) [T]

In addition, at the beginning of his stay in the U.S., Denys felt that Americans whom he met through new encounters were not interested in communicating with him due to the lack of common topics of interest:

I think one of my biggest challenges was my cultural knowledge, or rather lack of it. At the beginning I felt that I was unable to integrate into the U.S. culture. In my surrounding there were a lot of Americans. These people were not interested in me because I am a foreigner and a stranger in their culture… I felt that I needed that cultural knowledge in order to be on the same page with others, so that I could adequately participate in conversations. (Interview) [T]

Other challenges were caused by Denys’s limited knowledge of conventions of written discourse, characteristics of the U.S. languaculture. Denys wrote that it took him time to internalize proper email conventions typically followed by Americans:

In my first year in the U.S., I think I overused these “polite words” in emails. Whenever I emailed my advisor, I started my email with “Dear Dr.…” and finished it with “Sincerely”. I thought it was the correct way to communicate via email. Later, I learned that it was not that necessary because when you know a person well enough, even if he is your advisor, you don’t need to use these words, because they create an unnecessary distance between you and that person. (Journal)
Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies

Denys mentioned that he was consciously aware of his challenges and particularly willing to adopt U.S. cultural norms in order to better integrate into the U.S. culture. As mentioned in section “Second Language Issues”, Denys naturally developed a habit of using “polite” expressions as well as nonverbal signals, such as smiling to people, commonly used by American in everyday communication. Denys noted that he internalized these practices to such an extent that he viewed them as the only appropriate way of interacting with people and could not abstain from using such expressions and nonverbal cues even when interacting in his native language.

Similar to Maria and Victoria, Denys admitted that his belonging to the academic culture allowed him to enter the broader culture of the U.S. Denys mentioned that as a result of daily activities in the academic contexts, which included both formal educational practices and informal interactions with his peers, he managed to not only experience the U.S. culture firsthand but also reexamine his perceptions of his belonging to it:

I fully accept the academic culture here in the U.S. and it has become a norm for me. I don’t feel a foreigner in it. However, I feel more foreign outside the university. (Interview) [T]

Preserving Russian Cultural Identity

Denys noted that in the absence of Russian cultural points of reference in the U.S. he felt a strong desire to engage in the cultural practices of his home country, such as celebrating Russian holidays and cooking Russian food. Denys commented that in the U.S. he became particularly appreciative and proud of Russian literature:
If you ask me: “Would you like to read American literature instead of Dostoevsky, for example?” I would answer no because I am Russian and Russian literature is part of my worldview. I know the Russian language and culture better and I am more interested in it. I can better relate to it. I know that I will develop as a person by reading Dostoevsky or Pasternak, for example, than Mark Twain. I tried to read Mark Twain but I didn’t understand many cultural things. I’d better read Pushkin, Tolstoy, or Turgenev. Their writing style is so clear and close to me. (Interview) [T]

In addition to the above cultural forms, Denys talked about preserving his Russian moral values that he had naturally adopted under the influence of the Russian culture. Denys mentioned that some of the principles that guided his behavior contradicted U.S. norms of behavior:

…Another thing is the idea of modesty. We, Russians, have always been taught not to show off. It does not mean that it is encouraged not to do anything and to be lazy… but it just means that you need to be like everyone else, don’t try to stand out from the crowd. I think it comes from our Soviet heritage. So, I was taught to behave like that – to do something important but not to tell others about the things I do or achieve. Here in the U.S., it turned out to have a negative impact on me. It is very common here to promote yourself, speak about what you’ve achieved. It is interesting sometimes to read others’ resumes. People advertise themselves so much. This is something that I can’t do but I need to learn it. (Interview) [T]

Despite the fact that Denys’s concept of modesty interfered with U.S. cultural norms, he expressed willingness to adopt the above-described skill as he viewed it as an essential component of achieving professional goals in the U.S.
Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures

Throughout the interviews and reflection journals, Denys repeatedly used the word “foreign” or “foreigner” to describe his sense of belonging in the U.S. For example:

“These people were not interested in me because I am a foreigner and a stranger in their culture” (Interview) [T];

“At such moments I have a strong feeling that I am a foreigner and that I am not in my shoes” (Journal);

“I don’t feel a foreigner in it [academic environment]. However, I feel more foreign outside the university” (Interview) [T].

The use of descriptor “foreign” in both languages points to the fact that he felt distanced from the U.S. languaculture. Furthermore, the present tense in each of the three excerpts above indicates that Denys had not been able to integrate into the U.S. culture even over the course of several years as he noted that he was still feeling that way at the time of the interview.

As is evident from the findings above, Denys was eager to integrate into the U.S. culture better, and he adopted some of American cultural practice in order to facilitate the process. However, Denys emphasized that by trying to gain acceptance among Americans, he by no means aimed at distancing himself from the Russian culture. Conversely, his feeling of belonging to the Russian culture became even stronger in the U.S.:  

I would like to become more accepted in the U.S. culture. I want to socialize with others more naturally. But I wouldn’t like to become more Americanized in a sense that I lose my Russian heritage. I would not like to live an American lifestyle, watch American movies and eat American food. I have my cultural background that I would never want to change. (Focus group) [T]
Nevertheless, despite Denys’s increased sense of belonging to the Russian culture, he noted that when traveling to Russia he realized that he felt like a “different Russian” than before and than the majority of people who live there. The above idea is evident from the shift in his communication habits, as described in the “Second Language Issues” section earlier in this chapter and in the excerpt below:

I think that under the influence of the U.S. culture, I’ve become different than I was before. When I travel to Russia I don’t feel completely Russian any more; I feel different than I was when I lived there. I think people who know me well can tell. (Journal)

**Academic Activity**

Table 16

*Academic Activity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Practices</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coursework</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenged by the requirements of the doctoral program (1st year)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadlines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive writing and reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No previous academic background in the field of education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar format of academic writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the challenges reemerged when changed majors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate assistantship</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not overwhelming (in the education major)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased workload – research assistantship (in the psychology major)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic about research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of identity as related to academic practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going through stages of emotional experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased confidence over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling part of U.S. academic culture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive impact of academic advisor on identity development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Academic Practices**

The data collected from the interviews and reflection journals indicated that Denys’s perceptions of his academic experiences in the U.S. were significantly influenced by his challenges and accomplishments in his coursework. Denys explained that the doctoral classes that he took in his first semester introduced him to the U.S. academic culture and presented him with an opportunity to interact with this culture and experience it firsthand. Denys noted that at the beginning of his doctoral program he felt unprepared and challenged by the expectations of the doctoral program. He shared some of his concerns in the interview:

> I felt very uncomfortable at the beginning. It took me some time to get used to the whole system, to deadlines, to the fact that no one controls me but I am the only one in a sense who is responsible for meeting all the requirements. The fact that I had to read and write a lot and think critically about what I read, the thing that I was not used to. All of this was on top of my challenges with English… Plus the whole field of education was new to me. I didn’t get my undergraduate degree in education. All of this made my experience very difficult. (Interview) [T]

Denys’s major challenges in the coursework were related to completing homework assignments. Due to the fact that Denys’s previous academic background was from a different country and in the field other than education, at the initial stages of his doctoral program, he felt unprepared to write academic papers and complete other assignments that required reflection and critical thinking skills:
I never wrote such types of papers when I was a student in Russia. The format of academic papers was something new to me…It was hard to understand how to write them. Even still it’s not easy for me. (Interview) [T]

Denys noted that after several semesters of taking classes his overall perception of his academic progress improved due to the fact that he had learned fundamental concepts in the field of education and gained some experience in academic writing. However, some of Denys’s challenges reemerged when he became a doctoral student in the department of psychology. Similar to his experiences in the education major, at the beginning Denys lacked competence of major concepts in the field of psychology:

This semester I am taking a course in neuroscience that is quite difficult. I realize that I go through the same experience that I had in my first year again. The thing is that the field of neuroscience is new to me, the terminology is new, and everything is new. I am getting familiar with something that I didn’t know before. I think I just need time to digest the main concepts and then I’ll feel more comfortable in this area. (Interview) [T]

Despite the challenges, Denys felt optimistic about his experience and viewed them as temporary:

I think I struggle so much at the beginning because I need to spend a certain amount of time doing something in order to understand it, not just to spend time but I need to get a certain amount of information in order to become more fluent in it. (Interview) [T]

Denys’s graduate assistantship in his doctoral program in education included helping students with computers in the departmental computer lab. Denys admitted that this work did not
require to invest either much of his time or effort as he used the time in the computer lab for working on his own assignments. Denys added that despite the fact that his graduate assistantship responsibilities did not provide any opportunities for him to gain research or teaching experience necessary for his future career, he felt fortunate about his duties due to the fact that they did not put an extra burden on him during the initial years of his doctoral program:

When I came to the department of education, I took three classes and I didn’t have to work hard for my GAship. It was relatively easy to do and it saved me from being overwhelmed. I didn’t have this huge amount of work at the very beginning that fell on me. So, I could focus on my classes. (Interview) [T]

Denys’s graduate assistantship workload increased when he transferred to the department of psychology. His new responsibilities included assisting his academic advisor with research. Despite the greater amount of work he was enthusiastic about doing research and acquiring new skills. Furthermore, he felt that his new duties allowed him to explore his interests and expand his knowledge about the field and the research process:

I like to do research. I think it’s very interesting. And I do it willingly. I am not only interested in the topics that I learn in classes but I also try to dig into other areas and to learn something new. I read a lot because I want to expand my knowledge and I look for new topics for my research. I am now at the very beginning of my academic career and I can try new things and experiment. (Interview) [T]

Academic Identity

Denys evaluated his adaptation to the U.S. academic culture as positive overall. He described it as an on-going process where he went through several stages of adjustment. As is
evident from the findings discussed in the previous subsection, he experienced a lack of confidence and felt overwhelmed by his academic duties at the initial stages of his doctoral program in education. This phase was followed by increased confidence and a feeling of relief gradually achieved as a result of academic achievements and accumulated experience:

The difficulties and challenges faded away as time went and I gained more confidence in my own abilities. After some time I realized that I was able to understand important concepts and provide my reflection on the content. (Interview) [T]

However, later when Denys transferred to the department of psychology, some of his concerns resurfaced due to the fact that he found himself in a new academic context again, where he confronted challenges similar to the ones that he had in his first year of his doctoral program in education. Nevertheless, Denys felt optimistic about the phases of his adjustment and viewed them as integral constituents of his overall academic and personal development. Moreover, similar to Maria and Victoria, Denys felt that his active engagement with academic practices allowed him to feel part of academic culture and a legitimate member of academic communities in the U.S.:

I fully accept the academic culture here in the U.S. and it has become a norm for me. I don’t feel a foreigner in it. (Interview) [T]

Denys mentioned that the academic advisor in his new program played an important role in his adaptation to the culture of the new academic program. His advisor’s support extended to involving Denys into research projects and guiding his development as a researcher; working with Denys on the areas of difficulty in the English language; training him to do public speaking
effectively, in particular, as part of preparation for conference presentations, etc. In addition to the academic support, Denys received strong emotional support from his academic mentor:

My advisor plays an important role in raising my self-esteem. He always tries to instill confidence and the feeling of self-worth in me. He is very helpful in many aspects. He prepares me for various situations that I might have in academia. (Interview) [T]

Denys noted that his advisor’s active role in his academic development and understanding of his unique cultural and linguistic needs presented a strong support system for him in the U.S.

**Personal Life**

Table 17

*Personal Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social networks</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before getting married:</td>
<td>Limited social circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The majority of friends are married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After getting married:</td>
<td>No feelings of loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in social events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Views on the family      | Family and education balance                                     |
|                         | Spouse as support system                                         |

The data in this study indicated that Denys’s perceptions of his psychological well-being in the U.S. before getting married were more negative than after he got married. Denys commented that, at the initial stages, he felt lonely and isolated from his peers in the academic context as well as in the broader community of the U.S., not only because his linguistic and
cultural background differed from that of the majority of his peers but also due to the fact that most of his friends and acquaintances were married and, therefore, had different interests and priorities. Denys shared his perceptions as related to the above in his journal:

At the beginning I did not feel accepted in the U.S. I had no friends. In my surroundings, everyone had a family. So, I didn’t have anyone with whom I could hang out, communicate, go to a bar or to a park. Those people were not interested in me… I was not interested in them either… (Interview) [T]

Denys continued that many of such issues became insignificant on the third year of his stay in this country after he got married and his wife relocated to the U.S. from Russia. Denys felt that the fact that he was married helped him better integrate into the U.S. culture. Together with his spouse, he attended various social events, such as concerts, church events, or informal social gatherings organized by the university or the Russian community.

Denys viewed his spouse as a strong psychological support system for him in the U.S. that helped him overcome critical situations and cope with academic, cultural, and linguistic pressures. Despite the fact that Denys had multiple duties as a doctoral student, over time, he learned to balance his personal life and education:

… I try to save some time for my personal life. I try not to study at home in the evenings. Since last spring I started planning my schedule very carefully so that I have time for everything. I’ve realized that it’s possible to keep everything under control if you plan ahead and stick to your schedule. (Interview) [T]

158
Case 4 – Anna

Anna’s Profile

Anna moved to the U.S. in 2011 when she was 22 years old. Her primary goal of the relocation to the U.S. was pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Economics with a specialization in Microeconomics. Anna received her undergraduate degree in management from a Russian university in her hometown. She explained her decision to pursue a doctoral degree in the U.S. by her intention to find a permanent job in the U.S. and settle down in this country in the future. However, later in the program Anna changed her plans and decided to graduate from the university with her master’s degree, which was part of her doctoral program. One of the primary reasons why Anna chose not to pursue her Ph.D. degree was getting married after her second year in the program and relocating to West Virginia where her husband lived and worked. However, several months after she moved to WV, Anna found a job as a Marketing Analyst at a university in Washington, D.C. At the time of data collection, Anna and her husband lived several hours apart from each other and saw each other once or twice a month when Anna drove to her husband or he came to visit her. Anna was not excluding the possibility of continuing her education further in the future. She was considering pursuing a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the university where she was working.

