

Acculturation stressors and facilitators for African international students at a Canadian
university: Racialization, Pragmatic competence, and Intercultural Friendships

by

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A Thesis

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Barrister Joseph Lalere Laseinde, for teaching me to value knowledge. You'd have been proud to read my thesis. And to my children, Caleb and Ethan Owolabi, I hope this inspires you to believe that you can achieve anything you set out to do. Caleb and Ethan, finding what matters to you and why you matter would involve deliberate interaction with various forms of knowledge.

Acknowledgements

Igi kan ò lè dá igbó ẹ̀ – One tree cannot make a forest- Nigerian Proverb

Writing this thesis was a journey of self discovery. I am grateful for the community of faculty, friends and family members that walked this journey with me. My deep gratitude goes to the Holy Spirit for giving me the wisdom and tenacity to complete this process. I would like to thank the six African International Students that volunteered to share their experiences with me for this study. I couldn't have done this without your help! I hope this thesis did justice to the experiences you shared.

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Abstract

“When it comes to adjusting, I would take the race path, I guess. In Ghana, I was just female but when I came here (to Canada), I slowly realized that I'm not just a woman. I'm a Black woman. There's a difference with how you are related to, so I think that was one of the things that I had to slowly adjust to.”

Ruth (from participant data)

Above is an excerpt from the participant data to foreground the overarching effect of African International Students' (henceforth AIS) racialized identities on their acculturation experiences. Learning to adapt to a different culture and develop meaningful relationships is challenging for anyone. More so for AIS in Canada who must navigate a new cultural and academic context characterized by limited research to better understand and improve their acculturation experiences and educational outcomes. It is like being visible yet unheard. By adopting a qualitative method of inquiry with a theoretical framework that includes Africentricity, language socialization, intercultural pragmatics, and critical race theory, this study examined acculturation stressors and facilitators for six AIS at a small urban-based Canadian university. Focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. Thematic analysis revealed challenges that AIS encountered with accessing pragmatic knowledge relevant to their academic acculturation and their experiences as they developed pragmatic competence. Findings also shed light on factors that facilitate and those that inhibit intercultural friendships between AIS and Canadians. Further, analysis revealed the intersection between AIS' racialized identities and their acculturation experiences, providing evidence for the complexity of AIS' acculturation experiences. These findings point to the pivotal role that universities must play in providing relevant instruction and supporting the AIS population.

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“Ìròyìn ò tó àfojúbà ẹni tó bá dé ibẹ̀ ló lẹ̀ fẹnu sọ” – “The story is best told by someone who witnessed or experienced it.” - Nigerian proverb

Chapter One: Introduction

“How was your night?” Those were the first words that rolled off my lips as I made my way to Shanelle’s desk before heading to my workspace at the opposite side of the room. It was a cold Monday morning and I had just arrived in the office after the long walk from Owen Hall to Wells. Shanelle, my program supervisor was seated at her desk on the far-right side of the room cradling her steaming cup of coffee with both hands. I don’t remember what she said in response to my greeting. However, I recall very vividly that she had mumbled a response that made me feel that I must have said something wrong. But did I?

The decision to conduct this study emerged from my experiences as an African international student in the US and in Canada. I arrived at Michigan State University in the Summer of 2017 confident about my ability to communicate in English effectively. I had started speaking English from an early age. My naive assumption was that the only challenge I could have was keeping up with the fast-paced manner of speaking I had learned to know the US for, through the media. I was wrong. From the minute I arrived at the Capital Region International Airport in Lansing, MI, I found myself struggling to communicate and participate in conversations. At first, I had to repeat myself several times to be understood. Out of frustration, my initial reaction was to decide not to speak unless it was completely necessary.

To me, asking my program supervisor how her night went was a routine greeting and not a personal question. If the conversational context had been in Nigeria, she would have responded by saying, “It was fine.” However, Shanelle’s response and a subsequent conversation I had with her revealed that she considered my question intrusive or inappropriate considering the supervisor-

supervisee relationship we had. In retrospect, I realize that because I entered conversations with barely any knowledge about my host culture, shared background, and socio-cultural norms, I had to rely on knowledge from my first culture to interpret a situation and this didn't always work. A lot of times, I did not know how to respond appropriately to 'small talk.' I struggled with understanding what would be acceptable considering the age of the person I was speaking with and the situational context of the conversation. In most cases, I could not relate to the humor, and as I now know, the socio-cultural aspects of language use.

Being in these socially awkward situations where I was forced to monitor what I said and how I said it took a toll on my confidence about my ability to communicate in English effectively at the time. Many times, I would go home frustrated and confused with an overwhelming sense of being isolated and misunderstood. Berry (2006) describes these kinds of cultural dissonance that could arise during intercultural encounters as acculturation stressors. This experience has since shaped my interest in intercultural communication and pragmatics and in their role in acculturation.

In 2018, I relocated to Canada with my husband, and we had our first son soon after this. A year later, I was accepted into the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at Mount Saint Vincent University. During the application process, I met the requirements to be exempted from taking the graduate preparatory program or any English language test. Despite this, and as my experience soon revealed, I was not equipped with the relevant pragmatic knowledge necessary to manage the socio-cultural aspects of language use in my new environment. Having spent the better part of my time in Canada raising my son at home, I was especially excited to begin graduate school. I planned to expand my social circle, make new Canadian friends and friends from other cultures, and get to know the society I now called my

home. As an immigrant this was particularly important for me because, with each passing day, I felt flung far apart from my home culture and everything familiar that I had learned to hold on to. At the same time, I felt completely dissociated from my new environment.

At MSVU, I tried to establish connections with several people. I could participate quite easily in the more formal and task-related discussion that came up in classes as well as the occasional chit-chat that characterized group work. When trying to make Canadian friends, however, I found myself experiencing the same awkward social situations that I had experienced in the US. I recall being offered occasional rides home by one of my Canadian classmates. Even though I enjoyed these rides, it was quite challenging for me to participate meaningfully in some of the casual and spontaneous social conversations that characterized this space. The lack of sociocultural knowledge became a constraint to effective communication and sometimes made me edgy about approaching intercultural encounters with Canadians.

I soon found that this situation was not peculiar to me. In fact, a Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) 2014 survey revealed that over one-third of international students surveyed reported having no Canadian friends at all. Many of these students cited the difficulty of getting around Canadian cultural nuances, differences in cultural communication styles, and lack of similar interests and cultural reference points as constraining factors to establishing and maintaining friendships with Canadians.

As a student at MSVU, I have met international students who were at different points in their acculturation. Acculturation is “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Most of the international students I met at MSVU shared experiences quite like mine when discussing the challenges, they had encountered with making

Canadian friends and understanding Canadians sociocultural norms. Through these conversations as well as my learning and training in the TESOL program, I started to gain a broader awareness of the dynamics of communicating with people across cultures and how these impacts one's acculturation. These experiences culminated in my decision to conduct this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the acculturation stressors and facilitators for AIS enrolled at a small urban based Canadian with reference to their pragmatic competence, intercultural friendships with Canadians, and the impact of their racialized identities on their acculturation experiences. Although not an initial focus of the study, this study explores the intersection between race, racism, and the acculturation experiences of AIS drawing from emergent narratives from the data collected. Literature suggests a significant difference in the acculturation experiences of this group of students when compared with other international student groups. However, at present, existing literature is marked by a paucity of research that focuses on the acculturation of AIS, especially in a Canadian Context. This research contributes to the literature that informs us about the experiences of this student population and provides recommendations to support AIS better.

Context

Participants for this study were drawn from Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), a public university located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. MSVU has a student population of over 4,000 students representing more than 60 countries (Mount Saint Vincent University, n.d.). According to the university's website, 864 of this population are international students from 62 countries. In 2015, enrollment statistics revealed that 2067 of about 4000 students enrolled at MSVU were Black/African descent (Headley, 2018). MSVU is committed to eliminating all

accessibility barriers that students, faculty, and staff may face. The university's website highlights the fact that it is continually advancing purposeful efforts "in truth and reconciliation, (to) support Black students and scholars, and ensure an accessible education to traditionally under-served populations" (Mount Saint Vincent University, n.d.).

In a bid to improving support for students of African ancestry at MSVU, the university appointed its first full-time Black Student Advisor in 2020. Randy Headley, the new Black student advisor indicated, in an interview posted on MSVU's official website, that a vision for his role was to, "better understand the Black/African student learning experience at MSVU." By focusing on the acculturation experiences of African international student population at MSVU, this study is poised to further the deliberate efforts of the university to support or serve its African international student population better.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the acculturation stressors and facilitators for AIS at a small Canadian university with reference to racialization, intercultural friendships, and pragmatic competence. To understand their experiences, this study answers the following questions:

1. What are AIS' experiences developing pragmatic competence?
2. What factors facilitate or inhibit AIS from forming intercultural friendships with Canadians?
3. What are the acculturation experiences of AIS as it relates to pragmatic competence and intercultural friendships?
4. How do AIS' racialized identities impact their acculturation experiences?

In this chapter, I introduced my thesis topic and highlighted some goals of the study. I also provide a motivation for the study by discussing my experiences as an African student in Canada and in the US. In the next chapter, I will review relevant literature in the field and outline my theoretical framework.

“Ogbón ọlọgbón lá fí ñsọgbón ìmọ ẹ̀nikan ò jọ ẹ̀rọ” – “For one person’s knowledge to amount to anything, it is important to draw from the wisdom of others”. - Nigerian proverb

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter synthesizes literature on international students’ acculturation and examines research on the acculturation experiences of AIS. In addition to the study’s initial focus on understanding the acculturation experiences of AIS in relation to their pragmatic competence and intercultural friendships, an analysis of students’ narratives on their acculturation experiences necessitated a focus on racialization and how it could mediate all aspects of the adjustment of AIS. Language socialization and intercultural pragmatics explained aspects of participants’ acculturation experiences, but they did not capture aspects of students’ experiences related to their racialized identities. Critical race theory was adopted to better understand students’ experiences.

In the first section of this chapter, I explore the concept of acculturation and how it relates to international students. Second, I synthesize educational research on acculturation among international student groups. In this section, I explore the concepts of sociocultural and psychological adaptation and how these forms of adaptation relate to this study. Third, I discuss pragmatic competence and intercultural friendships and examine acculturation literature that examine these variables. Further, I provide an overview on the international student population in Canada with an emphasis on Canada’s AIS and the impact of their racialized identities on their experiences. Finally, this chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks that framed this study.

Acculturation

This study aims to improve support for AIS by expanding knowledge about their acculturation through data collected from six AIS studying in an urban-based university in Canada. Acculturation is viewed as a vital process of change that results from sustained contact

between individuals from different national cultures. In his seminal work on acculturation and adaptation strategies of immigrants, Berry (2005) defined acculturation as “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (p. 698). Bidirectionality or duality implies that acculturation changes may occur in all individuals or differing cultural groups that come in continual contact. For instance, in the international education context, acculturation changes take place both in the host society and in the international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Regardless, literature suggests that international students face adaptation challenges that are generally atypical to domestic students. Further, acculturation is bi-dimensional in that individuals may adopt aspects of the culture they encounter while still maintaining their home culture (Berry, 2006).

International students go through acculturation changes when they leave their home cultures to study in a different country (host country). These acculturation changes are regarded as adaptation (Berry, 2006). Berry specified that adaptation could take a variety of forms including physical, economical, and biological. This study focuses on two kinds of adaptation or acculturation outcomes - sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Psychological adaptation describes the emotional and/or mental wellbeing of the newcomer while sociocultural adaptation describes the behavioral aspect which captures the acquisition of culturally appropriate skills necessary to blend in; and the ability to sustain meaningful interactions or negotiate communication in the new sociocultural environment (Berry, 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Figure 1 illustrates this further.

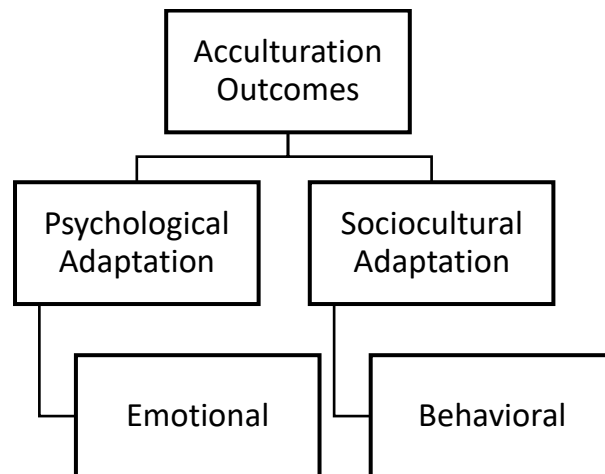


Figure 1. Acculturation outcomes. Distinction between psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation.

Despite the conceptual distinction between psychological and sociocultural adaptation, there is some overlap between both types of adaptation. For instance, lower language proficiency (a measure of sociocultural adaptation can lead to difficulties with establishing new (intercultural) friendships or connections and lead to loneliness). In this case, low language proficiency mediates the individual's psychological adaptation. For this study, acculturation is defined as a process through which international students interact with, adjust to, and react to a culture different from the one they grew up with. Communication is crucial to this process. Hence, acculturation is conceptualized as psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

Acculturation Research on International students.