Before relocating to the U.S., Anna visited this country once as a participant of the Work and Travel program for students from Eastern Europe and Russia. As part of her preparation for applying to U.S. graduate schools, Anna received educational advising support and attended English language classes at the Educational Advising Center located in her hometown in Russia. At the time of her relocation to the U.S., Anna considered herself proficient in both oral and written modes of the English language.
Below is the timeline of major events in Anna’s life in the U.S.:

Figure 4

*Timeline of Events for Anna*

2011 Arrived in the U.S. (NC)
   Started Ph.D.
   Age: 22

2013 Completed M.A.
   Got married
   Moved to WV

2012 Traveled to Russia

2014 Found a job
   Moved to DC

*Second Language Issues*
### Table 18

**Second Language Issues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges as Related to Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of vocabulary competence at the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesitant to ask questions in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent – not a concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor – difficult to comprehend and use in own speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquial expressions/idioms/slang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching American TV series to learn colloquial language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitating native speakers’ English to integrate into the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal cues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking for speaking/writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidirectional cross-linguistic influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental rehearsal before giving speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in self-talk to organize ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling confident about English language skills overall (at the beginning and later)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My English language does not define who I am”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different sense of identity when speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling more positive over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges as Related to Second Language**

*Academic language*. According to Anna, her academic language was not a significant barrier in achieving goals either at the beginning of her graduate program or in later periods. Among the challenges that she faced at the initial stages of her study was limited knowledge of vocabulary in her field, i.e. Economics. However, Anna noted that she was able to grasp new concepts rather effortlessly and quickly:
I never studied Economics in English before I started my graduate degree. I didn’t know the terminology in the field of Economics. But it didn’t last long. I learned the vocabulary pretty quickly. So, it was not a huge problem for me. (Interview)

Despite the fact that Anna felt confident about her English language proficiency, she was hesitant about asking questions in front of other students. She felt that any type of public speaking, including asking questions for clarification in class, made her particularly self-conscious about her English:

I was a kind of shy to ask questions in front of everyone. I never did it in my undergraduate degree. I felt like you shouldn’t interrupt a professor when he’s talking. I realized that it’s absolutely fine here in the U.S., they encourage questions. But I still felt uncomfortable asking questions even if I didn’t understand something. I thought like either my English would not be perfect or my question would sound awkward, something like that. Or I would say something wrong. So, I felt shy about asking questions. (Interview)

Furthermore, Anna noted that when she lacked competence in something, she could easily become anxious, which could result in a stronger accent and mistakes in her speech in English:

When I talk about something that I am familiar with I think that I am fine but when it comes to something that I don’t know I sometimes get nervous. I feel that I can say something wrong or my accent will be more evident. I would only ask questions after the class. (Interview)
Among other areas of difficulty in academic settings was composing emails. For Anna, online correspondence was a new genre of writing that she did not learn in her native language, as it had not become a popular method of communication in her home country by the time she left Russia. Anna admitted that she spent a significant amount of time on writing even short emails to instructors of her courses or administrators. Her particular concern was ensuring that her emails were at the appropriate level of formality and politeness:

Another thing is emails. When I write an email I am always worried about how I word it because I want to make sure that this is how Americans would say. I try to use a lot of “thank you” and “please” words. But I still worry if I am enough polite or not. (Journal)

Anna brought the following example to explain her challenges with writing emails in English:

The other day I sent an email to another organization and they were supposed to answer my question because we work together on a project. I wrote to a lady from that company about the issues that we had and I expected her to answer because they were responsible for fixing the issues. I was waiting for her reply for 5 days and she still didn’t reply. So, I decided to write another email today again and I spent so much time thinking how to word it to make sure I don’t sound rude. I reread it several times and I was not sure how to say it so that it sounds OK. You know, this emailing thing is new to us because we never used emails much in Russia. (Interview)

*Everyday language.* Anna felt generally confident about her daily communication. She noted that the fact that she consistently received compliments on her English and accent from people in her surroundings contributed to her improved self-esteem and made her less self-conscious about her language when engaging in conversations in various everyday contexts:
People compliment me on my language a lot and they say that I have a minimal accent, they can hardly notice it. So, I feel positive about it. I think what people say increases my self-esteem. And also, my husband, he always says that my language is very good.

(Journal)

Despite the fact that she was fluent in English, Anna occasionally felt inadequate due to her comprehension skills in the contexts where American humor was used:

When I watch standup comedy shows, I have a hard time getting jokes and humor. I remember catching myself at one of such shows that I am just not having fun at such shows because I don’t get half of the jokes that a comedian says. That’s a kind of a challenge for me… At such moments I realize that my English is not perfect. (Interview)

Anna also noted that she was not always familiar and ready to use colloquial expressions, idioms, and slang, which she viewed as an essential indicator of fluency in a language.

Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development

Anna mentioned in the journal that she was particularly concerned about her everyday language because she was convinced that fluency in everyday language could allow her access to U.S. linguistic communities and thus could help her integrate better. Anna found American TV series a helpful source of conversational language:

One of my main goals regarding my language is to speak naturally like native speakers do. For example, to be able to joke appropriately and to say and use all those phrases that Americans use naturally. I want to integrate better at this level. I want to learn more of informal stuff. That’s why I love the TV show “Friends”, because you can learn a lot of informal expressions from it. (Journal)
Besides watching series on TV, she did not intentionally develop or use any other strategies to improve her language. Instead, she felt that her language was improving naturally as a result of her exposure to the English language in the immersion environment. Thus, Anna noticed the change in her intonation and manner of speaking, which pointed to her linguistic development:

I think my intonation has changed. English is a singing language. When you say “have a good weekend” you’re not just saying “have a good weekend” [monotonous intonation] but you’re saying “have a good weekend” [rising and falling intonation]. It’s more like a singing kind of tone. That’s what I noticed about me. I think you can notice it about me too because you know how I speak Russian and how I speak English. (Interview)

Furthermore, Anna realized that when speaking with Americans some of her nonverbal cues changed as well. Particularly, she smiled more frequently when she spoke English than when she interacted with the Russian people. Additionally, she naturally incorporated in her speech positive expressions typical for small talk in English:

I try to speak like Americans do in terms of the language that I use. I would compliment people on things. I say a lot of such things as “have a good day”, “enjoy your vacation”, “it’s a pleasure to meet you”. It has become natural for me to do what Americans do. At least I am trying. (Journal)

Anna also found that many of her acquired linguistic habits transferred into her Russian language. When speaking her native language she tended to incorporate more positive expressions into her speech than she had done before.
Among other indicators of Anna’s English language development in the U.S. was the use of private and inner speech. Anna noted that she found mental rehearsal particularly important when she was preparing for a job interview:

It happens to me – especially before an interview. When I was looking for a job I practiced a lot. There were a lot of behavioral questions, such as – what are your weaknesses? What are your strengths? Bring me an example when there was a hard deadline and you failed at something. So, all this kind of questions that you need to be prepared for. You should be ready with a story to answer each of them. So, yeah, I practiced a lot… both to prepare the answers and practice my English. (Interview)

In addition to engaging in self-talk for mental rehearsal, Anna noticed that she occasionally used private speech in English when she was planning something or thinking it over:

Sometimes I catch myself thinking in English and then I’m like – oh, I am thinking in English! I don’t know why it happens, but sometimes I think in English and sometimes in Russian. Sometimes I speak aloud to myself in English… when I am thinking about my plans for today and I think that I need to do laundry, I need to do grocery, etc. I think about it in English because it comes out in my mind first. You hear the words laundry and grocery here all the time. It’s easier to say it in English. Also when I need to count something in my mind, you know – one, two, three – I noticed that sometimes I do it in English. (Interview)

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language**

Despite a few challenges that Anna experienced with her academic and everyday language at different points of time during her life in the U.S., she noted that she generally felt
confident about her English language skills. Thus, Anna’s English language proficiency did not represent a crucial aspect of her identity development in the U.S.:

Usually I am not concerned about it. I am only concerned about my language when there is something important like a presentation. But I think, it’s natural even for native speakers. (Journal)

The above is also evident from the focus group interview, in which Anna indicated that she was generally much less reflective and self-aware of her English language skills and language-related situations in her life than during the time of data collection for the current study. In particular, she emphasized that she normally did not engage in practices of evaluating her English because she did not view it as a significant aspect of her identity. Despite the fact that she was concerned about how people perceived her, Anna herself considered other aspects of her life and personality more meaningful for her:

I think for me my English language doesn’t define who I am. My language is not part of my identity. My identity is defined by something that I achieved and that I know, for example, my education, my work, my skills, and also the traits of my personality, how nice I am as a person. But for others, I am sure they judge me based on my language especially when I meet them for the first time. It’s like the way you are dressed or you look like. They hear your speech and create an image of you based on your language in addition to other things. (Focus Group) [T]

As is evident from the findings presented in the subsections above, similar to her overall English language competence, Anna did not perceive her accent as a significant challenge in communication with native speakers. Rather, she accepted the fact that she had an accent and did not view it as something that she needed to be concerned about:
If you ask me how I feel about my accent – well, I feel that it’s there, obviously. Some people notice it, other people don’t. But I don’t feel bad about my accent at all. I feel that it’s fine. (Interview)

Despite the fact that Anna prioritized other things above her English language skills, she was aware that the way she sounded in English differed from how she sounded in Russian. Furthermore, Anna noticed that the speaking patterns that she acquired as part of English language competence impacted the way she felt when she conversed in English as is evident from the excerpt below:

I think I feel a little more positive when I speak English than when I speak Russian. I think it’s because of all those phrases that Americans use a lot. Like, when I am at work everyone is nice to each other, they say a lot of such phrases as: “Good morning, how’re you? Have a good day! Good job! You’re doing great!” And also, you always smile to people and they smile to you. I feel that I am more positive and cheerful when I speak English. If I really want to tell someone a story about something negative I would feel more comfortable telling it to my Russian friend. (Focus group) [T]

Navigation Between Cultures
Table 19

*Navigation Between Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in the New Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of cultural background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies/TV shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor/Jokes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-directional cross-cultural influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online and oral communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of the Russian pronoun “you” in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working on social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying American languacultural practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating small talk and discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributing to conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from American friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preserving Russian Cultural Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russian “holidays are going away from my life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preserving family morals and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the Russian-speaking community in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling a legitimate member of both cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equally accepting both cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing under the influence of both cultures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges in the New Culture**

As an individual who grew up in a country other than the U.S., Anna felt that she lacked cultural competency that could allow her to integrate into the U.S. culture. Under specific circumstances, she occasionally became aware that she was unfamiliar with American popular culture, such as movies or TV shows, and thus was unable to sustain conversations based on them or understand nuances of cultural meanings:

I feel that I can’t participate in conversations sometimes. I can’t discuss certain topic because I am unfamiliar with them, like TV shows, old movies, that I never watched. I can’t provide any input on them. (Interview)
Besides the above cultural forms, as it was mentioned in the previous section, Anna was not always good at understanding American humor or jokes, which she attributed to her lack of both linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Anna also noticed that in both oral and electronic modes of communication, she was doubtful about proper ways to address a person. For example, in the academic culture of her department, it was not rare for doctoral students to call their professors by first names, which was highly unusual and difficult for Anna to adapt to due to her Russian cultural background, where such practices were not common:

I know a lot of students call their professors by first name. I found it unusual and could never get used to it because I never did it in Russia. In the Russian culture it is absolutely unacceptable. (Interview)

Similar to oral communication, Anna felt that her Russian cultural background impacted the way she communicated in writing. For example, when writing emails, Anna tended to overuse formal salutations, which, as she later realized, were redundant. Whereas her Russian background played a significant role in shaping her communication habits in the U.S., the cultural and linguistic norms of the U.S. languaculture, which she acquired in the course of her stay in the U.S., appeared to influence her communication habits in the Russian language as well. Particularly, the non-existence of the distinction between formal and informal forms of second person pronoun “you” in the English language made it challenging for her to decide which of the two forms to use when speaking Russian with Russian-speaking individuals residing in the U.S.:

At the beginning, I was not sure how I should address them, especially people who are 10 or 15 years older than me. And then I’ve figured that it’s better to use “ты” [singular
“you”] because everyone in such companies of Russians calls each other by “ты” because we are in the U.S. and here there is only one form. (Interview)

Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies

In her reflection journal, Anna mentioned that as a result of spending several years in the U.S. she adopted cultural and linguistic practices common for the U.S. languaculture. In addition to the acquired linguistic forms described in the previous section, Anna noticed that she became a more sociable and outgoing person under the influence of the U.S. culture. Anna shared one of her experiences that points to such a transformation:

Recently, I was standing in line in a grocery store. I always go to this store and I know some of the cashiers, not personally, but I just see them every time I come to the store. So, when it was my turn at the cashier, I noticed that the cashier had a haircut and I told him: “Oh, you had a hair cut. It looks nice.” At that moment I realized that I would never do the same in Russia. It is so unusual there to speak to a stranger and it is so fine here. (Journal)

Anna generally described her development in the U.S. with regard to culture in the following way:

I constantly develop in my views and beliefs about what is good and how I should behave in the society. A lot of such development happens under the influence of the U.S. culture. I develop specific habits or modes of behavior that are common for this culture. (Focus group) [T]
Anna also admitted that she learned from her American friends to always be ready to contribute to different types of informal discussions and be the one who initiates conversations in a company of individuals whom she had not met before, a practice that she generally did not engage into in her home country:

I work on my social skills. I understand that Americans can easily start a conversation at a party with people whom they never met before. I know it’s something that all Americans do. It’s in their culture. I try to be the same. I learn a lot about that from my American friends by just watching how they do it. I think it is very important to be like that if you don’t want to be an outsider in the U.S. (Focus group) [T]

**Preserving Russian Cultural Identity**

Due to the fact that Anna spent most of her time with Americans, including her husband, who were unfamiliar with the Russian culture, Anna unintentionally abandoned some of the Russian traditions, such as celebrating Russian holidays, which she regretted:

Sometimes I reflect on my cultural experiences. I don’t celebrate a lot of Russian holidays here that I would celebrate in Russia. Sometimes I think – Oh, today is a holiday in Russia, but I am not celebrating it because no one does it here. So, sometimes I think that those holidays are going away from my life. (Interview)

However, Anna felt that she still managed to maintain her Russian cultural identity in the U.S. through preserving the morals and values instilled by her family and the Russian culture. She shared the following ideas on such aspects of her identity:
My parents taught me a lot of things that I think are common for the Russian culture. They were always strict with me regarding my grades and being a good student. I think from that time I’ve learned that I must always set very high goals for myself… And I think later on it just kind of stayed with me. You cannot do it in a different way. So, I think my parents raised me that way that I am a perfectionist in some way, or at least I have high expectations of myself and set high goals for myself. (Interview)

Furthermore, despite the fact that the majority of Anna’s friends were Americans, she preserved her Russian cultural identity through communicating with her Russian friends as well as participating in activities organized by the local Russian-speaking community.