Acculturation research has generally examined acculturation among diverse immigrant groups (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Motti-Stefanidi, Pavlopoulos, & Asendorpf, 2018). Another burgeoning area of inquiry in acculturation is educational research that examine international student populations (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Existing studies on international students' acculturation examine acculturation from a variety of perspectives including examining factors that influence the process, its relationship to sociocultural adjustment, its association with

psychological adjustment, dimensions of acculturation, acculturation strategies and factors that mediate psychological adjustment (Girmay, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Sociocultural Adaptation. Sociocultural variables affect international students' abilities to participate fully in their host culture. These variables have been used to examine acculturation among international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Sociocultural variables include intercultural friendships, knowledge of host culture, language (i.e., communication variables), and sources of social support (Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Girmay, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Research on sociocultural adaptation tend to approach acculturation from a cultural learning perspective (Berry, 2006). Among other things, this perspective facilitates the examination of the language competencies that make up individuals' ability to sustain meaningful social interactions or negotiate communication in their new sociocultural environment. For conceptual simplicity, Masgoret and Ward (2006), identified "language proficiency and broader communicative competence" as the crux of sociocultural adaptation (p. 60). Thus, when viewed as a cultural learning tool, communication becomes crucial to the acculturation process.

To adjust to and survive in their new socio-cultural environment, international students must engage with society in ways made possible by communication. Inevitably, nearly all the activities that students perform during the acculturation process will involve the use of verbal and non-verbal language. According to Lakey (2003), an individual's communicative competence advances all aspects of their acculturation. To delineate the relationship between acculturation and communication, Lakey (2003) suggests that an immigrant's level of acculturation reflects their level of understanding of the communication process of their new socio-cultural context. Further, Kim (1982), conceptualizes acculturation as a dynamic and interactive process that emerges through communication during intercultural encounters. This study examined pragmatic

competence as an aspect of communicative competence that could significantly impact international students' acculturation. Pragmatic competence is central to effective communication.

Further, international students leave their familiar social support systems, friends, and family behind to study in their host countries. They generally seek to establish new relationships as they settle into life in their new sociocultural environment. However, the process of establishing new relationships is far from linear. International students seeking to develop new intercultural friendships may encounter some challenges with friendship formation that sometimes lead to acculturative stress (See the section on Intercultural friendships). For instance, Boafo-Arthur (2014), highlights the feelings of isolation that AIS experience because of the difficulties they encounter with making American friends. Research indicates that successful intercultural friendships is associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation in international students (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). The present study examines AIS' experiences with developing intercultural friendships with Canadians.

Psychological Adaptation. Educational research on acculturation has also focused on the impact of the acculturation process on international students' psychological wellbeing. International students may go through psychological stress in response to cultural changes that take place during the acculturation process. Berry (2006) described this as acculturative stress. Berry highlighted that research on psychological adaptation of international students approach acculturation from a stress, coping and adaptation perspective Although acculturative stress could sometimes lead to loneliness, withdrawal, and depression, the outcomes are not always negative. Sam and Berry (2006), note that individuals are presumed to be able to achieve various adaptation outcomes by adopting coping mechanisms to deal with stressors. According to them, the impact

of acculturative stressors is usually dependent on how the individual interprets their experiences and whether they view them as a difficulty or opportunity to learn.

Research on psychological adaptation examines factors that lead to acculturative stress or acculturation stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Some of these factors include challenges with language, social support, experiences of prejudice and discrimination, challenges with establishing intercultural friendships, language proficiency, cultural distance, and personal characteristics (Berry, 2006; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Masgoret & Ward, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). In some cases, multiple factors can contribute to feelings of acculturative stress. For instance, increased cultural distance between an individual's home culture and host culture has been shown to lead to acculturative stress and in turn challenges with adaptation (Berry, 2006; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). Also, challenges with language use could constrain international students from developing intercultural friendships. Situations like this impact individuals' sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Acculturation stressors could have a significant impact on the quality of international students' acculturation experiences. This study examined AIS' experiences with developing intercultural friendships with Canadians. Further, various acculturation stressors and facilitators discussed by AIS are delineated.

Pragmatic Competence

To better understand this study, it is pertinent to define pragmatic competence. Communicative competence was introduced by Hymes (1971), to delineate the need for language learners to acquire the socio-cultural rules of language use to communicate effectively. He presented a model of communicative competence that includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and the ability for use. In subsequent follow-up studies, Canale and

Swain (1980), and Bachman and Palmer (1996), expanded this model to include pragmatic competence.

Pragmatic competence is a crucial part of second language proficiency that deals with the ability to use language appropriately within the specific socio-cultural context that social interactions occur (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Sun, 2014; Taguchi 2011). Despite understanding the more formal aspects of language use, many newcomers find developing pragmatic competence quite challenging because pragmatic rules could be highly nuanced and contextual (Kim, 2001). Kim suggests that developing pragmatic competence requires an ongoing exposure to and involvement in the social processes of the host culture. In Kecskes's (2014) review of pragmatic competence literature, he concluded that in addition to host culture socialization, individual willingness and motivation are crucial to pragmatic competence development.

According to Culpeper, Mackey, and Taguchi (2018), pragmatic knowledge is mediated by the conversational situation because participants modify their speaking styles and language forms and functions based on the reactions of their interlocutors. Hence, pragmatic knowledge is emergent and not static in interactions. For this study, I adopt Culpeper et al.'s definition of pragmatic competence as the "knowledge of linguistic forms and their social functions; sociocultural knowledge of appropriate language use in a situation; the ability to use knowledge bases to co-construct a communicative act in a social interaction" (p. 6).

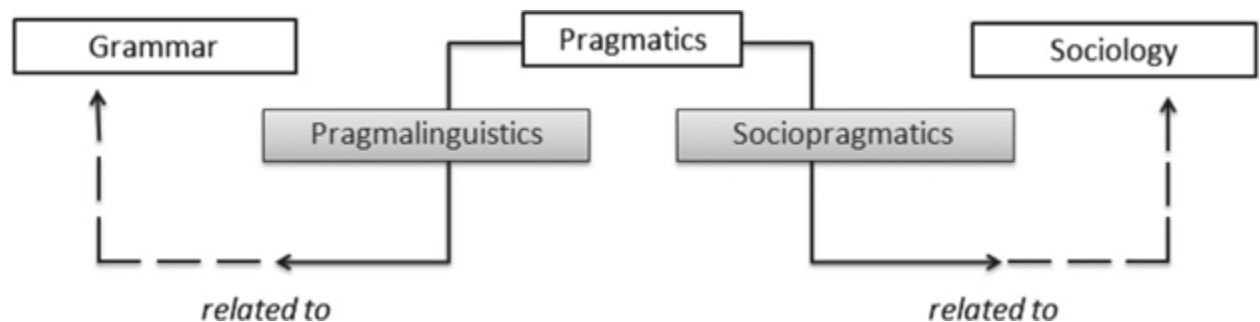
In real-life interactions, pragmatic (social or cultural) failures are usually weightier than linguistic errors because they can change the listener's impressions about the speaker. While linguistic errors can usually be viewed as just an error, pragmatic failures can portray a newcomer as overly blunt, impolite, rude, and unfriendly, even in cases where the utterance is grammatically correct (Thomas, 1983). Kecskes (2014) discussed that "If grammar is bad, the utterance may not

convey the right message or any message while if pragmatics is bad, the utterance will usually convey the wrong message” (p. 62). According to Thomas (1983) pragmatic failure occurs when the speaker’s intended meaning or the force the speaker associates with an utterance is interpreted differently by the hearer. In other words, the wrong message is conveyed.

Pragmalinguistics and Sociopragmatics.

Pragmatic competence encompasses linguistic knowledge; pragma linguistics and knowledge of socio-cultural norms of the target language; socio pragmatics. Pragma-linguistics refers to the linguistic resources available in a specific language to complete communicative acts, e.g., indirectness is used to achieve politeness in English language, and this can be done by using past modal verbs like ‘could.’ Leech (2016) defined pragma-linguistics as “the more linguistic end of pragmatics”. Further, he defines socio-pragmatics as the “sociological interface of pragmatics” (p. 10), that deals with the contextual and social appropriateness of language use. Expanding further on Leech’s definition, Mamaridou (2011), explicates that sociopragmatics encompasses “an assessment of participants’ social distance, the language community’s social rules and appropriateness norms, discourse practices and accepted behaviors” (p. 77).

Figure 2: Leech's distinction between pragma linguistics and socio pragmatics.



Adapted from *Principles of Pragmatics* (p. 11), by G. N. Leech, 2016, London, England, Longman. Copyright 1983 by the Longman.

Although conceptually different, pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, overlap. Thomas (1983) describes the relationship between pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics as a continuum where a shift from pragmalinguistics to sociopragmatics represents a move from the language-specific to the culture-specific. This study focused more on the culture-specific or sociopragmatic end of the continuum. Data reveals the process that AIS go through as they navigate cultural differences and modify their speaking styles to reflect their growing understanding of the sociopragmatic norms of their host community.

Most qualitative research examine pragmatic competence through Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT's) (e.g., Alami, & Naeimi, 2011; Retnowaty, 2017). A DCT is a written questionnaire in which a dialogue is provided for participants to fill in responses they deem appropriate, given the contextual information provided. However, for this study pragmatic competence is examined using interviews. Because they are designed to focus on speech acts, DCT's only cover a limited aspect of pragmatic competence (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). This study aimed to capture a broader scope of AIS' pragmatic competence specifically those related to their understanding of host culture sociopragmatic norms (sociopragmatics). Further, from an Africentric perspective (as will be discussed below), it was crucial to ensure that participants' understanding of pragmatic competence was represented in the data. Thus, protocols focused on getting participants to discuss their acculturation with reference to how their understanding of host culture sociopragmatic norms had influenced the process. This implies that rather than eliciting data about specific speech acts, the data revealed aspects of pragmatic competence that participants thought were salient to them based on their acculturation experiences. Intercultural friendships, as will be discussed below, may also play a significant role in acculturation.

Intercultural Friendships

In today's multicultural world, intercultural contact is increasingly inevitable. Internationalization efforts have led to an increase in the enrollment rate of international students in many English-speaking universities making these universities valuable hubs for the development of intercultural friendships (Lambert & Usher, 2013). For instance, the Canadian Bureau of International Education recorded a 119 percent increase in international student enrolment in Canada between 2010 and 2017 (CBIE, 2018). Peng (2011) notes that friendships between individuals with different national cultures are a unique kind of intercultural friendship. International students form intercultural friendships with individuals from other countries and from the country in which they are studying. This study examines AIS' experiences developing intercultural friendships with host nationals, in this case, Canadians. Emphasis will be placed on how these friendships impact their acculturation or socialization into Canadian society.

Intercultural friendships are mutually beneficial, but more so for international students who have left their familiar social support systems behind to study in their host countries. Friendship with host nationals has been shown to facilitate international students' acculturation, satisfaction, contentment, social support, and success (Hendrickson, et al., 2011). These relationships provide international students with access to the daily lives of host nationals and enrich their understanding of the host culture and communication patterns in the host country (Kim, 2001). Furthermore, intercultural friendships with host nationals lead to increased life satisfaction, knowledge of host culture, language, and intercultural development and, improved academic success (Gareis, Merkin & Goldman, 2011; Sias, Drzewiecka, Meares, Bent, Konomi, Ortega, & White, 2008).

Despite these benefits, numerous studies on intercultural friendship report that international students encounter difficulties with establishing and maintaining friendships with host nationals and in fact, consider this kind of friendship to be rare (Gareis, 2017; Gareis et al., 2011; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Some studies have examined the factors responsible for these difficulties. For instance, Kudo and Simkin (2003), investigated the development of intercultural friendships among Japanese students at an Australian university by analyzing participants' interviews. The authors identified English language proficiency and lack of contact with host nationals as factors that impeded intercultural friendship formation. Similarly, Sias et al. (2008) examined the development of intercultural friendships by analyzing participants' interviews. They discussed that cultural differences between intercultural friends led to differences in meaning-making systems thereby increasing the potential for conflict and misunderstandings in intercultural friendships. Nevertheless, other studies provide evidence for successful intercultural friendships with host nationals (Gareis, 2000; Sias, et al., 2008).

International students in Canada

International students are “non-Canadian students who do not have permanent resident status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education” (Statistics Canada, 2010, p. 1). In other words, international students in Canada are students from other countries who arrive in Canada with the main goal of pursuing an education. Even though international students do not have permanent resident status when they arrive in Canada, they may transition into Canadian permanent residence by the time they complete their education.

The Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) categorizes international students in Canada as ideal candidates for Canadian permanent residency and describes them as

crucial to Canada's future (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017, p.18). This is evidenced by various programs launched by the Canadian government to facilitate international students' transition from temporary to permanent residence including the *Express Entry Program*, *Atlantic Immigration Pilot program*, and the *Study to Stay program* in Nova Scotia. Monumental increase in international students' enrolment in Canada have however not yielded expected increase in the number of students that transition to permanent residency (CBIE, 2018; Ortiz & Choudaha, 2014). In their study on the retention of international students in Canada, Ortiz & Choudaha discuss that improved international student experience will lead to better retention of international students beyond graduation. The authors conclude that higher education institutions in Canada must endeavor to understand the unique experiences of their diverse international student population to improve their experiences.

African International Students in Canada.

According to the CBIE (2020), there were over 490,000 post-secondary international students in Canada as of December 31, 2019. Another CBIE (2018), survey revealed that in 2017 international students from Africa constituted 14% of the total population of international students in Canada, making Africa the third on the list of the regions represented in the sample. For this study, AIS in Canada include students born in the continent of Africa who have come to Canada primarily for the purpose of pursuing higher education. Although some literature exists on the acculturation experiences of AIS in the US and in Europe (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Coleman, 2018; Warren & Constantine, 2007; Zewolde, 2020), there is minimal research on the acculturation of this student group in Canada.

Research suggests differences in the acculturation experiences of AIS when compared with students from other continents (Warren & Constantine, 2007). According to Girmay (2017), and

Warren & Constantine, AIS' cultural world view or Africentric orientation to life (which is generally quite different from Western cultural orientation) may contribute to differences in their acculturation experiences. Further, evidence from numerous studies point to the significant impact of AIS' racialized identities on their adjustment and lived experiences (Awuor, 2020; Mwangi, Thelamour, Ezeofor, & Carpenter, 2018; Zewolde 2020). Parris and Brigham (2010), define race as "a social political ideological construct that has social, political and economic consequences." (p. 211). Through the process of racializing the identities of AIS or classifying them based on their race; race continues to hold a significant impact on their acculturation and lived experiences. For instance, in some studies, AIS report experiencing racism, discrimination, and prejudice (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Mwangi, et al., 2018).

Among other findings, studies on the acculturation and lived experiences of AIS have provided insight into the impact of intercultural friendships and language on their adjustment experiences (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Coleman, 2018). This study contributes to existing literature by focusing on pragmatic competence- a specific competency that makes up AIS' ability to communicate meaningfully in Canada and intercultural friendships.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the use of a theory (or theories) in a study to provide a clear description of the deepest values of the researcher(s) and to describe the perspective through which new knowledge will be understood, analyzed, and interpreted (Collins & Stockton, 2018). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), "You must consider the roles that existing, or formal, theory play in the development of your research questions and the goals of your studies as well as throughout the entire process of designing and engaging in your research" (p. 46). This section

describes the theories and the overarching philosophy that have helped shape and interpret this research.

To understand and improve the acculturation experiences of AIS, it is essential to acknowledge how previous socialization, history, culture, philosophy, myths, and worldview mediate these experiences. In essence, meaningful analysis is possible by acknowledging how their “Africanness” shapes their acculturation experiences. With this in view, adopting a Eurocentric perspective for this research was unnecessary and would have been counterproductive. Eurocentricity presents the specific historical realities of Europeans as the totality of human experience (Asante, 1991), consequently marginalizing the experiences of other groups. Similarly, Eurocentric ideology has fronted the view that Africans are ‘Black’ people rather than humans (Hoskins, 1992), hence promoting the idea that the realities of Africans can at best be understood as group specific. According to Asante, the entrenchment of eurocentrism in academia explains why some Black scholars must stifle their voices or deny their Blackness to achieve universality.

Africentricity: Philosophy.

This qualitative study adopts Africentricity as the overarching framework. Africentric informed research should “focus on the African experience from an African perspective” (Mazama, 2001).

Á kǐ́ fá orí lẹ̀hìn olórí – (We cannot shave a man’s head in his absence).

- Nigerian Proverb

Presenting a center that can hold true for African people is at the crux of africentricity. The concept of center rests on the worldview that one’s history, culture, and biology shapes one’s identity (Mazama, 2001). Centering involves understanding oneself, experiences, and the universe or reality with reference to African history, traditions, and culture. Defined simply, Africentricity

involves “Placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior” (Asante, 1998, p. 2). Today, centering is imperative because of the longstanding miseducation of African people to believe that Europe is the only source of human knowledge (Asante, 1991).

Quoting Woodson (1933), Asante (1991) noted that,

African Americans have been educated away from their culture and traditions and attached to the fringes of European culture; thus, dislocated from themselves, Woodson asserts that African Americans often valorize European culture to the detriment of their own heritage. (p.170)

Not surprisingly, this statement holds true for many continental Africans that are being educated with European-influenced curriculums. In the telling and retelling of the world’s history the contributions of Africa and Africans have been continually relegated to footnote status if included at all. For instance, as a primary school student in Southwestern Nigeria, I read stories about how Mungo Park, a Scottish explorer, ‘discovered’ river Niger rather than how he explored it with the help of locals. This neglect for the history, ideals and contributions of Africans is reflected in many of the Eurocentric narratives that have been used to document history. Further, it is incongruent with the African ideal that emphasizes the role of community:

‘Àgbájọ ọwọ ni a fí ń sọyà’

Nigerian Proverb

This Yoruba proverb emphasizes the role of teamwork or community in any success. It can be interpreted as “we beat the chest with our five fingers in tandem not with one finger.” As Asante (1991) asserts, “only rarely do Black children read or hear of African people as active participants in history”. An implication is that individuals begin to see themselves as inferior to those defined

as ‘active participants’ by the shaping of world history. As Asante (1998) succinctly captures, without the re-centering of African people, “we bring nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of whiteness”.

For this study, I adopt the definition of Africentricity proposed by Asante (1980, cited in Davidson 2010):

Africentricity is a philosophical paradigm that emphasizes the centrality and agency of the African person within a historical and cultural context. As such, it is a rejection of the historic marginality, and racial alterity often expressed in the conventional paradigm of European racial domination. (p. 35)

Asante’s definition captures the need to recognize the legitimacy and validity of the African’s voice and perspective in telling or retelling their stories and the need to reference African ideals as historical and cultural context. Further, Headley (2018) explains that “the Africentric approach directly addresses the need for an African/Black person to be the ‘agent’ of their cultural experiences, to author their stories and to see the world through their own eyes” (p. 56). According to Mazama (2001), the perspective adopted in a study rather than the focus of the study reflects what the study is centered around. Being African or saying something constructive about Africans does not make one Africentric (Asante, 1998; Mazama, 2001). Also, studying African phenomenon does not make a study Africentric.

From an Africentric perspective, “Africalogical researchers are able to view phenomena with crucial reference to African history, traditions, and culture which informs analyses and interpretations of events and data” (Shockley and Fredrick, 2010, p. 1216). Adopting Africentricity as the overarching framework in this study, implies that decisions that I made throughout my research reflect the core principles of Africentricity. To guide me in this process I drew from

various definitions of Africentricity and from three core principles of Africentricity: center or location, dislocation or ‘decenteredness’ and relocation or centering delineated by Mazama, (2001).

Implications of Africentricity for this study.

1. I adopted a qualitative approach to this study because its underlying principles align with the Africentric approach. Closeness of the researcher to the phenomenon under study and emphasis on participants’ interpretations of phenomena align qualitative method of inquiry with the Africentric approach (Mkabela, 2005).
2. With reference to the issues and concerns raised by participants in this study, I explore ways to improve the acculturation experiences of AIS and provide recommendations to this end. From an Africentric perspective, knowledge production is advocacy because it must be geared towards the emancipation of the community (African people) (Mazama, 2001).
3. In this study I foreground or center participants’ voices by telling counter stories that reflect their perceptions of their experiences. Africentricity rejects the marginalization of the experiences of African people that is preponderant in Eurocentric ideologies.
4. I assume agency throughout the research process (rather than adopting the characteristic distance of an observer) by referencing my shared cultural knowledge with participants in unpacking their acculturation experiences. Shared knowledge

about the philosophy, and myths of the people under study is central to Africentric research (Mkabela, 2005).

5. Drawing from emerging narratives of race and racism in participants' narratives, I explore the intersection between race, racism and the acculturation experiences of AIS using Critical Race Theory. Africentricity brings the notion of race, racism, and culture to the forefront (Headley, 2018).
6. Analysis is grounded in participants' experiences.

Below, I give brief descriptions of the theories that shaped this research.

Theories

Three theories informed this research namely: language socialization, intercultural pragmatics, and critical race theory. Language socialization and intercultural pragmatics provide rationales for examining participants' acculturation experiences from a communication perspective. Both frameworks are complementary because they focus on the social and cultural contexts in which language competencies are acquired. However, intercultural pragmatics goes a step further by acknowledging previous socialization as both valid and integral parts of second language socialization.

Further, it was hypothesized that racialization could emerge as a variable that impacts AIS acculturation experiences because participants in this study are considered a visible minority in Canada. Critical race theory helped to understand the emergent narratives of race and racism in participants' accounts of their acculturation experiences. Adopting this approach has helped to shape this study and provided a robust perspective to the interpretation of emergent narratives on the factors that impact the acculturation experiences of AIS. Below I provide brief descriptions of each of the theories.

Language Socialization.

Language socialization was introduced as a theoretical framework by anthropologists Bambi Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1984). Drawing from sociological, anthropological, and psychological underpinnings, language socialization emerged from the need to account for the role of language and discourse in social and cultural transmission, and the impact of sociocultural context in children's language acquisition (Howard, 2018). Language socialization foregrounds the view that the process of acquiring a language and language socialization are integrated processes (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008). Hence, language is a cultural learning tool. According to Leung (2001), language socialization explores "how persons (novices) become competent members of their community by taking on the appropriate beliefs, feelings and behaviors, and the role of language in this process" (p.2). The beliefs, feelings and behaviors which usually inform the linguistic choices of community members are the crux of pragmatic competence. Learning appropriate ways of speaking in specific contexts drives the process of pragmatic competence development.

Language socialization is a natural process through which children are socialized into membership of their speech communities. Socialization takes place as children interact with the situated discourse practices of their community and adopt the socio-cultural aspects of language use and the culture embedded in the norms of appropriate language use, as they learn to speak. i.e., children are socialized to use language and socialized into their community through language. In its application to second language acquisition, language socialization views second language learners as newcomers or novices that are being socialized into the language and culture in their host community (Leung, 2001).

A central theoretical premise of language socialization is that language learning occurs in the context of interaction with members of a speech community that are more proficient in the language and culture. These community members explicitly and implicitly provide “mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language, and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identities of community members” (Duff, 2010, p. 172). Another emphasis of language socialization is that the process of acquiring language and culture are integrated i.e., as language learning occurs an individual is also taking on the cultural beliefs or norms that are embedded in the language.

From a language socialization perspective, second language acquisition occurs through social interaction between novice language learners who are entering into a new culture or community and individuals who, because of experience and socialization into that culture, have more language and cultural knowledge and or proficiency Duff (2010). ‘Socialization’ is crucial because “language use is governed not only by universal but also language and culture specific rules” (Kecskes, 2014, p. 4). According to Duff, in addition to interactions with experienced speakers, newcomers learn the norms of language use through a variety of means including observation. Language socialization emphasizes that language is central to the development of social and cultural knowledge (Ochs & Schieffelin 2011). Hence to understand language acquisition, language socialization research examines the social and cultural contexts of language learning. (Leung, 2001).

Second language learners enter the language learning process with existing knowledge that interacts with new sociocultural information as they navigate meaning making and their participation in their new community. A critique of language socialization theory is that the word ‘novices’ contains an inherent assumption of a deficit or incapability on the part of the learners or

newcomers which is not usually the case (Berman & Smith, 2021). In the case of AIS interviewed for this study, this deficit perspective could imply viewing previous English language socialization and knowledge as an obstacle. A habit that must be undone rather than as a rich foundation that can be built upon as they navigate their new speech community or host culture.

Despite its broader scope and perspective, the emphasis of language socialization on the interconnectedness between language learning and the acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge makes it relevant to understanding the development of pragmatic competence. Kasper (2001) noted that most language socialization research focus on the development of pragmatic competence. Further, Duff (2010), describes language socialization as “the acquisition of linguistic, pragmatic and other cultural knowledge through social interactions” (p. 427).

For this study, language socialization provides a framework to understand AIS’ acculturation experiences as cultural adjustment or development. AIS will interact with the culture and situated discourse practices of their new community as they develop pragmatic competence and seek to build meaningful social connections. Language socialization provides a rationale for exploring the hypothesis that host nationals in intercultural friendships with AIS would serve as agents of language socialization due to their existing knowledge and experience of the host culture. Further, language socialization offers a framework to examine how AIS learn appropriate ways of using language in their host society or how they develop pragmatic competence. By encompassing “socialization through language and socialization into language” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2008, p. 4), language socialization positions language as an underlying process and product of the socialization process. Thus, it is well suited to examining acculturation from a communications perspective.

Intercultural Pragmatics.

Intercultural communication involves interlocutors who communicate in a common language but may have different first languages and identify with different cultural groups (Gudykunst, 2003; Kecskes, 2014). The emphasis in intercultural communication research is on the relationship between communication and culture and how this relationship impacts interlocutors in intercultural communication situations (Chen, 2017). In intercultural communication or encounters, “existing pragmatic norms and emerging, co-constructed features are present to a varying degree” (Kecskes & Assimakopoulos, 2017, p. 1). This domain of discourse is what intercultural pragmatics attempts to explore.

Intercultural pragmatics “is concerned with the way a language system is put to use in social encounters between human beings who have different first languages, communicate in a common language, and usually represent different cultures” (Kecskes, 2014, p. 14). Kecskes noted that individuals approach intercultural communication situations with existing pragmatic knowledge in their first languages. This prior knowledge interacts with elements co-constructed by the interlocutors in conversations to inform meaning construction and comprehension (Kecskes, 2017).

AIS in this study come into intercultural situations with existing pragmatic competence in English and in some cases other first languages. As they continue to engage with their host society, they pick up pragmatic information that they can then apply in intercultural encounters. This new knowledge will interact with their pre-existing pragmatic competence in conversational situations. Intercultural pragmatics provides a rationale through which second language pragmatic competence is analyzed in this study.

Critical Race Theory.

Advanced initially through the works of legal scholars Alan Freeman, Derrick Bell, and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), Critical race theorizing brings race and racism from the fringes of scholarly discourse to the forefront (Tate, 1997, p. 196). Race consciousness in critical race theory stems from the reality that whether generally acknowledged or not, race and racism affect the daily lives of people of color, especially Black people.

Although rooted in American law, critical race theory provides immense benefits as a theoretical and analytical tool for unpacking the pervasiveness and impacts of race and racism in education. In their review of the use of critical race theory in education, Lynn & Dixson (2013) found that critical race theory centers on how race impacts the experiences of marginalized groups in the seemingly race-neutral context of education. Further, in education, “critical race theory challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). The concept of voice is central to critical race theory (Tate, 1997); quoting Barnes (1990), Tate explains that

“...Distinguishing the consciousness of racial minorities requires the acknowledgement of the feelings and intangible modes of perception unique to those who have historically been socially, structurally, and intellectually marginalized in the United States.” (p. 1864)

In other words, racial minority voices are foregrounded by documenting their everyday lived experiences. The concept of voice makes critical race theory especially useful for examining the acculturation experiences of AIS in this study. Critical race theory achieves the foregrounding of marginalized voices through counter storytelling. Simply put, a counter-story is “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Counter stories challenge the dominant narratives

from privileged groups and provide a platform to understand the lived experiences of minorities, by focusing on the experiences of minority groups. Brigham (2013) highlights that counter stories are captured through “biographies, narratives, parables, family histories, fiction stories and composite stories” (p.123).