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures**

As a result of being a member in the Russian and the U.S. communities simultaneously, Anna felt equally accepted by both of them. Moreover, Anna’s continuous reflection on her cultural experiences in the U.S. allowed her to suspend her judgments about each of the cultures and fully accept both of them:

I think I fit in both the U.S. and the Russian cultures well... I feel comfortable in both. I’ve realized that I shouldn’t compare them. For example, despite the cultural differences between Americans and Russians, I tend to think that people are the same everywhere. There are good people no matter where you are. (Interview)

As is evident from the above, the exposure to the U.S. culture significantly impacted Anna’s perceptions of herself and the surroundings. One such impact was the fact that in the context of cultural contrasts, Anna became more reflective of cultural meanings, and became less
biased. Anna found that her engagement with both of the cultures simultaneously stimulated her development as a person:

I think that both my Russian background, that I brought with me to this country, and the environment where I live now affect the way I see the world and myself. I constantly develop in my views and beliefs about what is good and how I should behave in the society. A lot of such development happens under the influence of the U.S. culture. I develop specific habits or modes of behavior that are common for this culture.

(Interview)

**Academic Activity**

Table 20

*Academic Activity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coursework</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive amount of exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to complete 100% on tests/exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate assistantship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} year – stressful teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfamiliar concepts that needed to be taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year - head TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praised by professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional academic practices</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops/seminars/local conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} year – showed no interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} year – actively engaged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence (1\textsuperscript{st} year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed perceptions of being a “good student”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling proud of self for completing M.A. degree</td>
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</table>
**Academic Practices**

Anna’s academic duties in the graduate program played an important role in shaping her perceptions of herself and the surrounding world. Due to the fact that Anna’s graduate degree program consisted of two phases, i.e. M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, her coursework was a primary component of the M.A. program, whereas research practices were more common in the doctoral program. Therefore, Anna’s academic identity was significantly impacted by her experience of taking classes. Anna noted that she was overwhelmed by the workload and what she considered to be an excessive number of tests and exams in her coursework. In addition to feeling under pressure and stress, she also constantly blamed herself that she neither put in enough effort nor invested the necessary amount of time in preparing for exams:

> It was very stressful. You feel bad that you sleep, you feel bad that you eat because you were supposed to study all that time instead. You see your peers studying all the time, everywhere – in study rooms, in the cafeteria… Everyone is talking about assignments and tests all the time and you just feel that everybody is working all the time. So, if you don’t study all the time you feel bad about that. That’s why you always feel stressed on top of the fact that you don’t know the material and struggle with it. (Interview)

Based on her observations, Anna concluded that the exams were designed in such a way that it was impossible for students to complete all questions for the time allocated for each exam. Anna mentioned that her scores on these exams were usually around 80%. Such a score was above average in her classes. Moreover, when comparing her performances in her M.A. program in the U.S. and her undergraduate degree in Russia, she realized that she was not a “straight-A” student anymore, which made her depressed:
In Russia if you’re a good student you always get “A”s and if you get a “B” it’s kind of bad. If you get a “C” it’s really bad. Here, you have a test and nobody performs to 100% ever. So, if you get 70 or 80% that’s the top of the class… So, that was hard to realize that they give you really much intentionally and that it’s impossible to complete everything. So, you should understand that and just do as much as you can… You will not be able to complete everything anyways. (Interview)

Looking back at her past academic practices, Anna found her graduate assistantship responsibilities a particularly stressful experience at the beginning of her graduate program. As part of her duties, she was a teaching assistant (TA) in her first year and a head TA in her second year. Anna’s teaching assistantship responsibilities included grading students’ works, which she found particularly challenging during her first year due to the fact that she lacked competence in some of the mathematical concepts of the tests that she was expected to be knowledgeable about as she was responsible for assessing undergraduate students’ mastery of these concepts:

At first, I always felt very stressed. Especially when they gave me that class 410, it was Intermediate Micro for undergrads, and I opened the book and I was like: “I don’t know this stuff myself”. And I was supposed to explain those things to students. When I was assigned to this class I really spent a lot of time to learn the material. And then our professor would always send us quizzes before sending them to students of the class. And we would need to complete the quiz and send him the answers… It was very stressful. You know it’s an undergraduate class, you’re supposed to know it but you have troubles answering these questions yourself. And you don’t want to send wrong answers to you professor. If 20% of your answers are wrong he would be really angry and he would talk
about that to a Grad Director or someone. So, that was really stressful during the first semester. (Interview)

Despite the initial challenges, Anna’s self-esteem improved in her second year when she was assigned to work as a head TA. Anna noted that her academic advisor’s positive feedback on her performance as a TA helped reduce anxiety and increase confidence:

The next semester I was assigned to the same professor because he liked how I worked. And he put me as a head TA and I was not stressed any more. (Interview)

In her reflection journal, Anna wrote that her academic pressures, limited understanding of economics-related issues, and the lack of time restricted her from becoming involved in various academic activities organized by her department and designed to enrich students’ knowledge in economics. Anna mentioned that she attempted to attend several workshops and seminars in her first semester, but she got quickly discouraged due to the fact that the lack of advanced competence in the issues presented at such workshops and seminars put extra pressure on her and negatively affected her perceptions of her academic development:

The thing that comes to mind is conferences or lectures of professors who would come from different universities to give a lecture or workshop. And you can attend it if you want to. So, I think I was not attending any of them during my first year because I couldn’t understand what those professors were talking about. I could understand their English but I just didn’t understand the ideas and math concepts that they were talking about. And I also had a lot of other things to do. So, I was not really active at those things. Attending these presentations in my first year would only add stress to what I
already had because it would reinforce my concerns and fear that I didn’t understand so many things. (Journal)

However, in her second year, the positive shift in her views and increased competence in economics allowed Anna to regain confidence and get involved in such academic activities:

During my second year I had less stress and felt more comfortable with all the concepts. So, it was more interesting to listen to the research that other professors presented. I was really interested in a lot of such presentations and attended quite a lot of them. I was hoping to learn more things that would help me in my future research. (Interview)

**Academic Identity**

Anna’s novel academic experience as related to her coursework, graduate assistantships, and other academic practices in the U.S. had a significant impact on her overall self-esteem at the initial stages of her graduate program. Anna felt that she was unprepared to deal with the extensive workload and unfamiliar content in both courses that she took and those that she was assigned to assist with as a TA. Furthermore, as is evident from the findings above, in the course of her M.A. program Anna had to reevaluate the concept of a “good student” and put up with the idea that grades lower than “A” were common and acceptable:

… If you complete ¾ of the test and get 75% then you’ve done above average. So, that’ll be “B”, which was really bad in Russia. So, that’s hard to realize that as long as you do above 60% that’s fine… Here, I realized that I just became an average student and it made me feel bad. (Interview)
Despite the challenges and shifts in her perceptions of herself as a student, Anna felt proud of completing the graduate degree in economics and considered it a valuable experience that not only helped her expand her knowledge in the field of economics but also positively impacted her personal development:

I think receiving a graduate degree helped me gain confidence and helped me realize that I am a strong person. I remember how many challenges were there. Every time I look back I think: “I’ve managed to overcome all those difficulties. That means that I can succeed in whatever I have next in my life”. It definitely makes you believe in yourself.

(Focus group)

**Personal Life**

Table 21

*Personal Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social networks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian-speaking community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views on the family vs. career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inability to realize goals in personal life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing both family and career as essential elements of personal well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrificing personal life for education/career</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the fact that Anna’s education and later job took most of her time, she perceived herself as an outgoing person and found it important to engage in various social events in order to better integrate into the new cultural communities. When she was a student, the majority of Anna’s friends were her American peers receiving graduate degrees from the same university.
Anna noted that she enjoyed the fact that students were usually actively involved in different extracurricular activities and enthusiastically joined them whenever there was an opportunity. Anna found that her social experiences as a student in the U.S. contrasted with those that she had when she was a student in Russia, mainly because in Russia it was not typical for fellow students to gather as a group and engage in such extracurricular practices as playing sports or getting together to celebrate a final exam. However, Anna willingly adapted to the norms and practices commonly accepted among American college students.

When I was working on M.A. degree we got together with other students from my class a lot. We got together to celebrate a midterm or final. We got to a bar together. In Russia we never really got together with my group even though we were in the same group for 5 years… Here, if someone is having a party he or she will invite everyone, like the whole group… Another thing is that I played sports here at my university with other students. In Russia, I cannot even imagine students do that. It’s not popular there at all. (Journal)

In addition to her university friends, Anna socialized a lot with other Americans who she was introduced to through her American husband. Anna’s social circle included Russian-speaking individuals as well. Furthermore, when she received a job and moved to Washington, D.C., Anna shared a house with three Russian-speaking roommates.

Reflecting on the academic and career influences on her personal life in the U.S., Anna noted that despite the fact that she was married she was unable to realize some of her personal goals:

I hope one day my husband and I will be able to live together. I wish we settled down and bought a house.
In spite of the fact that she viewed family as an essential component of personal well-being, Anna and her husband had never lived together, either before or after their marriage, due to the specifics of her spouse’ work that required him to regularly move across the country. Initially, Anna planned to stay with her husband after receiving her degree. However, after several months she realized that her unemployment made her depressed to an extent that she was ready to relocate if she received a job offer. At the time of data collection, Anna felt particularly happy about the fact that she had found a job:

Well, now that I’ve had a job for several months already, I feel pretty happy. If you had asked me half a year ago, when I didn’t have a job yet, my answer would have been very different. (Interview)

Anna’s new job as a Marketing Analyst had a positive impact on her personal development. Anna admitted that she viewed career as an essential element of well-being. Furthermore, as part of her career advancement, she was willing to continue her education and considered receiving an MBA degree in the future.

**Case 5 – Alexander**

**Alexander’s Profile**

Alexander moved to the U.S. from Russia and started his doctoral degree in Industrial Engineering in 2008 when he was 22 years old. At the same age, Alexander completed his undergraduate degree in computer engineering from Voronezh State Technical University in his hometown in Russia. As part of his Ph.D. degree, Alexander was awarded a master’s degree after he finished thirty credits of his coursework. In addition to the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Industrial Engineering, Alexander simultaneously received a M.A. degree in Management from the same university in Florida. Alexander mentioned that he was willing to make use of every
opportunity that he had as a student in order to expand his expertise and obtain professional skills in various but related areas. He explained that the primary reason why he chose to relocate to the U.S. was better job opportunities. He realized, however, that in order to be qualified for his dream job, it was necessary to receive a degree from a U.S. university. Therefore, he submitted his application materials to several U.S. colleges and selected the university in Florida among the three to which he was accepted. Similar to the other four participants of the current study, Alexander attended the Educational Advising Center in order to improve his English, prepare for the TOEFL and GRE examinations, and learn about the specifics of preparing application materials. Before moving to the U.S. as an international doctoral student, Alexander had visited the U.S. once as a participant of a cultural exchange program for students.

Alexander got married after his first year in the graduate program. In the same year, his Russian spouse relocated to the U.S. from Russia and later started a Ph.D. degree in Hotel Administration at the same university in Florida. Alexander completed his doctoral degree in 2012 and found a job as an industrial engineer in an international company based in Florida.

Below is the timeline of major events in Alexander’s life in the U.S.:
Figure 5

Timeline of Events for Alexander

2008 Arrived in the U.S. (FL); Started Ph.D. in Engineering and M.A. in Management; Age: 22

2009 Got married; traveled to Russia

2010 Completed M.A. in Management

2012 Received Ph.D.; Found a job

2013 Traveled to Russia

2014 Traveled to Russia

Second Language Issues
Table 22

Second Language Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges as Related to Second Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insignificant role of L2 skills in academic contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In engineering, we speak the language of formulas.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic vocabulary (1st year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Everyday language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining small talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting volume and pace when speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking English accent-reduction classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English grammar books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking in English occasionally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language</th>
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<tr>
<td>No perception of being different (academic contexts, work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>English language is not an obstacle in achieving goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Different sense of identity when speaking English</td>
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<td>Increased confidence</td>
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Challenges as Related to Second Language

**Academic language.** Due to the fact that Alexander’s doctoral degree was in the field of engineering, his English language skills had never been critical for meeting the requirements of his academic program. Alexander did not consider himself highly proficient in English, however, according to Alexander his language skills were sufficient for understanding American speech, communicating his ideas, and completing academic assignments:

I had problems with my language, but it was good enough to meet the requirements of the program. (Interview)
Alexander used the following metaphor to describe the role of language in the learning process:

“In engineering, we speak the language of formulas.”

One of the few challenges with the academic language that Alexander had at the beginning of his studies was a lack of academic vocabulary. However, Alexander quickly expanded his vocabulary and stopped viewing it as an obstacle:

Sometimes I didn’t understand the words that my professors used. But then I read textbooks, used Google translator and I learned the words. (Interview)

Alexander’s other challenge was writing emails in English. He noted that it was difficult for him to express his ideas in English and use the proper language of email correspondence:

Recently I reviewed some of my emails that I wrote in my first year. I got really shocked (laughing). I couldn’t understand what I was writing there.