By foregrounding the narratives of race, racialization, and racism in AIS’ accounts of their experiences, I explore the intersection between race, racism, and acculturation through critical race theory. Further, counter storytelling centers the participants’ voices in this study as I examine their experiences. From an Africentric perspective, the concept of voice is crucial to ensuring that my analysis is grounded in the participants’ experiences. Critical to this study is the recognition that racism is deeply entrenched in all aspects of society, a fundamental tenet of Critical race theory. In her analysis of Black international students’ lived experiences through critical race theory, Zewolde (2020) concludes that a thorough analysis of Black international students’ experiences must foreground race and racism.

According to DeCuir and Dixson (2004), the permanence of racism allows for the examining of the “othering of people of color in all arenas including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004 p. 27). Finally, CRT aligns with the Africentric approach through the common goal of bringing about social change. From an Africentric perspective, knowledge can never be produced for its own sake but always for the emancipation of the community (African people) (Mazama, 2001). My analysis will discuss how racialized identity, race and racism mediate virtually all areas of the acculturation experiences shared by participants in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative approach to examine the impact of intercultural friendships and pragmatic competence on the acculturation experiences of AIS at MSVU. Qualitative research is a reflexive process that draws from the necessary closeness of the researcher to the topic of inquiry to contribute significant insight to scholarship or to the scientific community (Aspers & Cortes, 2019). Consequently, qualitative researchers attempt to analyse and interpret situations with reference to the meanings and interpretations that participants bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The closeness of the researcher to the phenomenon under study and the emphasis on participants' interpretations of phenomena align qualitative method of inquiry with the Africentric approach (Mkabela, 2005) employed in this study. For this study, an African international student is defined as someone born in the continent of Africa who has come to Canada primarily to pursue higher education.

Focus group and individual semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Before the individual interviews, I conducted preliminary focus group interviews to ensure that participants felt comfortable with discussing the topic. Conducting a focus group before individual interviews leads to greater participation and awareness from participants (Headley, 2018). Focus groups also provide researchers with an initial understanding of the topic (Krueger & Casey, 2015), making them particularly useful for this exploratory study. The conversational style adopted in the focus group and semi structured individual interviews was also important considering the focus of the study as it allowed participants to explore topics from as many angles as they please and to explore issues that they feel are important (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Data collected from the focus group further shaped the protocols for the one-on-one interviews making

it possible to follow up on participants' responses and gain a richer understanding of their acculturation experiences.

Research Participants.

Participants for this study were recruited based on specific criteria such as being currently enrolled as students at MSVU, being newcomers to Canada, being born in and receiving most of their education in an African country and being exempt from taking an English as an additional language (EAL) course as a requirement for admission into the university. For this study, the term 'newcomer' refers to participants who arrived in Canada not more than five years before the start of the study. At MSVU, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs are offered to international EAL students who need supplementary English language learning deemed necessary for successful completion of academic programs.

In total, six participants took part in this study. Specifically, the participants are five women and one man, all between the ages of 19 and 30. Based on participants' availabilities five participants took part in the focus group and individual interviews, while one person took part only in the individual interview. Participants were from four African countries including Sudan, Ghana, Rwanda, and Nigeria. Participants were recruited through the Black Student Support Office, and the International Education Center at MSVU and through snowball sampling. A demographic survey was used to confirm participants' eligibility to take part in the study. Those who met the inclusion criteria received a consent form to indicate their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study.

Below I provide a summary of each participant that reflects their English language backgrounds relevant to this study. To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant.

Mugisha

Mugisha moved to Canada from Rwanda approximately 2 years before I interviewed her. She speaks Kinyarwanda as her first language. Mugisha received her elementary education in the French language. She started learning English in 2010 when she moved to a high school in Rwanda where English was the primary language of instruction. She described her initial exposure to English language as rocky because at the time she had spent most of her life speaking Kinyarwanda and French. According to her, learning English was influenced by a political situation that arose in Rwanda at the time. Mugisha completed her undergraduate degree in Rwanda before traveling to the UK for her first Masters' program. She was enrolled in her second Masters' degree in Child and Youth Studies at MSVU when this study was conducted.

Ruth

Ruth moved to Canada from Ghana approximately 5 years before data were collected. She speaks English as her first language. Ruth received her elementary education in Nigeria before moving back to Ghana (her home country) where she completed high school. The medium of instruction throughout her educational journey has been English language. Ruth was studying sociology and anthropology as an undergraduate student at MSVU when data was collected. She describes her transition to MSVU as challenging due to the differences in the educational system in Ghana and Canada.

Naheem

Naheem moved to Canada from Sudan approximately 2 years before data were collected. He speaks Arabic as his first language. He received his elementary, high school and university education in Sudan before moving to the UK for his bachelor's degree. Naheem transferred to

MSVU and was enrolled in his bachelor's degree in Business Administration at MSVU when this study was conducted.

Tayo

Tayo moved to Canada from Nigeria approximately 6 months before data were collected. She identified Yoruba as her first language but noted that while growing up, her parents had mostly spoken Yoruba to each other and English to her siblings and her. Consequently, she would usually respond in English when Yoruba was spoken to her. It wasn't until high school that she learned how to speak Yoruba fluently. Tayo received her elementary, high school and university education in schools where English was the medium of instruction. Tayo completed her master's in public relations and advertising in Nigeria and was enrolled in her second master's degree at MSVU when data was collected.

Rebecca

Rebecca moved to Canada from Ghana approximately 4 years before data were collected. She was born to a Nigerian mum and a Ghanaian dad. Although she learned Twi at the same time she learned English, Rebecca identified English as her first language. She received her elementary, high school and university education in schools where English was the medium of instruction. Rebecca was enrolled in her second Masters' degree in Public Relations at MSVU when this study was conducted.

Taiwo

Taiwo moved to Canada from Nigeria approximately 6 months before data were collected. She speaks Yoruba as her first language. She received her elementary, high school and university education in Nigerian schools where English was the medium of instruction. Taiwo was enrolled in her master's degree at MSVU when data was collected.

A salient point to note about the above is that the participant population was not homogenous in terms of their English language learning backgrounds. The participants are bilingual and monolingual English users. For instance, some were simultaneous bilinguals where they acquired English at the same time as their native language, while others were sequential bilinguals since they learned English after acquiring their native language/s. Some participants would be considered circumstantial bilinguals because they learned English after acquiring other languages due to political circumstances that arose in their home countries, while others were monolingual as English was the only language they spoke. For some of the participants, despite speaking other native languages, English was the language of instruction throughout their education.

Instruments.

Data collection consisted of a demographic survey, focus groups and one-to-one interviews.

Demographic survey.

The demographic survey was used to collect information on participants' age range, length of stay in Canada, country of origin, educational background and the languages spoken by the participants. (See Appendix A).

Focus group interview protocol.

The focus group interview protocol included 14 semi-structured questions that reflect the core focus areas of this study: (1) Pragmatic competence, (2) Intercultural friendships, and (3) Acculturation. The focus group provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on their acculturation experiences from a communication standpoint before the individual interviews.

The first question focused on getting the conversation started. For instance, participants were asked to reflect on their initial arrival in Canada and some of the things that stood out to them or culture shock they experienced. Further questions examined participants' initial adjustment experiences, understanding of Canadian socio-cultural norms and expectations, examples of difficult or successful intercultural encounters, friendships and how these have impacted their acculturation experiences. (See Appendix B).

Semi-structured questions tailored to each participant were used to collect data for the individual interviews.

Individual interview protocol.

The individual interviews provided the opportunity to follow up on participants' responses in the focus group interview and for participants to share their acculturation experiences in more depth. For instance, a participant who noted that it was difficult to relate to Canadians who do not already have international friends during the focus group was asked to elucidate this further during their individual interview. (See Appendix C for sample protocols from the individual interviews).

Data Collection.

Ethics approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Board. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and restrictions for one-on-one gatherings, interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Focus group interviews took place in the summer of 2021. During this time, a lockdown had been enforced in Halifax, Nova Scotia to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The individual interviews took place approximately one month later (August 2021) when the lockdown had been eased. This difference in covid-19 restrictions across the focus group and individual interviews is reflected in participants' responses as will be later discussed. The focus group and individual interviews were audio-recorded through the recording

feature in Microsoft Teams. Both the focus group and individual interviews were approximately 1 hour each. After the interviews, participants were thanked for their time and given a \$15 gift card to a local grocery store.

Data Analysis.

Qualitative research methods were employed to analyze the data and uncover emerging themes on the association of racialization, pragmatic competence, and intercultural friendships with the acculturation experiences of AIS (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). First, I listened to the focus group audio recordings multiple times to identify participants' responses that I wanted to ask follow-up questions about in their one-on-one interviews. The focus group interview and individual interviews were transcribed with filler words and nonrelated content eliminated to focus on the gist of the interviews (Smith & Davies, 2010).

Next, codes were derived from the transcripts inductively (Miles et al., 2014). Using an open coding approach, participants' responses were coded manually in MAXQDA to determine aspects of their acculturation experiences that were associated with pragmatic competence and those that related to intercultural friendships and racialized identities. During a second coding cycle, the initial codes were reviewed to identify relationships among the open codes in the manner of axial coding described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The inductive coding process adopted in this study ensured that analysis was grounded in participants' understanding of their experiences, (Miles et al., 2014) and for this study, acculturation. Next, identified codes were categorized into emergent themes which were then used to report the findings from the data.

Data Representation

A three-step analysis process was adopted to make room for the conceptual differences between pragmatic competence and intercultural friendships in the analysis and to accommodate the race related experiences emerging from the data.

For pragmatic competence, an initial coding cycle revealed that aspects of the data related to pragmatic competence mostly related to challenges participants reported experiencing with pragmatic competence during their acculturation. Codes under this theme were categorized with reference to sociopragmatic competence elements captured in Mamaridou's (2011) definition of sociopragmatics (as will be discussed below). This helped to structure the data around specific aspects of sociopragmatic competence. Identified codes were further analysed to determine the process of pragmatic competence development that participants seemed to go through.

Further, aspects of participants' experiences related to intercultural friendships, racialized identities and racism were identified from the data and coded. After data related to intercultural friendships was coded, codes were grouped under four major themes. An independent coding cycle was conducted to identify aspects of participants' acculturation experiences related to their racialized identities and race. Race related codes associated with intercultural friendship formation were categorized under a relevant theme under intercultural friendships. For instance, an experience with racism that participants identified as an hinderance to intercultural friendship formation was categorized under challenges to intercultural friendship formation- a theme under intercultural friendships. All other race related data were weaved into counter stories to center participants' voices in reporting the data.

Credibility.

Because this is a qualitative study, it is pertinent that I acknowledge my background and how this may have influenced this research. Being a student from continental Africa studying in Canada influenced my interest in understanding the acculturation stressors and facilitators for AIS. As a student from continental Africa, I have an insider perspective that includes shared knowledge and experiences with the participants which is central to Africentric research (Mkabela, 2005). Although I am not an African ‘international’ student based on my permanent resident status in Canada, my everyday experiences as an international student from Africa (who has been in Canada for roughly the same time frame as the participants) mirrors the experiences of the participants in this study.

Listening to participants share some of the acculturation experiences that I had also experienced was both validating and enriching. However, despite commonalities between my experiences and participants’ experiences, I did not assume that all our experiences are shared. Africa is a vast continent with diverse cultures, languages, and worldviews. Regarding some biases or subjectivities that I may have had going into this study, I believed that participants would experience adjustment issues related to communication during the acculturation process. I also assumed that participants would view intercultural friendships with domestic students as beneficial to their acculturation.

Some other subjectivities I may have experienced according to Peshkin’s (1988) classification are ethnic maintenance where my strong loyalty to being African and upholding the African culture could have persuaded me to react more favourably to participants that share my perspectives during data collection. For instance, listening to a participant talk about how a White person will always be better than an African with English language communication skills triggered

an unsettling feeling in me. Another subjectivity I may have experienced is the non research human subjectivity where the distance presumed to be necessary between the researcher and participants to learn and write about their experiences was reduced due to my identification with the population under study. This subjectivity is especially useful from an Africentric perspective which suggests cultural and social immersion as opposed to scientific distance as the best approach to understand African phenomena (Mkabela, 2005; p. 179).

As a researcher, acknowledging one's subjectivities and how they are likely to impact one's work is not an end. A formal and systematic self-monitoring throughout the research process is pertinent to tame one's subjectivities or ensure that the research is unencumbered with any limitations that could arise because of them (Peshkin, 1988). For instance, during the data collection process I noticed my reaction when a participant mentioned that she saw no benefit in intercultural friendships with domestic students for her acculturation. Acknowledging that my subjectivity is likely to blur my perception; I carefully marked her contribution to ensure that it doesn't become the unseen or ignored later in my analysis. I have also received training in conducting interviews and have some experience conducting Africentric research. My background, academic and research experience speak to my credibility as a researcher in this qualitative inquiry.