Alexander admitted that due to the facts that electronic correspondence was a common means of communication in U.S. higher education and he had to write emails regularly, he gained experience and improved his skills in composing emails over time.

**Everyday language.** Alexander viewed his everyday communication as more challenging than using the language in academic settings. He pointed out fluency issues as one of his most significant challenges during the initial stages of his life in the U.S. Below is Alexander’s reflection on the difficulties that he encountered when speaking English in non-academic settings:

Everyday communication was more challenging. The main challenge was to formulate what I wanted to say. I needed a lot of time to come up with a clear and grammatically
correct sentence. Instead of an exact word to describe something I used a lot of unnecessary words because I simply couldn’t remember the exact word that I needed. (Interview)

Alexander was particularly concerned about his ability to express his thoughts in phone conversations where nonverbal communication cues were missing, which made telephone conversations more demanding:

It was always a challenge at the beginning to call on the phone, for example. When you don’t see a person and plus English is a foreign language for you, it makes it difficult to communicate your message and understand theirs. (Journal)

Among other challenges, Alexander named making effective small talk naturally. Although he found such a type of verbal interchange essential for establishing connections with people, Alexander lacked experience and skills in sustaining natural small talk in English:

For example, if you meet with a new person at some conference/dinner/party you should maintain some relaxed conversation about nothing; in Russia we do not have such a thing. So at such meetings I may feel less confident. (Journal)

Alexander indicated additionally that his accent occasionally could cause comprehension issues. As is evident from the excerpt below, Alexander’s accent remained a challenge for him throughout the entire period of his life in the U.S:

Another challenge is my accent and the way I speak. I don’t speak loud enough and my accent is sometimes hard for people to understand. (Interview)
Adjustments, Strategies, and Other Forms of Linguistic Development

Despite the fact that Alexander’s English language skills did not have any major impacts on his life in the U.S., he was aware of his weaknesses and was willing to eliminate them. Thus, in order to be better understood by his interlocutors when speaking English Alexander tried to articulate sounds clearly and speak louder and more slowly:

I’ve noticed that when I speak on the phone, when I have a phone conference with my colleagues I usually speak louder and clearer. During my first Skype meeting with my colleagues from Australia I felt very unconfident, I spoke unconfidently, I could barely understand their accent and I am sure they couldn’t understand mine. But then after a few meetings I started speaking louder and clearer and more confidently. In English I feel that I need to speak louder and slowly because I think it helps people understand me better.

(Interview)

As another strategy, which Alexander employed at the time of data collection to confront his challenges with the English language, was attending free English language classes offered by the company where he worked. The primary focus in such classes was to help non-native English speaking employees reduce their accents. In addition to attending the course on accent reduction, Alexander worked on improving his English independently with the help of English language grammar textbooks that he purchased online.

Alexander found that his English language skills significantly improved over the course of his stay in the U.S. and his speech in English became more natural. Alexander’s use of inner speech serves as an indicator of his English language development. Alexander explained that the choice of the language depended on whether the encounter that he was thinking about had been in English or in Russian.
It happens sometimes. When I think about some situations that happened to me… If is has something to do with American people or something related to the U.S., what I do here and English language in general, then I think about it in English, I think…

(Interview)

Alexander also noticed that he occasionally engaged in mental thinking in English when his imagined interlocutor was American:

Also, it just came to my mind – when I speak to a different person in my thoughts and this person is American then I would use English, of course; and when I talk in my mind to someone who is Russian I speak Russian. (Interview)

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Language**

Despite some challenges with everyday language, Alexander’s perceptions of his language proficiency were positive overall. Alexander admitted that although he was aware of some of his linguistic challenges he did not frequently reflect on his L2 proficiency and the role that it played in his academic development and adaptation in the U.S. The main reason why his English language skills did not concern Alexander was the fact that the majority of his peers and professors, including both of his academic advisors, in his department were non-native speakers of English. Alexander noted that he did not feel that he was different than anyone else in his community:

Well, with students I was fine as everyone was international. With faculty members, I think I was fine because I was not different from anyone else. The majority of both professors and students were international… One of my advisors was Greek, and the other one was Russian. But if you go to any technical program everyone is international.
In my area the most popular nationalities are Indians, Chinese, Iranian, and maybe Turkish. (Interview).

Furthermore, comparing his English language proficiency with that of other students, he found his second language skills more advanced than those of many other international students. Alexander added that his communication with the few American faculty members who taught some of his classes, regardless of their native English language proficiency, was not challenging either. Such instructors were used to the fact that the majority of students and faculty in engineering were international and adjusted their language to serve the needs of this population:

All faculty members were perfectly aware that almost every student in front of them was international. (Interview)

Alexander’s perceptions of his English skills and their role in his career and everyday life in the U.S. did not change much when he received his degree and started working for a U.S. company. Similar to his academic environment, the majority of his colleagues were non-native speakers of English:

I would say 90% are international in the three offices that my company has. In my office, among the total of 50 employees, there are only 2 Americans. One of them is a technical writer and the other one is our English teacher. (Interview)

Due to the fact that Alexander was surrounded by non-native speakers of English at his university, workplace, and in everyday contexts, where the majority of his friends were his international colleagues and his wife was Russian, he did not perceive the fact that he was a non-
native speaker of English as an obstacle in achieving any of his goals, either in education, career, or in his personal life:

I don’t think I ever thought that there are unachievable goals for me because of my language - neither in my Ph.D. programs nor in job searching because in this market the majority are international. (Interview)

When asked to compare his perceptions of self in relation to the Russian language and those in relation to the L2, Alexander noted that he felt that he sounded more confident when he communicated in English. The above can be attributed to Alexander’s manner of speaking which he intentionally adjusted when he communicated in English. In particular, Alexander noted that his more distinct speech in English with the increased volume contrasted with his manner of speaking Russian. Comparing the ways he spoke each of the languages, Alexander found that he sounded firmer when he used English than when speaking Russian. Moreover, his improved English language competence contributed to his increased confidence. Indeed, Alexander shared the following ideas on his increased confidence when speaking English:

… I think I now sound more confident because of that [increased volume, slower pace and distinct articulation of sounds]. I’ve become more confident in general. I guess my language improvement has made me more confident in general. (Interview)

Navigation Between Cultures
Table 23

*Navigation Between Cultures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges in the New Culture</th>
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**Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies**
- Community of international students/professionals in the U.S.
- Accepting/respecting differences
- Learning about the U.S. culture

**Preserving Russian Cultural Identity**
- Member of the Russian-speaking community in the U.S.
- Russian spouse
- Increased understanding of Russian culture after living in the U.S. for several years
- Preserving Russian cultural values

**Perceptions of Self in Relation to Both Cultures**
- Feeling a legitimate member of both cultural communities
- “¾ of me belongs to the Russian culture and ¼ to the U.S. culture”

**Integration into the U.S. Culture: Strategies**

Alexander indicated that his cultural adaptation in the U.S. presented a generally positive experience, first of all, due to the fact that he had already visited the U.S. before and was familiar with its culture:

> It [adjustment to the U.S. culture] was smooth enough. It just happened. I don’t think I had any culture shock or something. I came to the U.S. once before my Ph.D. program.

> So, I was already familiar with American mindset at least to some extent. (Interview)

Another reason why Alexander’s cultural adaptation in the U.S. was generally positive was the fact that his social circle, including his peers and professors at the university, colleagues at work, and immediate family and friends in the U.S., consisted mainly of culturally and linguistically
diverse people. Alexander noted that he quickly learned to accept and respect cultural differences and did not consider living in a different country a challenge.

When I just came here I met a lot of people from different cultures. Everyone around me was either Russian or international, I mean not American: other students, professors, my friends, now colleagues. I’ve learned to respect their cultures. I think I am very tolerant to other cultures. I accept differences and I am not surprised to see them. (Interview)

Despite the fact that Alexander had relatively few encounters with Americans in the U.S., he was naturally curious about the U.S. culture and enthusiastically read or watched documentaries about it whenever he had a chance.

**Preserving Russian Cultural Identity**

Despite the fact that Alexander had lived in the U.S. for several years and was exposed to the cultural diversity in both formal and informal contexts of the U.S., he managed to preserve his Russian identity. Alexander noted that due to the fact that his spouse was Russian he had fewer opportunities to access the U.S. culture. The majority of their family friends in the U.S. were either Russian or international. Alexander wrote that he enjoyed spending time with his Russian friends and engage in Russian cultural practices such as celebrating Russian holidays or cooking Russian food.

We have a Russian community here too. I enjoy spending time with my Russian-speaking friends. It is usually much more relaxing. We usually do a lot of cultural things together, like cooking. We celebrate Russian holidays together. (Focus group) [T]

He also indicated that, over the years spent away from Russia, he started understanding its culture better. Alexander explained it by the fact that he had not reflected on the Russian
culture when he lived in Russia as it was an integral aspect of his life. However, in the U.S. – the context of difference – Alexander became more reflective of his cultural belonging and what the Russian culture entails:

After spending some time away from Russia, I have gained a better understanding of what the Russian culture is. While in Russia, I thought that Russian culture is *matryoshka*, our national dresses or costumes, and folk songs. Now I realize that it is much more. It is the way of thinking, knowing and doing things. It is the way I was raised too. (Journal)

Among other indicators of Alexander’s preserving of his Russian cultural identity was the idea that despite the fact that he was open and accepting of the U.S. culture he was not willing to adopt American cultural traits or social patterns and abandon those of the Russian culture. In particular, he noted:

I can say that I never forced myself to change in this respect. I never try to smile when I am depressed or in a bad mood, like Americans do. I think this is some area where my Russian wins over my American. (Focus group) [T]

**Perception of Self in Relation to Both Cultures**

Due to Alexander’s unique circumstances, i.e. the fact that he was surrounded by either Russian-speaking individuals or people with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Alexander had generally positive experiences in the U.S. language and felt comfortable living in the U.S., participating in various formal and informal practices, and communicating with people. However, reflecting on his cultural belonging, Alexander mentioned that despite the fact that he felt equally comfortable and accepted in both cultures, he could relate to the Russian
culture better than to the U.S. one. In order to explain his perceptions of cultural belonging, Alexander used an example of a mathematical ratio: “¾ of me belongs to the Russian culture and ¼ to the U.S. culture”.

**Academic Activity**

Table 24

*Academic Activity*

<table>
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<th>Academic Practices</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Coursework</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenging content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive and valuable experience overall</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Assistantship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive experiences as a TA and RA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unwilling to do either research or teaching for living</td>
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<tr>
<th>Academic Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenged by the new academic culture (at the beginning)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling part of American academic culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Becoming more mature and independent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive impact of academic experiences on work</td>
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**Academic Practices**

Due to the fact that Alexander was enrolled in two graduate programs, i.e. Ph.D. in Engineering and M.A. in Management, simultaneously, he felt overwhelmed by the volume of assignments, exams, and new material. Comparing the two programs, Alexander found that the courses that he took as part of his doctoral program in engineering were more challenging than those in management:
It was difficult to balance both programs. When I was doing my M.A. in management I felt that it was much easier for me to do. In Industrial Engineering some of the classes were extremely difficult! When I started taking management classes the contrast was huge between the levels of difficulty. (Interview)

Evaluating his overall coursework experience, Alexander viewed it as positive and particularly valuable for the work that he was doing in his job later:

All my education was different from what I was used to in Russia but it was different in a good way. I had classes that you learned from and found them helpful at work. (Interview)

As a graduate assistant, Alexander was responsible for conducting research with his academic advisor in his initial years and teaching courses as a teaching assistant in the subsequent years of his doctoral program. Alexander felt appreciative of the opportunity to practice teaching and research and found both of the experiences beneficial in expanding his professional expertise. Despite the fact that he was enthusiastic about teaching and doing research when he was a doctoral student and considered them valuable, he was unwilling to pursue an academic career after completing his graduate degrees:

When it came to publications I was willing to do it. When it came to programming I also liked it because it was part of my program and it was very interesting. When I had to teach sometimes I enjoyed it when I challenged my students and asked them tricky questions and made them think. I enjoyed those things but I don’t think that either teaching or research is exactly what I would like to do for the rest of my life. (Interview)
Academic Identity

Alexander mentioned that his experience as a graduate student in the U.S. was significantly different from that of in Russia. In addition to academic demands, Alexander felt that, at the beginning of his study, he was unfamiliar with American academic culture, in particular, with university structure, academic expectations and requirements, academic protocol, etc. The above challenges were particularly common during the initial period in the graduate program. Later, however, as a result of engaging with various institutional practices, Alexander learned to successfully navigate through the university culture:

It was difficult at the beginning because I didn’t know a lot of cultural things, academic culture, I mean. But I didn’t feel comfortable only at the beginning, I think in my first semester especially. It got easier quickly. When I was in my final years, I felt very comfortable… I felt both accepted and accepting of the academic culture. (Interview)

Furthermore, Alexander noted that due to the fact that he was not unique with regard to his linguistic and cultural background, he never felt alienated among students and faculty in his academic department.

Alexander noted that his educational experience in the U.S. significantly influenced his personal and professional development and shaped his perspectives on the surrounding world and his place in it. According to Alexander, his experience of solving challenging problems without having sufficient resources and support systems taught him to overcome difficulties and become independent and mature:
One positive impact is becoming more independent. Also, ability to solve problems. You realize that no one would help you and you have to do it yourself. So, you end up doing it yourself and you find a way to do it good. (Focus group) [T]

Additionally, Alexander’s academic practices, particularly research assignments, were helpful in developing his critical thinking and decision-making skills. Alexander indicated that all of the above qualities, which he developed in the course of his education in the U.S., were highly beneficial in his subsequent career:

Well, I’ve developed better critical thinking skills here. If you compare my papers that I wrote in my first year and those in my later years you will see a huge difference. I am grateful to all those people who taught me and helped me all these skills. If you don’t have good critical thinking skills you cannot write a good paper for publication. I’ve developed analytical thinking skills that help me in decision-making at work. (Interview)

**Personal Life**

**Table 25**

*Personal Life*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social networks</th>
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<tr>
<td>Russian spouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited social circle of Americans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russian-speaking community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multicultural community</td>
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<tr>
<th>Views on the family</th>
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<tr>
<td>Family values – Russian background</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family and education/career balance</td>
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<td>Spouse as support system</td>
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Alexander’s social circle in the U.S. was composed primarily of individuals sharing a non-U.S. cultural backgrounds. Alexander noted that one of the primary reasons why he had limited access to American communities was the fact that his spouse was Russian:

My wife is Russian. Because of that, I think, I do not socialize much with Americans and don’t have a chance to learn more about the U.S. culture. I don’t go out with American friends. There is no need. I spend most of my free time with my wife. (Interview)

Another reason why most of his friends were individuals with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds was the nature of his profession. Both as a graduate student and later as a professional in the field of industrial engineering, Alexander was exposed to a multicultural community where the majority of his peers, colleagues, and friends were non-native speakers of English who recently immigrated to the U.S. Despite that, Alexander never viewed his limited participation in American communities as a disadvantage. Rather, Alexander admitted that he enjoyed spending time with his Russian-speaking friends.

Alexander felt that he was happy in his personal life due to the fact he was able to reach a balance between the two essential components of his personal well-being – family and work – when he got married and his wife relocated to the U.S. However, despite the fact that Alexander was happy in his family life and had a good job, he found it difficult to live away from his family members and relatives:

I received good education, I have a good job, my wife is here with me, but my parents and family are there and this is a hard part. So I’ve gained some things and I’ve lost other things. Probably I’ve gained when it comes to material things and I’ve lost when it comes to relationships and personal connections. (Interview)
Alexander also noted that although he had spent several years in the U.S. he preserved many values and perspectives instilled by his family in Russia and the Russian culture. One of such perspectives was the importance of maintaining close relationships with the family as he viewed family relationships as a vital component of well-being.

**Findings Review**

The findings presented in this study demonstrated that identities of the five non-native English speaking graduate students developed across four sociocultural contexts and/or practices in the second languaculture, i.e second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic activity, and personal life. The data in the above sections of this chapter were organized around these four themes separately for each of the five participants. The findings together with excerpts from the data were presented to address the participants’ challenges, duties they fulfilled, perceptions and views on their practices, goal-directed adjustments and developments, and emerging identities in the U.S. as related to the above four categories. The findings across the five cases presented above are synthesized in the table presented in Appendix D of this dissertation. A detailed discussion of the findings through the lens of reviewed literature and important aspects of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, including *perezhivanie*, is provided in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Organization

This chapter offers discussion of the findings introduced in the previous chapter through the lens of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) and the literature reviewed in chapter two of this dissertation. I analyze and discuss the findings of this study with reference to the research questions posed in the dissertation:

1. How does sociocultural theory inform the process of identity formation of international graduate students through exposure to a second languaculture?
2. What role in the process of identity formation is attributed to a second language?

Consistent with the organization of the findings in the previous chapter, the discussion of the findings in this chapter is presented in four sections:

1. Second Language Issues;
2. Navigation Between Cultures;
3. Academic Activity; and
4. Personal Life.

Each of the four sections synthesizes the findings across the five participants and presents a discussion of the issues of identity development within the SCT framework as related to each of the above aspects of the sociocultural activity in the U.S. languaculture. The discussion of the findings within each of the four themes is organized to address and analyze both the features of identity transformation common across participants and those specific for a particular individual.

Each of the four sections follows an analogous structure. Addressing the research questions posed in the study, the first part of each section discusses the participants’ identities as
sociocultural constructs, with reference to the mainstream sociocultural theorization of identity that focuses on the role of sociocultural process in individual development, and how the findings of this study support and add to such theorization of identity development.

As an aspect of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, *perezhivanie* is essential to the discussion of data. In the context of this study, the participants’ *perezhivanie* evoked by their experiences of non-native English language speaking graduate students, who entered the realm of the U.S. languaculture as adults, served as a powerful indicator of their development. Thus, in the second subsection of each section, I focus on the role of *perezhivanie* in the transformation of identity as related to each of the four themes and how the notion of affect informs identity development of the individuals in this study.

Due to the fact that second language issues presented a crucial component of the participants’ experiences in the second languaculture and the research questions specifically ask about the role of L2 development in the process of identity formation, the section “Second Language Issues” includes an additional subsection that discusses the participants’ second language development as related to identity, with reference to the SCT perspectives.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of the discussion.

**Second Language Issues**

**Second Language Identity**

The participants repeatedly referred to second-language related issues in their responses to the questions of one-on-one and focus group interviews as well as reflection journal prompts. The findings indicated that the challenges, as related to academic and everyday second language (such as, accent, lack of fluency, limited vocabulary, academic writing, etc.) that the individuals experienced throughout the exposure to the second languaculture, and particularly at initial
stages of their lives in the U.S., were typical of non-native speakers of English who relocate to the U.S. as adults without prior linguistic and educational experience in an English speaking country (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Jackson, 2008).

Despite the fact that second language played an essential role in their academic development and each of the participants experienced challenges with the academic language at different points of time in the course of their study in the U.S., their non-nativeness was not tightly bound with their academic identities. In other words, the participants did not view their English language proficiency as a significant component of their self-image. Neither did they find that it could accurately represent their true selves. For example, although Maria realized that her English was not perfect, she never viewed her non-native proficiency as a potential obstacle in finding a job. Instead, she was convinced that her academic qualifications and experiences, primarily her research potential that was evident from her achievements as a doctoral student, played a much more prominent role in finding a job. Similarly, Victoria came to the conclusion over the course of several years in the U.S. that “I am not just the language, I am much more”. Likewise, Anna was convinced that “my English language does not define who I am”. Whereas Maria, Victoria, and Anna arrived at such conclusions over the course of several years in the U.S., Alexander had never viewed his English language proficiency as a decisive factor in achieving his goals.

Consistent with Norton’s (2006) conceptualization of second language learner identity, although within the broader sociocultural domain, the above finding, i.e. the idea that English language proficiency in academic contexts had over time lost its primacy, which had been shifted to academic achievements, points to the dynamic transformation of the individuals’ identities
that resulted from redefining their positions as non-native speaking students in American universities. The identity shift, in the above examples, can also be explained by gaining a novel understanding of the sociocultural activity, in which they were involved, and their roles in such activity. Such new understanding, in Vygotsky’s terminology, originates from negotiating the meaning of personal self-worth achieved in the process of mediation and generates new ways of acting on and experiencing the world (Miller, 2011).

Whereas in academic settings the participants’ English language proficiency was not an integral component of their identities, in non-academic contexts it played a much more prominent role. In such contexts, the participants of this study were detached from the common activity system of their doctoral studies, where they had established legitimacy as members of academic communities, and were forced to learn to navigate through the new languaculture in the absence of familiar support systems. Whereas in the academic environment they felt that they did not have to rely on the English language proficiency to assert their identities as capable individuals, outside the university their lack of fluency in the English language and accent presented an obstacle for entering the new languaculture.

In particular, Maria, Victoria, and Denys felt that due to the lack of English language competency they were often perceived as different or even inferior by native speakers in non-academic contexts. For example, Maria, who successfully completed her doctoral degree and found a job of Assistant Professor of Marketing, felt that her accent sometimes presented a barrier in accomplishing some basic communication goals in everyday encounters, such as when asking the manager of a store for permission to conduct a marketing experiment in that store. Additionally, both Maria and Denys felt that they were unable to defend their points of view in an argument with a native speaker due to their inability to fluently express ideas in English. Such
negative communication experiences frequently resulted in the feeling of inferiority, low self-esteem, and unwillingness to engage in conversations with target language speakers.

Consistent with Norton’s (1995, 2000, 2006) perspective on the role of power structures in second language identity development, the participants’ identities were socially constructed in inequitable relations of power determined by their English language proficiency, which affected the learners’ access to the target language community and opportunities to negotiate relationships with native speakers of English. In the informal encounters described above, the individuals were not given full access to the U.S. language culture due to their perceived lack of English language competency and thus were constrained in their actions. According to Block (2007), such negative relations of power often result in self-conflict and refusal to accept a new community, such as in the case of Maria, Victoria, and Denys, which leads to the negotiation and transformation of identities.

**Perezhivanie as Related to Second Language and Identity**

Consistent with the theory of perezhivanie that holds an idea of a unity of individual characteristics and the environment, the participants’ emotional experiences were shaped by the surrounding conditions, and most importantly, by the ways they interpreted those conditions through their own consciousness (Vygotsky, 1994). Despite the fact that the participants of this study shared common characteristics, such as age, cultural and linguistic background, levels of education and English language proficiency, circumstances in which they relocated to the U.S., and all of them became immersed in similar sociocultural practices due to the nature of their activity in the U.S., each of them could signify and comprehend the same situation or event as related to the L2 differently. For example, the findings indicated that the non-native speaking individuals attributed different personal meanings to accent. Thus, Maria was highly concerned
about how she was perceived by others due to her English pronunciation. Furthermore, her accent elicited strong emotions, such as feelings of inferiority, insecurity, and a lack of confidence, which persisted over the course of her stay in the U.S. In contrast, Alexander and Anna neither considered accent a significant obstacle in communication nor experienced negative emotions regarding it. Similarly, Victoria realized that she was not concerned about her accent, though the reevaluation of the role of her accent in communication happened over time. The above supports a prominent proposition of Vygotsky’s notion of *perezhivanie*, in particular the idea that *perezhivanie* occurs when an event, surrounding conditions, or an experience is meaningful for an individual (Blunden, 2010; Vasilyuk, 1992; Vygotsky, 1992). Whereas Maria’s communication in the U.S. contexts, where her accent emerged, constituted particularly meaningful experiences for her that shaped her perceptions of herself and the surroundings, Victoria, Alexander, and Anna attributed a different kind meaning to their accents that did not significantly determine or impact their perceptions of themselves.

The findings also indicated that the same type of a situation or surrounding condition could cause contrasting emotional experiences not only in various people but also within the same individual. Thus, Maria felt more confident and relaxed in contexts where her interlocutors were non-native speakers of English than when she was surrounded by Americans. Maria attributed that to the fact that non-native speakers were less judgmental of the imperfections in her English language because they could relate to her linguistic experience. In collaboration, non-native speaking participants of a joint activity created zones of proximal development for one another, in which they provided emotional scaffolding for each other, such as the sharing of risks and the creation of a safety zone, the attributes that were missing in communication with native speakers (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). In Vygotsky’s (1994) terms, it is not the
experience per se that matters and impacts development but the significance of this experience for an individual in a given situation and at a particular time.

The above idea can also explain why the participants’ _perezhivanie_ caused by identical situations, events, or surrounding conditions varied at different points of time in their lives in the U.S. Maria, Victoria, and Denys were particularly distressed because of their lack of fluency, the mistakes that they made in speech, limited lexical competency, and inadequate writing skills at the initial stages of their doctoral programs. However, each of them noted that over time their concerns about their English language proficiency in academic settings faded away and moved to the background. Over the course of several semesters as graduate students, their priorities shifted to their academic achievements. The above finding indicates that the participants’ emotional experiences were tied to stages of their development. Consistent with Vygotsky’s (1994) theory, the individuals’ developmental levels formed by their socialization in the second language culture determined what kind of _perezhivanie_ their linguistic experiences elicited in them. In other words, due to the fact that the participants’ attitudes to the role of their language proficiency changed over time as a result of the reevaluation of its significance in their academic practices (_perezhivanie_), the influence that their language experiences exerted on their identity development changed as well – it became less significant. The above idea points to the fact that the participants were able to resolve, on the emotional plane, the psychological crisis caused by their initial negative linguistic experiences (Vasilyuk, 1992). The resolution of the crisis happened as a result of intensive “work” of consciousness, which involved such processes as reflection on linguistic experiences, reevaluation of surrounding conditions and self-worth, and constructing new meanings. Such processes evoked transformation of consciousness and identity and led to the change in behavior.
Unlike Maria’s, Victoria’s, Denys’s, and Anna’s perezhivanie, Alexander’s lived-through experience as related to the second language was fostered by the surrounding conditions that significantly contrasted from those of the other four participants and, therefore, had a different kind of impact on his identity development in the U.S. languaculture. In particular, in Alexander’s case, the English language proficiency was not critical for academic success and professional growth in the field of engineering. Furthermore, the cultural and linguistic diversity characteristic of his program of study contributed to a more ‘relaxed’ linguistic environment, in which students and instructors were in ‘equal’ circumstances as non-native speakers of English. The above explains why Alexander attributed a different kind of meaning to his accent and fluency in the English language. Alexander’s English language proficiency did not evoke a psychological crisis in him and did not provoke emotions and reflection. Indeed, Alexander noted that reflection on his linguistic experiences in the U.S. was not typical for him and that his participation in this dissertation study gave him a chance to focus on such issues for the first time.

Second Language Development

Whereas the above sections primarily discussed the participants’ identity development in the U.S. languaculture as related to the L2 and the role of perezhivanie in such development, this section focuses on the participants’ efforts to improve their second language, adjustments as related to the L2, and other forms of linguistic development that occurred over the course of their stay in the U.S. and that are dialectically related to their identities constructed through experiencing. The findings of this study support an integral idea of Vygotsky’s (1986) sociocultural theory – the crucial role of language in individual development. Kramsch (2009) argued that language as a meaning-making system “constructs the historical sedimentation of
meaning that we call our ‘selves’” (p. 17). Pointing to the dialogic and dialectic nature of second language development and the issues of identity, the findings revealed that the transformation of the participants’ identities across time and experience exerted powerful influences on their willingness to engage with the English language. Particularly, the shifts in their identities at various points of their development, caused by the reevaluation of their perceptions of themselves, stimulated reflection on their linguistic competency and resulted in adjustments with regard to the L2. Some of such adjustments were conscious attempts to enhance their L2 proficiency, whereas others presented unconscious processes directed at developing the L2 in order to overcome the obstacle to the integration into the U.S. languaculture.