“The hunter who arrives from the forest with an unusual animal must be prepared to tell a detailed story about his adventures” – African Proverb

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the findings from participant data in three sections as they relate to the core focus areas of this study: (1) Acculturation and pragmatic competence, (2) acculturation and intercultural friendships and (3) counter-storytelling of participants’ experiences with racialization, race, and racism. Because of the nature of the experiences shared by participants, some data are coded multiple times or repeated in multiple sections. For instance, a code which captures a participants’ acculturation experience could reveal their pragmatic competence and experience with intercultural friendship development simultaneously. Consequently, that code would appear in the section that relates to pragmatic competence and the one that relates to intercultural friendships.

In addition to the findings, counter stories of participants’ experiences with race and racism in the third section have brief discussions weaved into the narratives.

Acculturation and pragmatic competence

This section highlights AIS’ experience with developing pragmatic competence as it relates to their acculturation drawing from their reflections on their experiences. The data reveals participants’ experiences as they navigate cultural differences and modify their speaking styles to reflect their growing understanding of the sociopragmatic norms of their host community. Aspects of pragmatic competence that AIS found challenging as they tried to adjust to their host culture and relationships that furthered their understanding of host culture sociocultural norms are delineated. Apologizing and negotiating identity, conversational power dynamics and the culture of respect, understanding academic writing conventions, understanding accepted behaviours and

discourse practices, and navigating cultural differences emerged as aspects of pragmatic competence that participants experienced challenges with. The findings in this section are presented in relation to two themes (1) Challenges with pragmatic competence development and (2) Cultural learning and guides on sociocultural norms. Figure 3 summarizes the theme and subthemes that emerged from the data.

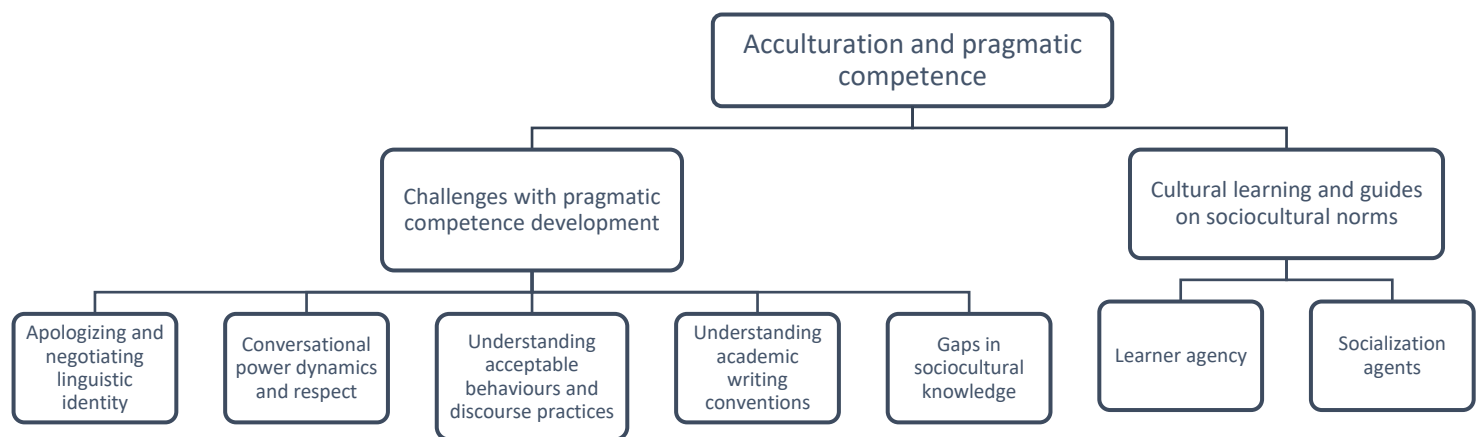


Figure 3: Pragmatic competence

When participants arrived in Canada, they seemed to transfer their understanding of sociocultural norms from their home cultures into meaning-making during intercultural encounters. However, as time progressed, they began to identify the differences in sociocultural norms and discourse practices through direct observation, the reactions of their interlocutors (implicit socialization) and the explicit socialization characteristic of their relationships with members of their home culture or other Africans. For instance, most participants spoke to their understanding of using the word “sorry.” Although the use of this word may vary across

Canadians, it was obvious that participants' experiences and exposure had started to shape their understanding of how it 'should or must' be used.

Apologizing and Negotiating Linguistic Identity.

An aspect of pragmatic competence that participants reported struggling with was adjusting to the normative pattern of apologizing in their host culture which seemed quite different from the norm in their home cultures. Participants had to negotiate their linguistic identities as they navigated this difference. This may be because apologies are generally associated with an individual's personality or character.

Participants initially transferred their understanding of sociocultural norms around using the word 'sorry' from their home culture into intercultural encounters in their host culture. As they explained, 'sorry' was used as a routine response to show sympathy in their home culture, however, using sorry in similar contexts in their host culture attracted responses that signified a difference in the normative pattern of use of the word sorry. Describing a situation at work, during the focus group, Ruth said, "When something bad happens to them (her Canadian clients) and then I say sorry which I'm very used to. It's like oh, but you didn't cause this so why are you saying sorry? You don't have to say sorry."

Ruth's bewilderment was apparent when she went on to say, "I don't know what else to tell you if you're in pain. Like what else can I say to show that I am trying to sympathize with you? Like if you get hurt, how else do I tell you that I feel bad for the situation going on without saying sorry.... Do I just keep quiet? And does that make me insensitive when I keep quiet when something bad happens and I don't say sorry. Does that make me look like a bad person and what else can I say in place of sorry that means the same thing? Because apparently sorry means

you're guilty here or you only say sorry or apologize when the thing the person is feeling was caused by you.”

I couldn't help but notice Ruth's frustration as she narrated this experience during the focus group. As she mentioned, in Ghana, it would be expected of her to say something in response in those contexts. Despite realizing that the expectations on how she should respond was different in this context, Ruth still felt the need to respond so that she does not seem “insensitive.” According to her, “that's something I'm trying to wrap my head around.” It became apparent that Ruth was negotiating her identity while participating in two cultural worlds. As she explained, she has a lot of Africans in her circle of friends where her home country's norms around using sorry still strongly applied. A more explicit reference to this is when Ruth explained during the focus group that she must “remind myself that I'm not with my friends and family” and “switch my personality or mindset not to apologize when something happens.”

Understanding the normative pattern of apologizing was also an issue for Tayo, Taiwo and Mugisha. Recounting her workplace experience during the focus group, Mugisha said,

I have had two Black women here and two in the UK telling me whenever I apologized for something I did not do in the workplace ‘Please do not apologize for something that you did not cause especially here’. They believed that could put me in trouble or incriminate me. Back home you know we really apologize a lot for both things we didn't do and things we didn't cause. When you get to see your colleagues like locals and when you get to speak to them you see them not also apologize for the general things, they apologize for something they are responsible for or that they did personally.

It seemed that rather than making assumptions about Mugisha's attitude (when she apologized for things that she did not cause or wasn't responsible for at work), her co-workers understood that it was a pragmatic transfer due to the shared background knowledge they had about her home culture. From a critical race perspective, it appears significant that Mugisha's attention was drawn to her use of apologies both in Canada and in the UK, specifically, by other Black women at her workplace. It appears to be a self preservative move. Mugisha's reference to 'especially here', 'put me in trouble or incriminate me' lends credence to this. Her Black coworkers appeared to be saying - "listen, as a Black woman, you cannot afford to give anyone a reason to think you are soft and unassertive, or to blame you for stuff you aren't responsible for." Further, Tannen (1994) notes that the way how one accepts or avoids responsibility for mistakes is crucial to how one is regarded or viewed in the workplace.

Although the use of this word may vary across Canadians, it was obvious that participants' experiences and exposure had started to shape their understanding of how sorry 'should or must' be used. Unlike Ruth, who seemed to have decided to avoid saying sorry (in contexts where she was beginning to understand that it would be inappropriate to do so), Mugisha resulted to fill the gap by explicitly stating the reason for her apology to ensure that she was not misunderstood. As she said during the focus group, it is "impossible to stop sympathizing with people." So, when something happened at her workplace, she would say, "I'm sorry to hear that or I'm sorry you are feeling that way or I'm sorry that that happened to you."

It was obvious from the discussion that exposure to new pragmatic information raised participants' pragmatic awareness but did not always translate to them adopting the new knowledge as part of their developing pragmatic repertoire. The process of pragmatic competence development seemed to be marked by a negotiation of meaning and identity

especially in the case that participants had to adjust aspects of cultural knowledge related to their identity.

Also, participants seemed to attribute a lot of weight to corrections or observations of their interlocutors (especially those understood in the conversational context to be more knowledgeable about the culture) in shaping their understanding of the socio-cultural norms and discourse practices of their host culture. According to Culpeper et al., (2018), pragmatic knowledge in language use is mediated by the conversational situation because participants modify their speaking styles and language forms and functions based on the reactions of their interlocutors. During the interviews, it was noticeable that observing the nuanced differences in how sorry was used was more common to participants from contexts where sorry was used to demonstrate empathy. Naheem, for instance only noticed that sorry indicated politeness or respect. He said, “When Canadians are doing something, I realise that they would say ‘sorry’ and it shows way more respect between both sides.”

Culture of Respect and Conversational Power Dynamics.

Negotiating professor-student power dynamics or social distance in conversations and understanding host culture norms around expressing respect to elders and people in higher status were salient points raised by participants during the interview and focus group.

Participants initially transferred their understanding of sociocultural norms around expressing respect from their home cultures into intercultural encounters in their host culture. In most of their home cultures respect had to be explicitly signified through language in conversations between an older person, or somebody with a higher status and a younger interlocutor. But they soon realized that discourse practices around expressing respect differed in their host culture.

Ruth explained that “when I came here in the beginning, I would call my professors Mr. or Mrs. because you know how we had to show respect back home.” (Ruth, focus group). Even when the interlocutors mentioned that they would like to be addressed by their names, participants mentioned that they still felt “rude” (Taiwo, Interview) or “couldn’t bring myself to call him by his name” (Tayo, Focus group). Participants thought that despite being a normative practice in their host culture addressing older people or professors by their names still felt disrespectful. According to Ruth during the focus group, “here most of my professors like to be called by their names. It took me a while to get used to this because I felt like calling you by your name was disrespectful on my part. I don't think there is any adults back home that I would call by their names unless it's like a cousin or a friend that is older than I am.”

During her interview, Taiwo recalled the first email she had to write to a professor. According to her, “In my culture you don't call someone in their 60s by their first name.... So, in my first email I wasn’t sure how to address her (Professor) I had to read about her. When I noticed she had a doctorate degree I just said Hello Dr.... But when I noticed that she wasn’t offended when people addressed her by her name in class, I started to call her by her name in my subsequent emails.” These experiences point to the socialization process participants went through due to their ongoing exposure to and involvement in the social processes of the host culture (Kim, 2001).

Further, the interviews revealed some progress in participants’ understanding of host culture sociocultural norms over time. For instance, in Tayo’s opinion, “respect is shown more in actions compared to Nigeria where you must add the title to it to demonstrate it. So, I feel that when you talk to Canadians some of their actions and the way they relate to you tells you that

they respect you. They'd respect your privacy. They'd respect your thoughts. When you tell them that this is how you want it, they respect your opinions." (Tayo, focus group).

On one hand, some participants will adjust the ways they express themselves to reflect their increasing understanding of host culture discourse practices and sociocultural norms. For instance, as mentioned above, Taiwo started to address her professor by first name in emails drawing from new pragmatic knowledge she acquired from her classroom observations. Conversely, it is possible that some students maintain sociocultural norms from their home culture in intercultural encounters despite being exposed to new pragmatic information. Taiwo shared that she had a Nigerian classmate "who would never call a professor by their first name."

Academic writing conventions.

Participants highlighted some challenges they had with adjusting to Canadian academic culture as they experienced it at MSVU and the sociocultural norms that guide this space, which they shared is vastly different from academia in their home cultures.

For instance, they explained that they had to adjust their writing styles, and email conventions and understanding of plagiarism to match the norm but did not have access to some of this information. Recounting her initial attempts to send emails to a professor, Taiwo said that she, "wasn't sure what I was supposed to say or the way I was supposed to address her. I wasn't sure about what she'd find offensive." When she did not receive responses to her emails, she started to worry whether "that was something I was supposed to ask in class or something. Maybe it's not something that is worth sending an email over." The Professor eventually let Taiwo know that she had missed her emails for some reasons (Taiwo, Interview).

Similarly, Rebecca explained that in her home culture a writing convention was to use small talk to "show respect before getting to the point." However, she soon realized that "in this

part of the world people are more straight to the point, even when talking to the elderly. They don't have to make small talk before getting to the point." (Rebecca, Focus group). In participants' experiences, they did not have direct access to the socio-cultural norms that guided their new academic context, and this impacted their acculturation. For instance, during her interview, Taiwo said that she learned how to word her emails appropriately "When most of my colleagues send emails to professors and I'm copied in the mail." For Tayo, she "looked at all the emails that I had been getting from school. So, I noticed their style of writing." (Tayo, interview).

In Ruth's case, she began to understand the situated discourse practices and norms with writing emails through feedback she got from the writing center. During the focus group, she shared her experience with writing a thank you email to the sponsor of a bursary she had received. According to her, she had included phrases like "God bless you, have a beautiful day, have a blessed day" which would have been appropriate for her to say in her home culture. Noting the feedback she got from the writing center, she said:

"I had sent the letter to the lady on campus to read it before I sent it out. So, she called out the God bless you part and told me to take that out. And she explained to me why that might be inappropriate to put in an email or letter."

Ruth, Ghanaian student

Some participants also reported struggling with understanding plagiarism in their new academic environment. During her interview Ruth explained that "Plagiarism was something that I knew nothing about when I got here. I knew nothing about having to cite if you used somebody's work and I think the school didn't really do a great job at explaining it in full details alongside the consequences. They told you what plagiarism is but not the full picture. Being an African student or a Nigerian student or a Ghanaian student that wasn't something we were taught

per se, so it was a big problem for me.” She recalled that it wasn’t until her second year that she got some support with this. According to her “Randy, the Black student support advisor, an older friend called Feyi and my professor who became my supervisor helped me when it comes to school and plagiarism in my second year.”