The participants’ goal-directed development of both academic and non-academic English language proficiency manifested itself through specific strategies that they employed with regard to their evolving sense of identity. The study of such strategies, which form the base of the participants’ behavior and point to the processes of transformation on the internal level, is fundamental for understanding the nature of individual development (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). The participants’ goal-directed English language development was comprised of both external actions that they developed in order to confront and alleviate the problem and internal strategies that unconsciously evolved in an attempt to resolve inner conflicts caused by new and/or challenging linguistic experiences in the second languaculture.

As is evident from the findings, imitation was one of the goal-directed behaviors used by the participants (Maria, Victoria, and Anna) in order to better integrate into American linguistic communities. The participants viewed the imitation of the American English intonation and articulation of sounds as well as the copying of non-linguistic elements, such as facial expressions and gestures, as the necessary tools that helped them become “closer” to natives
speakers of English and sound more competent to their American interlocutors. By imitating English language linguistic and non-linguistic forms, the participants were able to construct a sense of self. As Penuel and Wertsch (1995) noted, “it is for this reason [that] we suggest that identity be conceived as a form of action that is first and foremost rhetorical, concerned with persuading others (and oneself) about who one is and what one values to meet different purposes” (p. 91).

Another strategy that the participants utilized to maintain positive identity experiences was avoidance. As is evident from the findings, Maria, Victoria, and Denys purposefully refrained from particular discourses, such as engaging in an argument with native speakers of English (Denys and Maria), using American humor in speech (Victoria), discussing topics that required the knowledge and use of unfamiliar topic-specific vocabulary (Maria and Victoria), etc. Additionally, Maria admitted that she ignored the fact that she could lack the competency of culture-specific vocabulary, such as brand names, when teaching classes as an instructor. By merely ignoring unsuccessful linguistic experiences, the participants avoided negative impacts on identity. Consistent with Uzikova’s (2009) perspective on perezhivanie, particularly the idea that through perezhivanie individuals seek answers to important questions, take decisions, and make choices in order to find a safe place and obtain meaning by manipulating their language-related encounters, the participants of this study took active stances in determining what kind of experiences were meaningful for them, made choices, and thus were able to maintain psychological balance and positive identities.

The findings indicated that the participants’ goal-directed language development was also evident through the use of private speech. Private speech was typically carried out in the form of external speaking in the English language for the purpose of cognitive and emotional self-
regulation (Ahmed, 1994; Diaz & Berk, 1992; McCafferty, 1992; 1994). For example, it surfaced when Anna, Denys, Maria, and Victoria practiced their speeches before public presentations. Such mental rehearsal served as a mediational means that helped the individuals internalize new knowledge (Diaz & Berk, 1992). Anna, Victoria, and Denys also engaged in self-dialogue for understanding difficult academic content and arranging ideas when they talked through complex concepts in English. Most importantly, the findings revealed that Victoria used English private speech for psychological reasons when she felt the need to organize thoughts in order to solve a problem. Particularly, when confronted with a difficulty, such as confusing interview procedures as related to the application for an internship position, Victoria invoked private speech in an effort to gain control over the situation. As such, private verbal thinking provided a channel for “self expression and release” and thus allowed the participants who engaged in it to exercise emotional control over challenges encountered in everyday life (John-Steiner, 1992, p. 228). The use of private speech in this capacity, as related to the participants of this study, pointed to the development of self-regulation and thus determined trajectories of identity development.

It was also found in the study that the participants unconsciously engaged in a different form of thinking when they switched to another language, the phenomenon known as thinking for speaking (Slobin, 1987, 2003). Particularly, when using English as a language of communication, Alexander, Anna, and Denys mobilized their thinking in such a way that it conformed to the organizational requirements of the language they used. However, it was found that due to bilingualism, both languages exerted bi-directional cross-linguistic influences on each other in relation to identity and the sociocultural contexts through which the languages were used. In other words, in addition to the impact of Russian linguistic categories (lexical and grammatical) on English language use, the participants’ increasing mastery of their second
language resulted in occasional and unintentional integration of English linguistic patterns, such as sentence structures, in their Russian speech, pointing to the development of “thinking for speaking” in English, and thus the proficiency in the English language as a whole. The participants’ sense of self with regard to L2 use transferred as they internalized new ways in which second language categorizes and conceptualizes the world. Consistent with Slobin’s (2003) notion of thinking for speaking, the newly internalized language-driven categories of the world were stored by the participants for future speaking, which made thinking for present speaking become thinking for potential speaking.

In addition to the above discussed goal-directed behaviors that the participants developed through exposure to the second language culture, they were also employing some external actions directed at improving their language proficiency and known as efficient ways to learn a foreign language (Brown, 2007; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Some of these actions included watching American TV and movies (Anna and Denys); referring to textbooks on English grammar (Alexander and Denys); participating in accent-reduction classes (Alexander) or a toastmasters club (Victoria); using the university writing center as a resource (Denys); and asking an academic advisor for help with English (Denys). The range of the strategies used as a means of enhancing L2 competency indicates that the participants were highly motivated learners who were aware of their challenges and willing to overcome them.

**Navigation Between Cultures**

**Identity Development in Cross-Cultural Contexts**

The impact of cross-cultural differences on identity development of international students, participants of study abroad programs, and non-native speakers in a new cultural environment in general has been well documented in the literature (Aveni, 2005; Benson et al.,
212


Overall, the participants of this study were open and accepting of the cultural differences. Each of them had a prior experience of living in the U.S. for a period of three to four months and, therefore, felt prepared to deal with cross-cultural differences. Furthermore, the participants intentionally chose this country for pursuing their graduate degrees partially due to the fact that after their prior trips to the U.S. they realized that they felt comfortable and secure in this cultural environment. Nevertheless, their positive dispositions towards the new culture did not always guarantee that they felt accepted in U.S. cultural contexts.

Similar to the English language proficiency issues that marginalized the non-native speaking students from the U.S. languaculture, their lack of cultural knowledge or resistance to fully accept the new culture at times posed obstacles in accessing U.S. non-academic communities. For example, Victoria, Denys, and Anna noted that they lacked understanding of U.S. humor, and could not respond to it in an adequate way. Maria, Victoria, Anna, and Denys also found that they were unfamiliar with many American popular cultural forms, such as American movies, TV shows, music, etc. In addition to the above, the more critical cultural element that the participants were missing was the knowledge of forms of communication typical of the U.S. culture, such as the level of register and degrees of formality as well as other pragmatic features, such as politeness in both email correspondence and oral communication.
Despite the lack of cultural knowledge, the participants, for example Victoria, Denys, and Maria, actively sought opportunities to socialize with native speakers in order to expand their cultural competency and were willing to transform some of their modes of behavior by enacting U.S. cultural forms, such as linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, and actively learning about the U.S. culture by questioning, examining, and reflecting on the cultural elements that they were unfamiliar with. The above finding confirms Bourhis’s et al. (2007) claim that individuals, who find themselves in novel sociocultural settings, specifically in the context of a different country, tend to “adapt their communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic (e.g., languages, accents, speech rates), paralinguistic (e.g., pauses, utterance length), and nonverbal features (e.g., smiling, gazing) in such a way as to become familiar to their interlocutor’s behavior” (p. 37). Furthermore, using Jackson’s (2008) terminology, the participants of this study, in their roles of new members of U.S. cultural communities, learned to “appropriate voices of core members, engaging in the act of ‘ventriloquation’” and mediate their identities through the act of ‘convergence’ (p. 45).

Consistent with Vygotksy’s sociocultural theory of individual development, the U.S. cultural influences were found to play a prominent role in shaping the participants’ modes of being and the formation of their identities. Indeed, the findings indicated that the international students both modified their external actions in an attempt to integrate into the U.S. languaculture and changed their ways of thinking and understanding the world. Such identity shifts happened as a result of reevaluating their sociocultural practices and encounters and constructing novel meaning in the new languaculture. In other words, the participants gained a certain degree of self-regulation over their behaviors in the U.S. cultural environment, which expanded their options for identity formation (Vygotsky, 1997).
Similar to the findings of Benson’s et al. (2013), Jackson’s (2008) and Kim’s (2013) studies, the findings of this study indicated that the contexts of cultural heterogeneity enhanced the participants’ sense of belonging to their home culture. The above idea supports the “contested” and “fragmented” nature of identity formation (Block, 2007). However, whereas the participants of the above studies made a definite choice in favor of one or another cultural identity, i.e. they sought for affiliation with either the new culture or their native culture which shifted depending on the stage of their development, the participants of this study were simultaneously maintaining affiliations with both cultures. In other words, the two identities – the one shaped under the influence of the Russian cultural background and the one that emerged in the U.S. as a result of adopting the tools provided by the U.S. culture – coexisted and developed in different frames of reference. Thus, the participants (Maria, Victoria, Denys, and Alexander) were able to find their safe place in the new cultural environment by both conforming to the U.S. cultural norms and engaging in the cultural practices of their home country, which allowed them to maintain affiliations with both cultures.

**Perezhivanie as Related to Identity in Cross-Cultural Context**

The findings indicated that the participants’ subjective experiences were highly influenced by cross-cultural encounters in the context of the U.S., which played a prominent role in constructing their emotional experiences and determining directions of their personal development. Consistent with Vasilyuk’s (1992) theorization of experiencing, the context of cultural contrast evoked strong emotions, uncertainty and internal conflict between the existing understanding and new knowledge brought by the new cultural attributes. In order to overcome the crisis and ultimately obtain the meaning, the individuals engaged in a productive activity on the internal plane, i.e. reflection on the new cultural experience and reevaluation of the
surrounding conditions and their position in the new culture in order to gain a new understanding. In particular, the findings indicated that Victoria’s, Denys’s, and Alexander’s relocation to the U.S. contributed to their increased curiosity about the Russian culture. Furthermore, the novel cultural environment made them engage in continuous reflections on the value of the Russian culture for them and made them reevaluate their perceptions of both cultures. The participants’ perezhivanie resulted in constructing new meanings about their cultural belonging and the role of the Russian background in their lives. The new understanding that they gained over the course of several years in the U.S. held the idea that while the participants were generally satisfied with their experiences in the U.S. and respected and appreciated its culture, they felt strong ties to their native culture and clearly identified themselves as Russians. The resolution of the internal crisis, i.e. regaining a Russian cultural identity, – the result of perezhivanie – helped the individuals restore a psychological equilibrium and assert their identities in the new sociocultural milieu (Vasilyuk, 1992).

The data indicated that the participants’ emotional experiences, as related to the above, varied. Despite the fact that Maria’s experiencing of the identical surrounding conditions resulted in obtaining a similar meaning, i.e. the sense of belonging to the Russian culture, her development followed a different trajectory. In contrast to the other four participants, Maria’s relocation to the U.S. and the desire to integrate in the U.S. languaculture caused her to reject her Russian cultural identity at the beginning of her stay in the U.S., which was evident from her conscious attempts to alienate herself from native speakers of Russian and Russian cultural forms. However, over the course of five years, when she moved to Oregon and became a member of a local Russian community, she realized that she “became a true Russian again” and that “no matter how much time [she has] lived in the U.S. [she] will always remain Russian”.
The above-discussed findings point to another important idea of Vygotsky’s (1993) concept of *perezhivanie* – its orientedness towards the past and the future simultaneously. The exploration of the participants’ *perezhivanie* indicated that their past experiences, such as cross-cultural encounters and engagement in practices as related to both cultures, informed their future identity trajectories (Vasilyuk, 1992). In other words, the new meanings created, generated and constructed through experiencing of past events, impacted their prospective orientations with regard to their positioning in relation to both culture and the role of each of the cultures in their lives.

**Academic Activity**

**Academic Identity Development**

Due to the fact that each of the participants’ goals of moving to the U.S. was to pursue a doctoral degree in a U.S. institution, their identity development was shaped in large part by their engagement in academic practices and participation in institutional social networks. The findings indicated that the participants were going through several stages of identity development as doctoral students in the U.S. All of them found the first year of their programs particularly difficult due to the change in academic, linguistic, and cultural practices. At that stage, identified as the exposure phase in Kim’s (2013) study, they were familiarizing themselves with the new academic culture, negotiating cultural differences, and learning the necessary skills to be able to adequately function as doctoral students in U.S. institutions. The findings indicated that despite the fact that each of them initially experienced challenges as related to academic language and content, teaching and research responsibilities caused by extensive workload in their doctoral programs and the lack of academic background in the U.S., they were generally successful at adjusting to American academic culture, establishing positive connections within the academic
networks, and regaining confidence in their abilities as students. In Vygotsky’s (1978) terminology, the individuals were able to internalize the patterns of practices characteristic of the U.S. academic contexts and utilize the existing socially constructed cultural artifacts in the course of collaborative activity, which allowed them to learn to successfully navigate through and develop understanding of themselves in various academic settings. By engaging in joint activities, their individual academic identities were shaped by sociocultural conditions, where first they originated on the social plane as a culturally shared cognition; later they were negotiated through the acquisition of mediational tools; and finally the identities became internalized and self-regulated (Fuhrer, 2004). The particular practices that the participants internalized over time through ‘participation, collaboration, and social interaction’ (Vygotksy, 1978), and thus developed self-regulation over them, were coursework assignments, research activities, teaching practices, etc. The participants were able to gain self-regulation over those activities as a result of reconstructing, self-organizing, and transforming the elements of those practices from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal plane (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986).