The discussion suggested that participants perceived differences in the sociocultural norms of their new academic context when compared to academia in their home cultures but sometimes had to approach situations with hesitance because they did not have direct access to needed pragmatic information.

Understanding accepted behaviours and discourse practices.

Another aspect of pragmatic competence that participants discussed was understanding host culture behavioural norms or social expectations around greetings; discourse practices like being straight to the point, and behavioural ideals like what is believed to be acceptable behaviour. These things could vary across cultures because pragmatic rules could be highly nuanced and contextual (Kim, 2001).

Speaking about her concern with understanding workplace norms about greeting, Taiwo said, “At work (the few times I have gone to the office in person), when I walk past people I wonder if I am supposed to greet them or say hello. Like when I see a superior whom I know, am I supposed to say hello, or do I just walk by?” Taiwo explained that she “tried to observe whether people say hi to each other especially in the mornings when they just come into the office. As she said it was a ‘normal culture’ in Nigeria to “greet people as long as I’m just seeing you for the first time today.” She pointed out that it would be a “big deal” in her home culture not to greet someone who is higher in rank. From her observations, Taiwo concluded that “they don’t expect much from you in terms of greeting. They know it’s not because you are not polite,

or you want to be rude. They can see you're busy and it's just not much like a big deal here.”
(Taiwo, Interview).

Taiwo’s concern and subsequent observation reflect her awareness that pragmatic failures can affect interlocutors’ impressions about her. According to Thomas (1983) pragmatic failures can portray a non-native speaker as overly blunt, impolite, rude, and unfriendly, even in cases where the utterance is grammatically correct. With reference to challenges he had had with communication during intercultural encounters, Naheem discussed some of his observations about host culture discourse practices during his interview. Most of these observations were drawn from his friendships with Canadians. He explained that he “came to understand that it's OK to be blunt with your friends and not shy away from them.” In his opinion “this makes for better relationships. If you are polite and honest and you're not shy about anything, I believe that's a huge step forward for you in your communication with people.”

Before sharing this example, Naheem had highlighted his shyness and wariness with initiating conversations with Canadians during the focus group. He seemed excited to share that he had “better friendships right now” because he had started to incorporate some of his observations on expected communication behaviors into his intercultural encounters. He noted further that “you have to learn some terms with your friends that’s just going to help you out along the way.” Through their social interactions, participants were expanding their pragmatic knowledge and developing pragmatic competence while being implicitly or explicitly socialized.

Gaps in Sociocultural knowledge.

Participants shared challenges they encountered with understanding aspects of communication that seemed to be shaped by their interlocutor’s sociocultural backgrounds. In

their experience, not having a full grasp of Canadian culture sometimes led to gaps in their understanding during intercultural encounters with Canadians.

Reflecting on her experience working with Canadian youth, Mugisha recounted, “I might understand English, but because I work with Canadians (mostly Canadian youth) Even though I can communicate in English, and we understand each other in English, we cannot connect without an understanding about their culture. In communication. It's more than words, right? Because sometimes they can say something like slangs or something. They usually say things and I don't get it. It's an English word, but it doesn't mean what I think it means, or it's not even an English word that I know. What I mean is to communicate you need to at least understand the culture a little bit. To communicate with the youth that I'm working with. So, I find myself trying to learn new things. Which is not like communication.” (Mugisha, Interview).

Mugisha demonstrates an understanding of the interdependence of language and culture. Also, she displays a recognition of the need to expand her sociocultural knowledge to participate fully in the host culture. Participants believed that gaps in their sociocultural knowledge about Canadian culture sometimes led to challenges with understanding humour, and nonverbal communication when used by their Canadian interlocutors. Recounting her experience with understanding small talk during her interview, Mugisha said:

“The jokes are way too different. Sometimes, they say something, and I don't get it. I don't see why it is funny. Maybe a joke about animals and I don't get it because they have probably been doing that all their lives. I see others laughing and I know that I'm missing something. Maybe they used to say this joke in kindergarten or in school and there's somethings that I say that they don't get too. Like, no one laughs. So, our jokes are different. With facial

expressions, sometimes they are laughing and I'm not sure if I should laugh too. But sometimes I just laugh along or say 'oh, wow.'

Further, Mugisha reported that her interlocutors sometimes had trouble understanding her attempts at casual conversation due to the cultural undertone. She said: Yeah, I could see that sometimes they don't get or understand what I say. It's not even about like the accent or something or the amount of English that I speak. Yeah, like you could see they didn't get it, especially when you're trying to banter. Even like a comment you make it takes time for them to understand what you mean by that. So, it's really not about the language this time, it's more like understanding where you're coming from. Mugisha, Interview

For Rebecca, "The only thing I don't really get is dry humour. Like I can't even tell the difference when someone is being serious and when they are telling a joke. But people from here seem to understand like they can tell the difference. Personally, I'm still trying to figure this out" (Rebecca, focus group). Similarly, Naheem reported during the focus group that he also found dry humour "hard to understand." Although these participants seemed to imply that gaps in their sociocultural knowledge might be fully responsible for their challenge with understanding dry humour, it's important to acknowledge that understanding this aspect of language may be hinged on shared knowledge between interlocutors rather than culture.

Cultural learning and guides on sociocultural norms

Participants described relationships, situations and strategies that broadened their understanding of Canadian culture and facilitated pragmatic competence development.

With reference to how she navigated miscommunication during intercultural encounters, Tayo recounted,

“When I discovered that these are some of the challenges that I’m having with this people I knew that I need to overcome it so that I can easily fit into the environment. I reminisce on these incidents when I get home and try to think about what could have been done differently. Because I’m new in this environment and I’m the one who has come to meet them in their own community, so I need to adjust to their way of life. So, I’m learning and I’m trying to watch most of their movies more. And trying to understand. So, before I go out to buy things now, what I do is I check what the item is called here because I’ve realized they could be called a different name back home. So, I check online so by the time I get there I know that this is what it is called, and I just go for it.”

Tayo, Interview

Tayo displayed her understanding of how pertinent pragmatic competence is to her acculturation and her role in taking agency for the process. Further, during her interview, Tayo shared that Black friend from her church “guide me when I do certain things. They let me know what I shouldn’t do because they are not acceptable in the society. And they also guide me on how to behave.” It was commonplace in the data for participants to mention that their culturally and racially similar friendships facilitated their understanding on Canadian sociocultural norms and in extension pragmatic competence development.

Mugisha approached cultural learning by trying to understand the sociocultural orientation behind interlocutor’s actions and linguistic choices during intercultural encounters. During her interview, she recounted,

“One thing that I realize has helped is that I keep making them talk about themselves. Like tell me why you do this or what happened when you do this? So, I tend to ask them so many questions to understand where it came from, like why they did what they did and how. And it’s not only the youth but even the staff I work with. I can see how easily they connect with the

youth. You can see, oh you guys understand each other. It's very noticeable. So, I observe what they're doing, what they're saying. And then I ask questions. And yeah, just compare it to my culture. Like oh, at home we do this and this. I observe and ask questions.”

Similarly, Naheem explained, during his interview that he “Try to see the other persons’ viewpoint. Try to understand what he is thinking.” Further, during her interview, Mugisha explained that she expanded her knowledge of Canadian culture through classroom discussion. According to her, “In class when professors are teaching, they compare a little bit and then I get to learn a thing or two. And then when students are sharing their experiences in class that’s the best way I have learned about the Canadian culture because they would always share their experiences, how they understood the situation, how they reacted and so on.”

For Ruth, her friends who had lived in Halifax for longer, “gave me some guideline on the things to expect when communicating with other Canadians. They tell me the dos and don’ts of the Canadian community or system. You know an example would be how you must switch up your accent when you're talking to a Canadian because if you speak in your accent then they can't hear you properly. And how you can't go around greeting every elderly Canadian that you see the way you do at home, because that's not how it is done here.” (Interview).

Taiwo also indicated that she had learned several things from her Canadian friend that have been “helping me with my interactions with people going forward.” These excerpts provide some evidence for the process and context of AIS pragmatic competence development and ongoing acculturation to their host society. Pragmatic competence development did not seem to happen because of participants’ exposure to their host society alone. Rather, participants had to actively participate in the process by taking agency for their learning. Further, the role of

socializing agents like their Canadian friends and racially and culturally similar friends in their pragmatic competence development was quite evident from the data.

Acculturation and Intercultural Friendships

This section provides a deeper understanding of the acculturation experiences of AIS with reference to their intercultural friendships. The findings in this section are presented in relation to four broad themes (1) Early adjustment experiences (2) Factors impeding intercultural friendship formation with Canadians (3) Factors that facilitate intercultural friendship formation with Canadians, and (4) Impact of Canadian friendships on acculturation (self-reported perceptions). Figure 4 summarizes the subthemes and codes that emerged from the data under each theme. **Acculturation and Intercultural Friendships**

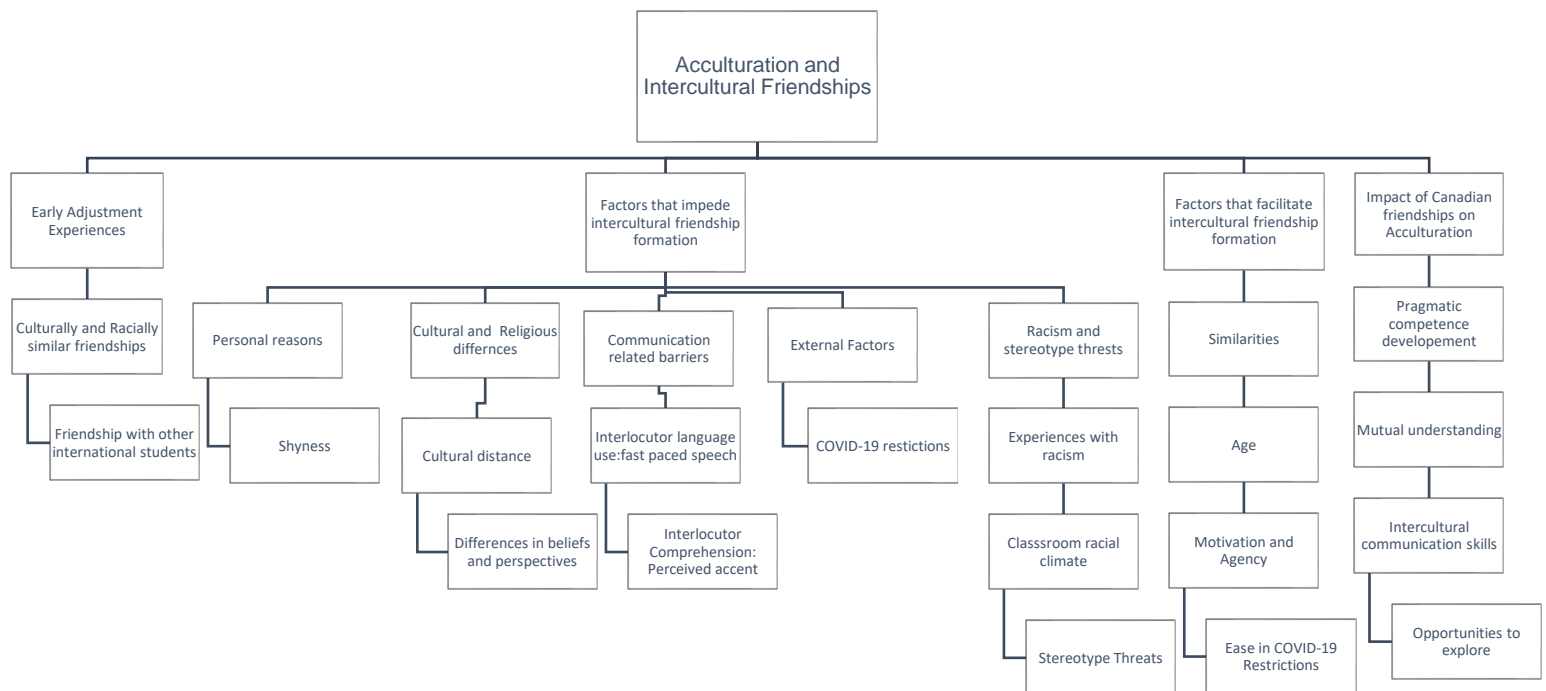


Figure 4: Acculturation and Intercultural Friendships

I acknowledge that specific criteria were not employed to verify participants' descriptions of whom they believed was Canadian. For instance, when a participant referred to someone as their Canadian friend or interlocutor while reflecting on their experiences, I did not ask how they determined the nationality of the individual e.g., did the person seem to be Canadian because of how they person spoke, looked etc.

Early Adjustment Experiences.

I describe participants' early acculturation experiences with an emphasis on how their intercultural friendships during this phase appear to influence their pragmatic competence development and acculturation.

Adjusting to an entirely different culture is a challenging experience especially during the early stage of arriving in a new country. It is a period characterized by unexpected changes and culture shock (Brown and Holloway, 2008). During participants' early adjustment or first few months of arriving in Canada they reported grappling with adjusting to the weather, securing housing, food, locating necessary services and navigating on their own. Participants relied on people from their home countries who had immigrated to Canada before them, Africans, family, and other international students for friendship and social support. These relationships played various roles in their acculturation by helping them navigate the initial challenges they encountered and preparing them to engage with their host community from a sociocultural standpoint.

Culturally and racially similar friendships.

Participant data revealed that they were more likely to develop friendships with people from their home countries (co-nationals, culturally similar friends, home country friends) and other Africans (racially similar friends) during the early phase of their arrival. Some of these

relationships seemed to be predicated on cultural and language similarities. For instance, in the focus group Mugisha shared that “when you see somebody from your home country you can't help but speak the language” because, “there is already the language that we have in common and a lot of similarities.” Similarly, in the focus group, Ruth said, “usually I speak with them in Pidgin because when you're in the midst of people it made it easier for you to communicate with them especially if you don't want others to hear what you're saying.”

Describing her friend circle when she arrived in Canada, Ruth said she “situated myself with people that are either Nigerians or Ghanaians.” (Ruth, focus group) She felt that her home country friends “made it easier for me to transition so I didn't really go out to make other friends that weren't people from Africa or Ghana to be precise.” From the focus group discussion, it became apparent that the safety or comfort that shared background, languages and similarities provided made it easier for AIS to develop home country friendships during their early adjustment.

Participants thought that their co-nationals and racially similar friends were more likely to identify with and anticipate the struggles they might experience upon arrival in Canada, and it was apparent these relationships impacted their psychological and sociocultural adaptation. For instance, in her interview, Taiwo recounted “when I first got here my (Nigerian) friend was telling me not to worry because there are so many things that you will learn here that will be a shock to you. But trust me you'll get over it. It's a phase everyone passes through. She had been here for a year at the time.... So, these relationships kind of prepared me for the differences that I would encounter.” She said the support she received from this friend was “the biggest tip or help I have gotten since I arrived because that laid the foundation for my arrival.” (Taiwo, Interview).

From the discussion, it appeared that participants went through a preparatory phase during their early adjustment where they received some of the support that prepared them to interface more successfully with their host culture. Participants did not report making Canadian friends during their early adjustment.

Friendships with other International Students.

Participants' reflections on their acculturation experiences during the first few months of their arrival in Canada revealed that most of them developed intercultural friendships with other international students rather than with Canadian students; in addition to their co-nationals and racially similar friendships. It was apparent from participants' accounts of their experiences that international students may "have to" rely on each other as they navigate their new society. Data suggested that participants' intercultural friendships with other international students facilitated their psychological adaptation by constituting a support system for them. For instance, during the focus group, Ruth recounted that her relationships with international students helped because "we're figuring things out together." According to her, "not having to do it alone kind of made the transition easier because I knew that I wasn't in this alone" and "we kind of figured out life in Halifax together."

While reflecting on opportunities to develop friendships with Canadian students in her classes, Mugisha explained that international students were more likely to relate with each other than with Canadian students due to shared experiences:

"The international students relate because they know that you are going through the same things as them. It's like, we're all new here so let me come over to say hi. But with Canadian students if I'm honest, you know how international students will come over to say hi. The

Canadian students wouldn't even move from their seats. They stay on their phone and that's it. And you can't just go and disturb someone just because you want to be friends.”

Mugisha, Focus group

The discussion suggested that the ‘status’ of being an international student would necessitate making attempts to establish friendships. On the other hand, Canadian students may already have their own friend circles and are more used to the environment and culture. Consequently, unlike the international students in their classes, they may not ‘need’ to make attempts to develop friendships in class. Contrarily, most international students are navigating an entirely new culture and society and would need support as they try to figure things out. As Mugisha explained during her interview, “when you come for the first time, you are nervous in class. That's your first time in that country or in that environment.” Mugisha’s reference to the experience of one of her friends who is also an international student captures some of this:

“But it was different for a friend of mine who came from another country in Europe. Yeah, she's also an international student, but she didn't have family here and she came to uni a week late. As I mentioned, the Canadians were not as approachable as international students. So, you see how she had to come like hey, my name is this. Can you show me this? Can I please take you for a quick coffee downstairs? I have questions for you. So, you could see that she had to really push herself.”

Mugisha, Interview

According to Mugisha, similarities that she observed in the experiences shared by other international students (during classroom conversations) formed the basis for subsequent interactions between them. She said, “we ended up staying back, talking and being in the same circle.” (Mugisha, focus group) Although most participants reported having relationships that aided their early adjustment, this did not seem to be the case for some international students who

may face isolation and loneliness in the early stage of their arrival in Canada. For instance, during the focus group and individual interview, it was easy to note Tayo's frustration with developing intercultural friendships. Although she had only been in Canada for about 6 months when data was collected, she explained that she was doing all she knew to make Canadian friends. According to her, loneliness was a motivation for her to develop intercultural friendships:

“Because in all sincerity this place can be lonely if you don't relate to people. That is why I am putting in efforts to communicate. My communication is getting better, I think. And I don't know what strategy I'm going to use to make friends yet, but I will keep trying. So, I will keep having conversations.”

Tayo, Interview

Mugisha also observed that “some people struggle because they are alone. They didn't have anyone to show them around. To tell them how things work. So, they struggled.” In her experience, having family in Canada as a support system may reduce the need international students may have to develop intercultural friendships. For instance, she recounted that “I didn't put myself out there because I knew I had family, so I'll go back home and ask every question I had to.” (Mugisha, Interview)

In participants' experience, international students who have been in Canada for longer seemed more likely to extend support to newly arriving international students especially in the early phase of their arrival and this facilitated friendship. Naheem, for instance, shared that his knowledge of Canadian culture has given him the chance to help others “who are very stuck.” He observed that fluency in English language could be a barrier to the adjustment of some international students. Naheem enthusiastically explained that his friendship with some new international students had been beneficial to their adjustment:

“Honestly, I've met 2 new guys over here. First guy, right now I've been talking to him for almost two or three months. With me talking to him, I've managed to like, you know, improve his English as well, because he was very nervous. I've managed to meet another guy as well, but it was more of a hopeless case, you know. So sometimes I realize my English, although I might think it's bad. It's a blessing, you know compared to like some people. So, I was like kind of happy about it. Yes, I do still help the other guy out, but I would still keep on doing my best to do that.”

Naheem Interview

Intercultural friendships with Canadian students: Factors that impede friendship

Participants generally shared their desire to establish friendships with Canadians but highlighted some constraints they had encountered with initiating these relationships. The factors they identified include personal reasons, cultural and religious differences, communication-related barriers, experiences with racism, and external factors.

Personal Reasons.

The data point to several personal constraints that explained participants' reluctance to make efforts to connect with Canadians and slowed down their attempts to do so.

Shyness.

When reflecting on some of the challenges he initially encountered with initiating friendships with Canadians, Naheem mentioned that his shyness was a barrier that he had to overcome. According to him, “first was shyness. Now I don't feel the shyness anymore because I just feel older in the Mount when I see people`. Further, Naheem felt that his shyness restricted him from communicating effectively during intercultural encounters. He explained that he had to move past shyness by reminding himself not to approach situations as though the people he was talking to were fundamentally different. According to him, “Remember they are just the same as

you so that's the way I think about it. Being shy is going to restrict you. Yes, you could be shy and lucky enough to meet someone who's open. But if you always stay shy you will never meet someone.” (Naheem, Interview)

Taiwo shared something similar during her interview. She said she had not been able to develop friendships with Canadians “because of my shy personality” For Tayo, her strong reliance on people in her home country for friendship impeded her opportunities to establish intercultural friendships with Canadians. She said that she was almost always on the phone with her friends back home. Her desire to connect with Canadians was evident when she said, “I would love to have Canadian friends. I think it is one of the perks of being an international student.” However, she observed that “since getting here, I realize that I don't even know the best way to make friends because I am always on the phone with people from home.” Further she mentioned that she barely went out since classes had been online. She said, “It's just been home, church, and occasional visits to the mall.” (Tayo Focus group) Similarly, during the focus group Ruth explained that when considering initiating friendship with Canadians she “felt restricted because I didn't know how to go about it.”

Beyond participants' shyness, the discussion points to the inherent challenges of navigating intercultural friendships. Participants seemed unsure of the best way to initiate friendship with Canadians, what to say, and as data further revealed how to keep the conversation going. It appeared navigating these challenges especially with a racial divide thrown into the mix made friendship formation with Canadians more challenging for participants.

Cultural differences.

Participant data revealed that cultural distance or differences that participants perceived between them, and their interlocutors restricted them from initiating friendships with Canadians. When thinking about initiating friendship with Canadians during the early phase of her arrival, Ruth explained that she presumed that there would be no similarities on which the friendship could be premised. She said, “In school, you had to speak to Canadians because we were put in groups, but I didn't make friends with any of them because I thought that we did not have anything in common.” (Ruth, focus group). Gareis (2017) notes that interlocutors find it easier to understand and predict the behaviors of people who are like them.

Consistent with Izwayyed's (2014) findings, Mugisha's experiences revealed that cultural clashes during intercultural encounters impeded intercultural friendship formation. According to her, “Because we've been raised in a specific culture more than half of our lives when you meet somebody new from another new culture you are interested to learn more about their culture.” She explained that “when there is a cultural clash like when your cultures don't gel there is a clash, and you go your separate ways.” (Mugisha, focus group) Sias et al. (2008), found that cultural differences could serve as points of interest that facilitate intercultural friendship formation. Although cultural differences served as a point of interest that made Mugisha interested in developing intercultural friendship with her interlocutor, the degree of perceived cultural distance seemed to end the friendship prematurely.

Similarly, recounting a failed attempt to connect with Canadian friends, Ruth was quick to note that “it sometimes boils down to interest.” During the focus group, she explained that she once joined a friendship application to expand her friend circle. According to her, this came after she “thought about putting myself out there because I was friends with lots of Africans and I

wanted to see what happens.” She recounted that absence of similar interests impeded her efforts to develop intercultural friendships even before she could meet her interlocutors physically. She said, “But with the people I was talking to, the interest just died down.” According to her, “when it came to trying to find things that we have in common (via chats) this became very rare and the friendship that we were trying to form just died out because there was nothing to keep the flame burning, I guess.” When Mugisha reported not having Canadian friends, she explained that “it wasn’t an intentional choice. It just happened. You don’t find yourself in the same settings. So, it’s not like I chose not to. You don’t mix in the same settings and when you meet you don’t click so things like that.” (Mugisha, Interview)

For Naheem, differences in beliefs and perspectives were barriers he had to overcome. He recounted that he met people who were either too religious, not religious or atheists. He explained that in his culture, “we never had atheists.” According to him, he had to “take on a whole different mindset” to be better able to tolerate the diversity in perspectives that he found during intercultural encounters with Canadians. (Naheem, Interview)

These findings reveal that it is possible for AIS and Canadians to exist side by side in the same academic space and community without developing intercultural relationships.

Variations in perceptions about friendship and friendship norms.

A salient point raised in the data was the impact of participants’ perceptions about friendship and friendship norms on their opportunities to establish friendships with Canadians. Differences between the way participants and their interlocutors viewed friendships were quite evident from the data. Also, participants observed that there were some differences between the way friendship was established in their culture compared to what they had observed about Canadian culture.

Variations in Perception about Friendship norms.

Participants generally shared that in their home cultures, making small talk or having a conversation with someone in class would usually set the tone for subsequent interactions and or friendship. They recalled going into intercultural encounters with the expectation that once communication had been established in class, subsequent meetings would evoke small talk or at least a brief chat between them and their Canadian interlocutors. However, they soon realised that most of their interlocutors felt no obligation to maintain communication despite having had initial contact.

Tayo's disappointment was apparent when she said, "I noticed that you could greet somebody here today and you're all friendly. Like my neighbour the first time we met we were very friendly towards each other and then the next time we met I said, 'Hi, do you remember me?' and they just said hi and zoomed off like we never had that conversation." (Tayo, focus group)

Ruth also grappled with this when she first arrived in Canada. She shared that she had to revise her expectations when approaching intercultural encounters. Ruth recounted that, "meeting someone the previous day and meeting them the next day with them not saying hi was also definitely a thing for me" Referring to people she had spoken to in class, Ruth said, "normally when I say hi, they never really respond and even if they do it's like a really shabby acknowledgment and everyone walks away." According to her, "gradually I learned that that's not how it happens here." (Ruth, focus group)

Similarly, Rebecca felt that differences in friendship norms impeded her efforts to make friends when she arrived in Canada. According to her, "When I got here, I was excited to make friends." She observed that she "was talking to people regularly but I wasn't able to sustain or keep the friendship going because I would talk to them in class but when we see outside of class, they

would act like they don't know me.” (Rebecca, focus group) Participants’ experiences revealed that an integral part of their psychological and sociocultural adaptation was to understand these cultural differences and negotiate them as they acculturated.

Variations in Perceptions about Friendship.

Data suggested differences in what constitutes close friendship across participants’ home cultures and what they had observed to be the culture in Canada. For instance, during her interview, Tayo said “I think the way that friendship is viewed here is different from back home.” According to her, she believed that Canadians “don't take friendships as seriously as we take it. So, I still don't have Canadian friends, asides from my Black friends that have been here for a long time.” (Here, by Black friends, Tayo is referring to her friends from continental Africa who have been living in Canada for a while). Expanding further on what she meant, she said “friendship for me is with someone that I can always call but I meet people and once you have a conversation with them it ends there. It's not like Nigeria where that could lead to me inviting the person for something or taking their number.”

Similarly, Mugisha insinuated that her relationships with Canadians were more superficial than she wanted. She said:

“Good Canadian friends. Like friendships where we hang out over the weekend. You've seen my place. I've seen yours. We actually do holidays. It doesn't even mean big holidays like thanksgiving. No, I mean like, let's just do this.” (Mugisha, Interview)

It was apparent that Mugisha wasn't getting some of the closeness or qualities that she would have loved from her Canadian friendships. Enunciating her point with an example, Mugisha said:

I don't like camping. But I've realized that most people I work with love camping. So, you see them saying let's go camping this weekend. Let's go camping next weekend. And you see yourself getting involved in those activities. Like let's go hiking and you're like yeah, let's go. I mean, you guys should have mutual activities that you enjoy together. As for me, I know that I like an evening out. I mean like let's go out with friends, relax on a patio, and just enjoy the weather. Enjoy people, conversations.... Like if people could come through to that. Like enjoy each others' activities, getting along, enjoying my moments, or sharing in my own experiences too. (Mugisha, Interview)

Although Mugisha did not specify if she has attempted to invite her colleagues over to her place, it was apparent that they seemed to prefer to connect over outdoor activities while she would prefer to take the relationship further.