Furthermore, the international students’ involvement and active participation in academic practices allowed them to gain legitimacy as members of not only academic communities but also the broader culture of the U.S. As is evident from the data, the above was particularly relevant to Maria, Victoria, and Denys as each of them mentioned that their membership in U.S. academic communities prevented them from feeling alienated from the broader culture of the U.S., thus allowing them to feel part of it. The findings indicated that as a result of spending a considerable amount of time on academic activities and having multiple connections with individuals whose interests revolved around academic-related matters, Maria’s, Victoria’s, and Denys’s unconditional belonging to the academic culture transferred to other areas of their lives.
within the U.S. languaculture. In contrast to the findings of Benson et al. (2013) and Jackson (2008), where some of the participants of study abroad programs felt isolated from both educational communities and the broader culture of the countries in which they were temporarily residing, the participants of this study felt that their belonging to the U.S. academic culture allowed them to enter other U.S. communities.

Interestingly, as is evident from the findings of this study, when individuals proceed to further stages of their personal development, like in the case of Maria who had completed her Ph.D. degree and worked as a tenure-track faculty at the time of data collection, their identities undergo changes and transformation as a result of the new sociocultural experiences, such as the new role as a university professor in Maria’s case. In particular, Maria noted that her professional status occasionally made her feel distanced from the people she encountered in non-academic settings in the small town where she found a job due to the fact that the majority of them were students, which created a social boundary between Maria and those individuals. The above supports a fundamental postulate of the sociocultural theorization of identity, i.e. the fact that identity formation is a dynamic and constantly evolving process of individual development and transformation that changes its direction depending on new sociocultural conditions and circumstances presented to individuals at a particular point of time (Hall, 1994; Norton, 2006).

**Perezhivanie as Related to Academic Practices**

Consistent with the central idea of *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky, 1978), the participants’ experiencing as related to their engagement in academic practices determined in large part the direction of their individual development. Based on the findings, it is evident that for each of the five individuals the academic aspect of their lives was particularly meaningful. Indeed, the pursuit of a graduate degree served as a driving force for relocating to the U.S.
The findings indicated that the challenges that each of the five participants encountered in the first academic year of their graduate programs, such as an intense workload, unfamiliar content, issues related to academic language, etc., elicited strong emotions and inner conflicts in them. In Vasilyuk’s (1992) terms, perezhivanie naturally occurred due to the high intensity of emotions and the controversy between the existing understanding and new knowledge brought by the novel experiences. Nevertheless, the participants were successful at resolving some of the conflicts on the internal level through continuous reflective processes and external actions, such as investing a significant amount of effort into their studies. The participants transformations, such as the shift in academic priorities (Victoria), the improved self-esteem as related to academic achievements (Maria, Victoria, Denys, and Alexander), the reevaluation of their views on belonging to academic culture (Denys, Victoria, Maria, and Anna), etc. serve as an indication of overcoming the inner crisis, obtaining new meanings, and restoring a certain degree of psychological balance, which point to positive identity development.

As is evident from the findings, in the process of experiencing, the participants signified different aspects of their academic practices as particularly meaningful for them. Such aspects presented focal points in their perezhivanie and allowed the individuals to reevaluate their self-worth in the new community of practice. For example, the key element in Maria’s experience was her research endeavors. Maria’s substantial investments in research practices and her notable achievements in research over the course of several years as a doctoral student, in her particular case, appeared to play a primary role in resolving conflict and transforming her sense of self.

Whereas Maria was able to reach a psychological balance through signifying her research experiences, Anna’s perezhivanie revolved around her perceptions of being “a good student” as related to coursework. The new conception of what constitutes “a good student”, typical for U.S.
academic programs, i.e. one whose grades include “A”s and “B”s rather than exclusively “A”s, contradicted her prior beliefs as she was used to being a “straight-A” student in her previous educational experiences. In Vasilyuk’s (1992) terms, Anna’s emotional involvement and intensive “work” of consciousness allowed her to obtain a new understanding of a “good student” and resolve the internal conflict. Following Vygotsky’s (1978) theorization of *perezhivanie*, the reevaluation of her prior perceptions determined her future identity orientation in the U.S. and shaped her perspectives of the surrounding world and her place in it. Indeed, the fact that Anna felt proud of her accomplishment upon completion of her graduate degree at a U.S. university indicates her overall positive views on her academic performance in the graduate program.

The findings indicated that the *perezhivanie* of Maria and Anna, as well as that of the other three individuals, with respect to academic practices, was characterized by continuous reflections on their academic work and the significance of academic experiences in their lives. As such, the reflection stimulated the development of various aspects of their personality. For example, Victoria noted that her active engagement in academic practices and constant reflection that it entailed made her curious and critical of many of her beliefs regarding both academic and non-academic experiences and events happening in her immediate surroundings and in the world. Most importantly, as a consequence of transformations on the internal level caused by such *perezhivanie*, Victoria gained greater understanding of the meaning of her life, – the idea that the meaning of human life lies in continuous development, – and the fact that she was capable of achieving goals. A part of such transformations was the shift in Victoria’s perceptions of the value of her accent and English language proficiency in her life in the U.S., as discussed earlier in this chapter.
As is evident from the above, the participants’ academic experiences, similar to their linguistic and cultural encounters, were vastly meaningful and emotional in nature, and as such, played a prominent role in determining their identity development in the second language/culture.

**Personal Life**

**The Impact of Personal Life on Identity**

Personal life is generally not discussed in research as an important aspect of identity development of individuals who relocate to a different country to pursue a university degree. However, I found that it played a prominent role in the way the participants navigated through the new linguistic, cultural, and academic experiences in the U.S. Furthermore, when I asked them interview questions regarding their experiences in the U.S., the issues of personal life emerged in the responses of each of the participants. In particular, the impact of personal life on identity was implied or explicitly discussed when answering the following interview questions:

Question 21: Do you often notice that you are reflecting on your experiences in the U.S.? What aspects of your experiences do you think you are most reflective of? Why?

Question 22: Before you came to the U.S., how did you imagine what your experience would be like? Now that you have been in the U.S. for some time, how is your actual experience different from what you first imagined?

Question 23: What is your sense of the world in which you live now? How do you feel about what has happened over the course of your stay in the U.S.?

Due to the fact that identity is a holistic entity in which feelings and emotions are intertwined and experiences are interconnected in the process of constructing the self and giving greater meaningfulness to life (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger 2000), it is erroneous to completely ignore such aspects of individual development.
The findings indicated that the individuals’ personal life, such as participation in social activities in their free time or lack thereof, exerted particular influences on their overall experience in the U.S. As is evident from the data, the extent of their engagement in non-academic communities varied at different stages of their development in the U.S., depended on how important they viewed their social life for them at those particular stages, and was consistent with their overall identity development in the U.S. Thus, Victoria was more active at building social networks at the beginning of her stay in the U.S. However, later she reevaluated the value of spending time on such activities and limited her communication to just a few close friends, explaining it by the lack of free time and assigning primacy to her academic activities. The above finding - the desire to restrict oneself from social life - supports Kim’s (2013) findings and reflects phases of the model of international students’ identity transformation that Kim (2013) proposed in her study. Consistent with Kim’s (2013) model, upon arrival in the U.S. and at the initial period in the new country, Victoria entered the stage of exposure characterized by the desire to get familiar with the new cultural environment and meet new people through engaging in social networks. This phase, according to Kim (2013), was followed by the phase of enclosure or securing self, when Victoria chose to distance herself from the surrounding environment and discontinue many of her contacts. In Victoria’s case, such transformation of her identity was caused by her overall progression to a different level in her development as a person in which her devotion to her academic practices outweighed her eagerness to expand her social circles.

Maria’s experience, however, differed from that of Victoria and the participants’ of Kim’s (2013) study. In contrast to them, Maria “skipped” the exposure stage as she generally showed lack of enthusiasm to engage in non-academic social practices during the entire period of her doctoral program due to an intense workload. Maria was only able to reevaluate her
perceptions as related to her social life, within the affordances and constraints of the environment, later when she completed her degree and moved to Oregon, where she was successful at establishing connections with both Americans and Russian-speaking people. The shift in Maria’s identity as related to personal life can be explained by the fact that by the time she moved to a different state and became a professional, her academic activity had become a stable component of her identity, thus allowing her to expand her options and embrace new practices in the second languaculture. Integrating the above-discussed model (Kim, 2013), following the stage of securing self, Maria entered the stage of emergence or disclosing self. This is when she left her “shell” and tried to establish contacts with Americans and Russian-speaking individuals in an attempt to gain an integrated identity.

Interesting, and contrasting with each other, findings as related to the impact of personal life on identity development in the U.S. emerged in Alexander’s and Denys’s cases. Each of the two male participants’ personal lives, in particular, the fact that they got married and their spouses were Russian, exerted a different influence on their ability to expand social circles in the U.S. Thus, Denys found that his marriage enabled him to better integrate into the U.S. culture and expand his social circles and, therefore, served as a channel to entering diverse communities. He explained this circumstance by the fact that together with his spouse he became involved in various informal social events, activities that he was not typically engaged in prior to coming to the U.S. for a number of reasons. Alexander, in contrast, found that after getting married, his participation in social networks was affected due to the fact that he started spending most of his free time with his Russian spouse and did not feel the need to intentionally expand his social circles. Each of the two participants followed different trajectories in their development in the U.S. languaculture based on the opportunities that their personal lives provided them with and
the choices they made. Nevertheless, both of the participants’ experiences in their personal lives had positive impacts on their identity development as they were able to realize their goals and reach “harmonious relational outcomes”, which according to Jackson (2008) serves as an indication of positive identity development.

**Perezhivanie as Related to Personal Life**

The data in this study indicated that some of the aspects of the participants’ personal life exerted significant influences on their psychological well-being in the U.S., and ultimately identity development in the new languaculture. These aspects primarily related to their ability (or, in some cases, inability) to accomplish their personal goals with regard to getting married. The findings point to the fact that such aspects operated differently in the male and female participants’ lives and thus elicited contrasting emotional investments in each of the two groups of participants.

Due to the fact that the male participants were married and their Russian spouses had relocated to the U.S. neither of the male participants was particularly reflective of such aspects of their lives. This can be explained by the fact that their inner conflicts generated by relevant experiences, which had been particularly meaningful for them earlier in their lives in the U.S., were already resolved. As a result, the two male participants were able to reach a certain degree of emotional balance, which allowed them to shift their priorities to other aspects of their lives in the U.S., such as the issues of academic/professional, linguistic and cultural growth. By means of external actions, such as getting married, and internal processes, they successfully achieved “a non-contradictory and integrated state of the internal world”, which pointed to positive identity development (Vasilyuk, 1992, p. 57).
As is evident from the findings, the female participants’ experiences as related to personal life, in particular having a family, were different than those of the male individuals. In contrast to Denys and Alexander, the female participants were less successful in realizing the related goals. Despite prioritizing family over academic and career achievements, neither Maria nor Victoria was married throughout the course of their stay in the U.S. Anna, although she got married upon completion of her master’s degree in the U.S., had always lived separately from her husband due to circumstances beyond her control, and thus was yet to fulfill important goals in her personal life. Their inability to accomplish personal objectives under the given conditions gave rise to the ambivalence of feelings and discord among ideas, wishes, aims, and values. The findings indicated that the female participants’ perezhivanie, which naturally emerged in an attempt to resolve the crisis and obtain meaning, was at the forefront of their experiencing of the world. Consistent with the sociocultural concept of perezhivanie (Vasilyuk, 1992), the internal contradiction between the future that they had imagined prior to relocating to the U.S. and the existence in terms of meaning evoked powerful emotions in the three individuals, which had a significant impact on their perceptions of themselves and the surrounding world, and thus determined their personal development in the U.S. languaculture.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the participants’ identity transformation through exposure to the second languaculture. In particular, using SCT, I analyzed their individual development over the course of their stay in the U.S. as related to the four aspects of their sociocultural activity examined in the study, i.e. second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic activity, and personal life. Due to the fact that linguistic practices played a central role in shaping individual identities, as in the case of international graduate students who relocate to the U.S. as
adults without relevant prior experiences, the findings regarding L2 development as related to identity were given a special consideration and discussed in an additional subsection. As part of the analysis for each of the four themes, I also discussed in what ways the categories of affect and *perezhivanie* guided identity transformations of the five participants.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

In this study, I attempted to analyze the longitudinal process of identity development of international graduate students as their lives unfolded across time and experience in the second languaculture. Furthermore, my goal was to explore what role is attributed to second language in this process. The study relied on the mainstream sociocultural perspectives on individual development that originated from Vygotsky’s work and were further elaborated by his followers to address the issues of identity and language development of second language learners. As part of such perspectives, it integrated the unit of *perezhivanie* into the examination of individual experiences in a new languaculture and explored how *perezhivanie* as related to different aspects of such experiences figured in transforming identity and second language development. The dissertation employed qualitative methodology, such as in-depth interviews, reflection journals collected over the course of five months, and a focus group, to explore the experiences of the five individuals and how the participants made meaning of themselves in relation to such experiences in the new contexts of the U.S.

The topic of second language and identity development for international students has only recently become popular in second language research. However, no specific studies have addressed the issue of identity transformation in such individuals from the perspective of the category of affect, and more specifically *perezhivanie* as applied to the experiences of advanced language learners abroad. Therefore, by exploring international graduate students’ identity development from the holistic theoretical perspective that captures the unity of affect and cognition, this study contributes to the currently existing body of knowledge.
An important characteristic of the participants of this research was that, despite the fact that they were international students in the U.S., all of them intended to continue their journeys in the U.S. after completing their degrees, and thus were sharing a number of common features with individuals who are immigrants in a new country. Particularly, they were highly motivated to adjust and integrate into the new environment and find their safe place in the new world. Additionally, due to the fact that the pursuit of a graduate degree served as the driving force behind relocation to the U.S. and their lives revolved around academic activities, the participants were also confronted with the experiences typical of international students. Despite the fact that the focus of the study was on Russian students who were pursuing or recently completed graduate degrees in a U.S. university and the research findings must be considered in relation to the particular five graduate students under investigation, the findings benefit all international students who relocate to the U.S. as adults from any geographic location and work on a college degree at any level. Furthermore, due to the fact that the study explores the participants’ exposure to the U.S. language as a multidimensional lived-through experience without excluding any meaningful aspects of such experiences, the findings also benefit those immigrants who find themselves in a novel environment of the U.S. or any other country and go through similar stages of emotional development.

I chose a five-month period of data collection to examine how the participants rendered their sense of self over the course of their stay in the U.S. Although the participants’ perceptions and understanding of themselves and the surroundings may have changed over the course of the five months and could present an interesting area of analysis, a primary goal of conducting a longitudinal study was to engage the participants in practices that called for deep and continuous reflection on their experiences over the course of their lives in the U.S., and thus provide them
with multiple opportunities to reveal how their true selves transformed over time. As was evident from the data, such an approach to data collection yielded valuable outcomes. In particular, in the focus group interview, which was conducted at the final phase of data collection, all of the participants noted that their participation in the study stimulated their reflective processes and helped them become aware of the aspects of their experiences that they had not been typically thinking of before.

The data were analyzed and discussed across the four themes representing the aspects of the participants’ experiences in the U.S. that appeared to play prominent roles in their identity development in the second language culture. In particular, categories of second language issues, navigation between cultures, academic activity, and personal life were examined. As indicated in the discussion of the findings, the issues related to English language were particularly meaningful indicators of identity development of the non-native speaking graduate students in the context of the U.S. However, such issues figured differently in each participant’s identity. For example, depending on an individual subjective experience, some perceived accent as an obstacle for entering U.S. communities of practice, whereas others viewed it as an insignificant element of their linguistic competence, which did not have a profound effect on their perceptions of themselves. Furthermore, in some cases, the meanings that the individuals attributed to their English language competence and accent changed over time depending on the phase of their identity development.

The collected data revealed a great deal about the participants’ navigation between the two cultures that determined their identity trajectories in the second language culture. Interestingly, the individuals’ intentions to adjust in the new country did not necessarily imply that they were willing to adapt to it by absorbing the new cultural forms. Instead, they showed different identity
patterns. In particular, in some cases, they were able to find their safe place and restore a psychological equilibrium in the new cultural context by engaging with the Russian cultural practices that were available to them in the context of the U.S.

The data also revealed that the participants’ engagement with academic activity allowed them to integrate into the broader culture of the U.S. Despite initial challenges with institutional practices, the academic aspect of their identities got stabilized over time, which was evident through the shift in their perceptions of their academic self and new meanings that they constructed through reflective processes.

Finally, the participants’ personal life was found to exert significant influence on their overall experience in the second languaculture. Particularly, their willingness to engage with informal social networks depended much on intentionality and the phase of identity development that they were going through. It was also found that the female individuals’ inability to realize goals in personal life evoked strong emotions and internal conflicts that impacted how they evaluated their experiences in the U.S.

With regard to the research questions, the unified SCT framework, which combines both cognitive and affective dimensions of individual development, enabled the examination of issues of identity and second language development of international graduate students in the U.S. by viewing internal and external transformations in individual consciousness and behavior through various aspects of their activity in a second languaculture. The main tenets of the SCT framework, such as cognition, mediation, internalization, sociocultural activity, as well as personality, affect, and perezhivanie, allowed me to explore the processes that underlie such transformations and explain the dimensions of non-native speakers’ second language development within the affordances and constraints of the new sociocultural environment.
Implications and Future Research

This dissertation study provides a range of implications and recommendations for future research to enhance the understanding of issues of identity development of non-native speakers of English through exposure to a second languaculture. Particularly, the findings of the study urge educators to view such individuals as complex and multidimensional beings whose identities are shaped and produced through individual subjective experiences where affective features are inseparable from cognitive and sociocultural dimensions. Identity formation of international students in the U.S. is an intricate process of constructing meaning of self and the surroundings through reflection on various areas of individual activity, where a particularly prominent role is assigned to second language.

Although the current study is a significant contribution to the body of knowledge, some areas need to be further researched. First, because the data in this study were collected from five participants, which is a relatively small number, and thus cannot represent the population of second language learners, future research might focus on a larger number of non-native speakers of English who pursue a university degree at a U.S. university in order to explore their identity development. Second, the field of applied linguistics might benefit if the participants from other linguistic background, besides Russian, are included. It might prove interesting to compare how their identities and perceptions of themselves and the environment and those of the participants of this study evolve through exposure to the U.S. languaculture. Third, future studies might explore perezhivanie, with regard to identity development and the role of the L2 in this process, of English language learners who are at lower levels of English language proficiency than international graduate students. For example, the participants of language exchange and/or study abroad programs might be of interest. Specifically, how does their emotional experiencing unfold
in an immersion environment? What role do second language-related issues play in this process considering the fact that such English language learners (ELLs) have not yet mastered linguistic skills at the level of the individuals who come to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree? In other words, do language-related issues in their cases result in a different kind of internal conflict and what internal means and external actions they utilize to restore a psychological balance?

Additionally, it might be worthy to focus on a younger population of language learners, such as ELLs who immigrate to the U.S. with their families and are placed in English-only classrooms where they have to acquire both content area knowledge and English language skills in formal classroom settings. How are their subjective experiences shaped and what emotional processes are “brought on the stage” in the production of experiencing? (Vasilyuk, 1992). As part of this process, what role is assigned to reflective processes with regard to second language in the production of meaning? Or else, how reflective are such ELLs of their linguistic experiences and how the meanings that they produce determine their identity options? As was evident from the data collected from the participants of this study, the international graduate students were actively and continuously engaged in reflection on different aspects of their lives and their development. It would be interesting to compare both groups of population in this regard.

The above recommendations for future research reflect some areas that might be explored to expand the existing body of literature on non-native English language speaking individuals’ identity development in the U.S. lenguaculture.
APPENDIX A

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. General Background Information:

1. How many years have you been living in the U.S.? Where?

2. How old were you when you started your graduate degree in the U.S.?

3. How long have you been in a graduate program in the U.S? Or, if you have already received a graduate degree, when did you receive it?

4. What is your area of study?

5. What did you study for your undergraduate and master’s degrees if you received them in Russia? If not, where did you receive those degrees?

6. Why did you choose to study in the U.S. for your graduate degree(s)?

II. Language-Related Issues

7. How did you view your English language proficiency at the beginning of your graduate studies? How do you view your English language proficiency now?

8. Have you ever experienced any communication challenges due to the fact that you are a non-native speaker of English? What kinds of challenges? How have you responded (/do you respond) to them?

9. What do you think about your communication with faculty members, administrators and peer students? How do you feel as a non-native speaker of English when interacting with each of them?

10. Have you ever perceived or experienced your different sense of identity when speaking English language? When and how?

12. What role does your English language proficiency play in your academic life? Have you ever felt that there are goals you wish to pursue that are unachievable due to your perceived lack of English language proficiency? Bring examples.

13. How do you feel about your accent? Can you share some experiences where you have become conscious of your accent for some reason? Would you like to change your accent? If so, then why and what would you like to achieve by doing so?

III. Education-Related Issues

14. Can you compare the U.S. education system and that of your country? What differences have you observed? What differences do you accept? What differences do you resist? How do you resist them?

15. How comfortable did you feel in the academic settings you experienced when you just started your graduate program in the U.S.? How have your feelings changed over time?

16. How can you evaluate your adjustment to the U.S. academic culture?

17. What are your major responsibilities as a graduate student at your university? (e.g. taking classes, being a GA/TA, conducting research, etc.). How do you feel about playing these different roles?

18. How willing were you to participate in various educational activities when you just started the program? How willing are you to engage in them now?

IV. Perceptions of identity
19. How has moving to the U.S. and working-on/receiving your graduate degree in a U.S. university impacted you as a person? What are specific positive and negative impacts?

20. How do you think your personal history, i.e. the way you were raised and the way you lived before moving to the U.S., impacts your feelings and perceptions about who you are now?

21. Do you often notice that you are reflecting on your experiences in the U.S.? What aspects of your experiences do you think you are most reflective of? Why?

22. Before you came to the U.S., how did you imagine what your experience would be like? Now that you have been in the U.S. for some time, how is your actual experience different from what you first imagined? Do you have an imagined future in the U.S.? What does that entail? What if you returned to Russia? What would you imagine your life to be like there?

23. What is your sense of the world in which you live now? How do you feel about what has happened over the course of your stay in the U.S.?

24. How do you find yourself reflecting on Russia, its culture, academic institutions, and other things? Has this affected how you view yourself?

25. Are there activities that you engage in socially or for other purposes that are different than what you did in Russia? How do you regard such experiences?

26. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How have your participation in the study and reflection on your experiences as part of such participation impacted your perceptions of who you are and the world surrounding you?

2. How do you currently view your “fitting in” (belonging) in relation to the two cultures (Russian and American)? Explain.

3. How have your improved language proficiency and enhanced cultural competence impacted your way of communication in Russian (and in English), in particular as related to the choice of linguistic forms and formulating utterances?

4. What role do you think your personality has played in shaping your perceptions of who you are? What role do you think the context (cultural, academic, linguistic) in which you live now plays in shaping your perceptions of who you are?
APPENDIX C

REFLECTION JOURNAL PROMPTS

Below are several prompts to guide you in journal writing. You are not required to provide your reflection on each of them. These are just prompts to help you start thinking about your recent experiences and perceptions of identity. You may choose to reflect on other related linguistic, cultural and educational experiences that you find relevant and important for understanding of your identity development.

1. Please recall a recent experience when you were conscious about the fact that you are a non-native speaker of English. Describe this experience and how you felt about it.

2. Please recall a recent experience when you noticed a difference between the U.S. culture and the Russian culture. How did you feel about that?

3. Please reflect on your education-related experiences (participation in educational activities; communication with faculty members, administrators or other students; classroom or online teaching (if you are a teaching assistant), etc.) and recall any situations when you felt challenged due to the fact that you are international.

4. Please recall a recent experience when you noticed that you had changed as a person and your perceptions and views about the world surrounding you had shifted from what they had been before. Reflect on the changes and causes of the changes.

5. Please reflect further on any questions that you were asked during one-on-one interviews and/or group interviews.
# APPENDIX D

## SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS ACROSS THE CASES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Language Issues</td>
<td>Challenges as related to second language</td>
<td>- Academic language:&lt;br&gt;  • Academic vocabulary&lt;br&gt;  • Academic writing/writing emails&lt;br&gt;  • Communication challenges (listening and/or speaking)&lt;br&gt;  - Everyday language:&lt;br&gt;  • Lack of fluency&lt;br&gt;  • Lexis: slang/idioms/colloquial expressions&lt;br&gt;  • Accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjustments, strategies, and other forms of linguistic development</td>
<td>- Working on pronunciation, articulation, intonation, pace and volume of speech, and nonverbal cues&lt;br&gt;  - Goal-directed language development through:&lt;br&gt;  • Toastmasters club&lt;br&gt;  • Writing center&lt;br&gt;  • English grammar books&lt;br&gt;  • American movies/series&lt;br&gt;  • Academic advisor’s support&lt;br&gt;  • Accent-reduction classes&lt;br&gt;  - Private speech:&lt;br&gt;  • Mental rehearsal&lt;br&gt;  • Self-talk to organize/clarify ideas&lt;br&gt;  - Thinking-for-speaking:&lt;br&gt;  • Bidirectional cross-linguistic influences&lt;br&gt;  - Other strategies and adjustments:&lt;br&gt;  • Reflecting on language experiences&lt;br&gt;  • Avoiding negative linguistic experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of self in relation to language</td>
<td>- Increased confidence about English language skills over time&lt;br&gt; - Different sense of identity when speaking English&lt;br&gt; - Perceptions about the role of L2 proficiency in achieving goals – varied among the participants&lt;br&gt; - L2 proficiency is not part of identity (for some)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Navigation Between Cultures</td>
<td>Challenges in the new culture</td>
<td>- Lack of knowledge of the U.S. culture (movies/TV shows; music; historical events; American humor; online communication)&lt;br&gt;  - Perceived foreign/different by Americans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration into the U.S. culture: Strategies</td>
<td>- Goal-directed learning about the U.S. culture&lt;br&gt; - Copying American languacultural practices&lt;br&gt;  • Culture-specific verbal and nonverbal cues;&lt;br&gt;  • Email conventions;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Activity</td>
<td>Academic practices</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
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| Preserving Russian cultural identity | - Communicating with Russian-speaking individuals  
- Engaging with Russian cultural forms/ keeping Russian traditions (holidays, food, literature, TV/movies, news, cultural and social events)  
- Preserving Russian cultural values and morals |
| Perceptions of self in relation to both cultures | - Emergence of Russian identity in the U.S.  
- Feeling a member of both cultural communities  
- Feeling different from Russians living in Russia (as perceived by some) |
| Academic identity | - Feeling part of the U.S. academic culture  
- Personal development as resulted from academic development  
  - Shifted values and/or priorities  
  - Increased self-esteem  
  - Improved language proficiency  
  - Improved critical thinking skills  
  - Shifted priorities |
| Personal Life | Social networks | - Various experiences with social networks in the U.S. with regard to:  
  - Communities of Americans  
  - Communities of Russian-speaking individuals  
  - Russian spouse (male participants); American husband/boyfriend (female participants) |
| Views on the family | - Female participants:  
  - Unable to realize goals in personal life |

- Cultural-specific behavior (e.g. initiating small talk; inviting colleagues for coffee/lunch) 
- Integrating through academic culture
• Prioritizing family over education/career
  - Male participants:
    • Capable of maintaining balance between education/career and family
    • Viewing spouse as support system


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CURRICULUM VITAE

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Alexandra A. Dema

Degrees:
Bachelors of Arts, Foreign Language, Translation, and Linguistics, 2008
Voronezh State University

Master of Arts, Foreign Language Translation, 2008
Voronezh State University

Dissertation Title: The development of language and identity: A sociocultural study of five international graduate students living in the U.S.

Dissertation Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Steven G. McCafferty, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Kendall Hartley, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Tracy Spies, Ph.D.
Committee Member, Shaoan Zhang, Ph.D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, LeAnn G. Putney, Ph.D.