Communication-related barriers to friendship formation.

Participants highlighted communication-related barriers when reflecting on their attempts to establish intercultural friendships with Canadians.

Interlocutor language use: Fast paced speech.

Participants felt that their interlocutors sometimes spoke too fast. According to them, it made comprehension difficult, and they were not able to follow the pace of conversations. This observation was more evident in the experiences shared by participants who had been in Canada for less than a year. For instance, during her interview, Tayo, who had only been in Canada for about 6 months when the data was collected, said “I think their pace when they're talking is one of the challenges. And it causes a lot of things because I have to ask them to repeat themselves severally. Sometimes, I try to guess what the person is saying when I can't follow the pace, but I end up being wrong most of the time.”

Similarly, Taiwo also presumed that she would find her interlocutors' fast paced speech difficult to follow. Like Tayo, she had only been in Canada for about 6 months when the data was collected. When reflecting on some of the challenges she had encountered with intercultural friendship formation with Canadians, Taiwo felt that "language might have been a factor." She shared that she initially felt that "The speech here is fast paced. How do I even understand what people are saying? The speech is so fast paced and even when you're talking to people here one on one (during conversations), sometimes you have to keep saying could you just repeat that for me" (Taiwo, Interview).

Interlocutor Comprehension: Perceived Accent.

Participants felt that their interlocutors sometimes found it difficult to understand what they were saying due to their accent. They thought that situations like this impacted their confidence about speaking and made them more reluctant to initiate intercultural friendships with Canadians. Ruth's experience, which she described as "not fitting into specific spaces" captures some of this. Ruth said:

"Sometimes when I'm on campus I feel like they don't hear me, but they just say yes so that they wouldn't seem rude. But when I go back to ask what I said they can't give me an answer, but they were nodding their head the whole time I was speaking. So, it's like sometimes when you are speaking, the accent can be a barrier in communicating. I think that's what I meant by not fitting into spaces." (Ruth, Interview)

Interlocutors' disposition towards participants' accents also impacted their confidence about initiating friendship with Canadians. Ruth's frustration was visible as she recounted an experience she had at a restaurant in Halifax. She said:

“There are some places where I would go to, and it will be hard to relate or for someone to communicate. I know recently, I went to a restaurant asking for water and I had to repeat myself like 7 times for the person to know that I said water. And at a point, I felt like I was saying it wrong. So, I started to whisper it slowly to see if the word is not water. I tried to say it in a British accent, but still, you know we're still going back and forth about it and then when I try to describe what I was talking about, she went, 'ah, it's water.' And I said that's the same thing that I said, and she said, 'Oh yeah, the accent.' And I'm like, I don't think accent changes the way that you say water.”

Ruth Interview

Despite her interlocutor's reference to accent being the cause of miscommunication, it was apparent that Ruth felt that that this situation was more related to her interlocutors' bias than her accent. Taiwo also expressed her reluctance to initiate friendships with Canadians because she thought her accent would be an issue. She said, “even if I want to make friends, how do I talk to my Canadian friends? Would they be able to understand me or understand my accent? Would I be able to understand them? But since I got here, at least I understand 97% of what people say.... Most times they end up asking me to repeat myself.” (Taiwo, Interview)

For Rebecca, “The way Canadians listen to me or the way they interact with me, they make me feel like I don't understand English, and they are trying hard to understand me. But I know I speak exceptionally clean English and the only barrier would probably be my accent. I recall that I started doubting myself initially. I write the same essays as these guys. I feel that the way I write is basically their expectation on how everyone else should speak. Because I don't speak in the same way that I write my essays. So, they made me really question myself that do I speak awfully bad English because I didn't understand what was going on. Back in Ghana the teachers teach me all subjects in the type of English that I speak. And I thought that the way that I speak is the correct

way of speaking English and that everyone else speaks like that. But at that point I had to question myself that do I really know how to speak English. So now I am noticeably quiet even though I'm normally a talkative person. When I have to talk to Canadians, it's so frustrating for me because I have to take my time when speaking to think about the sentences and how to phrase them before speaking."

Effective communication is central to intercultural friendship formation. Even though participants' interlocutors might have been unaware of the implications of their tolerance or disposition towards the way participants spoke, being in situations like this repeatedly, seemed to impact participants confidence about initiating friendship with Canadians.

Racism and Stereotype threats.

Participants' data pointed to the fact that their race and the realities they had to confront because of this, significantly impeded opportunities to establish friendships with Canadians and sometimes their motivation to do this.

Experiences with Racism.

During the interview, Ruth mentioned that due to "a really bad (racist) experience in my first year" she was more likely to develop friendship with people from her home culture or other Africans than with Canadians. She said, "with Canadians if they didn't approach me or if we didn't find ourselves in a situation where it would be natural to have conversations, I just wouldn't put myself out there to talk." Recounting an experience with racism she had in class that led to this, Ruth said:

"I was in a business class, and I was put in a group dominated by White people (I was the only Black person in the group), and they did this thing where they wouldn't talk to me about things we were supposed to talk about. They wouldn't ask me for meetings, they wouldn't tell me when

they were having a meeting. When the day for the presentation came, I knew nothing about what was going on and the only slide they gave me was just to say the names of people in the group. And again, I was a first-year student, so I didn't know who to talk to, who to go to, or where to go to and I kind of got like a really shaky grade in that class because of the group so I think that put a sour taste in my mouth I guess that affected my zeal to reach out to people.”

Ruth Interview

Ruth went on to explain that “One of the group members saw me everyday in the cafeteria and he would just pretend like he didn't know me and walk away so it was definitely racist.” (Ruth, interview). Even though the experience Ruth related occurred a couple of years before the interview, her pain was still apparent.

Classroom's racial climate.

Similarly, reflecting on opportunities to develop intercultural friendships with Canadians through classroom group work, Taiwo said, “I just have mixed feelings about the classroom setting. I believe Canadians are fantastic people. Like I said, most of the people that have been friendly to me are Canadians, but the classroom setting I don't know if it's because it's virtual. It's just kind of different for now” (Taiwo, Interview).

Taiwo felt that the attitude of her Canadian interlocutors sometimes made the atmosphere in class uncomfortable. She explained that this constrained her from initiating friendships with Canadian students and negatively impacted her learning experiences. During her interview, Taiwo illustrated her point further by narrating her experience with groupwork, she said, “I don't want to generalize, so I'll give my own example. I've had group assignments where we're like a group of four girls and anytime we had conversations we had someone who was older moderate the group assignments. But I notice that whenever she would say something or in the discussion, she would

never mention my name. She would mention the other two people, Hilda (not real name), what do you think of this? Karen (not real name) What do you think of this? I never hear my name and I just crawl back into my shell even if I wanted to bring more to the table.”

Taiwo lamented,” Does that mean my ideas don't count? Or you feel that I don't have enough ideas to contribute to this assignment? Sometimes it just makes me feel laid back and they might have the impression that I don't want to do much on the assignment whereas that is not true. The atmosphere is just not making me feel comfortable enough to bring what I have to the table, so most times I'm always the one trying to make efforts to say something or to say this. I'm going to do this to take charge of some duties and like I said some of my friends have also experienced the same thing.”

Taiwo, Interview

Further, Taiwo shared an example of her friend’s classroom experience. According to her, “I had a friend tell me that they had a group project where her contribution was eventually ignored. What the Canadian group member said was that he just felt that it was not weighty enough and they already had what they needed. According to her, he said it wasn't what the lecturer was expecting. At the end of the day the professor said what they submitted was not what she was expecting. If you're saying what I wanted to bring to the table was not what she was expecting and at the end of the day what you submitted was not what she was expecting. Where does that leave us?”

Taiwo, Interview

Throughout the discussion, Taiwo’s frustration was easy to see. It was evident from the discussion that experiences with racism sometimes occurred within the context of smaller groups in the classroom where participants shared that they were almost always the only Black student. Experiences like this seemed to increase the racial tension that AIS perceived between them and their Canadian interlocutors.

Stereotype Threats.

Participants believed that their interlocutors had race-based misconceptions or stereotypes about them that informed some of their actions. According to the participants, this sometimes led to their reluctance to initiate friendships with Canadians. Reflecting on opportunities to develop friendship with Canadians through group assignments, Taiwo said:

“And the second reason ties into the issue of feeling excluded in the group assignments to be honest. And it's not just me like I was saying, I've spoken to some of my colleagues that come from Nigeria and majority of them have also experienced the same thing. They don't feel included, they feel excluded from the whole thing. I might be wrong, but I think that the idea that they have is that Canadians don't really see Africans as intellectual enough. I may be wrong but like I said, that's at least that's what it seems to be. A friend of mine also opened up to me about this. They don't see Black people as people that are sound enough to bring much to the table. So, they feel like this person is not going to contribute much. So, whenever we are having a group discussion, they just sort of indirectly exclude Africans or Black people out of the conversation.”

(Taiwo, Interview)

During the focus group, Rebecca also insinuated that stereotype threats could mitigate friendship formation with Canadians. In her opinion, “just the mutual understanding of cultural differences as opposed to someone who still thinks that Africans live on trees” could facilitate friendship formation with Canadians. The stereotype threats that participants discussed seemed to impact both their psychological adaptation and attempts to develop intercultural friendships with Canadians.

External factors.

COVID-19 Restrictions.

When data was collected for the focus group, there was a lockdown in place to restrict social gatherings due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It was easy to note that COVID-19 restrictions (having to take classes online, restrictions on social gatherings) had played some role in inhibiting participants' access to activities that could otherwise foster intercultural friendships with Canadians. Further, the restrictions seemed to impact participants' acculturation. This was especially apparent from the experiences shared by participants who had only been in Canada for a short time. For instance, during her interview, Taiwo said she had not been able to build friendships with Canadians because "I think the major reason is not because I have issues making friends with Canadians, it's just because of COVID." According to her, she "arrived (in Canada) in the wake of the pandemic and people were not so open to mingling with other people and could not go out to socialize."

Reflecting on opportunities to develop friendships with Canadian students in her classrooms, Taiwo further shared that, "the fact that it's virtual learning and I haven't seen any one of them in person" made friendship development challenging. She said, "if classes were in person maybe we would have been able to establish that kind of connection." (Taiwo, interview). Similarly, Tayo (who had only been in Canada for six months when data was collected) thought that COVID-19 restrictions had restricted her opportunities to connect with Canadians. Her frustration was evident when she said, "Most of the classes have been online. I'm not used to online classes. I don't like online classes. I like seeing my lecturer. I like having that interaction in class. I feel that the online thing has been a challenge when it comes to my adjustment." (Tayo, Interview)

Tayo went on to say that she was “hoping that this COVID-19 thing reduces probably when everyone is fully vaccinated. We’ll be able to see each other, go to classes in person. I’d start to explore more, visit places, and hopefully make more friends because I only know the same people that I have known from Nigeria.” Her enthusiasm was easy to observe when she said she would be having one in person class in September. Rebecca also shared something similar during her interview. She said “As time goes by and places open, I would definitely adjust better to being in this environment. Because when I started to adjust is when COVID-19 happened, but I think it would be much better once I start going out.”

Intercultural friendships with Canadian students: Factors that facilitate friendship.

Generally, participants did not have Canadian friends until much later in their acculturation process. This is consistent with Torres and Rollock’s, (2004) finding that intercultural relationships are generally predicated on higher levels of acculturation. As they began to adjust to Canadian society better, participants seemed to become increasingly comfortable with making deliberate efforts to connect with Canadians. Participant data reveal some factors that helped to facilitate their intercultural friendships with Canadians. These factors include similarities, prior exposure, age, motivation and agency, and more opportunities for contact. Participants also spoke about some of the ways that these relationships have impacted their adjustment.

Similarities.

While differences seemed to mitigate friendship formation, participants felt that similarities they observed between them, and their Canadian interlocutors were a significant factor that facilitated friendship development. For instance, when Naheem began to relate with his Canadian friend more, he observed that “we had lots of similarities, and it kind of just made us closer” (Naheem, Interview). Despite mentioning that the only friendship she had with a Canadian

was with her property owner, Taiwo felt that “things like you sharing similar ideas” would facilitate friendship formation with Canadians. Illustrating her opinion further with a friend’s example, Taiwo said, “A friend of mine who has a Canadian friend told me about how they connected. She said they were colleagues at work, and they just noticed that they liked the same things, they shared similar ideas and that was how they connected. They had a common ground in terms of beauty. And they are good friends right now” (Taiwo, Interview).

Further, in Taiwo’s experience, having a common ground and similar interests facilitated friendship. Reflecting on her friendship with her property owner, Taiwo said:

“I think another factor might be the fact that even though he is older than I am, he has this trait of the Gen Z generation. Yeah, so he is active on social media. We can talk about entertainment and other things that people of my age would be able to relate with. And I remember him just yesterday telling me that he loves Nigerian comedy. And I was so surprised when he said that. We can come to a common ground in terms of entertainment and stuff like that.

Taiwo, Interview

Ruth also felt that her intercultural friendship “was smooth because we had a lot of things that we had in common.”

Prior Exposure.

Ruth observed that it was easier to relate with Canadians who already had other international friends due to the added exposure they seemed to have. For instance, according to her, “I feel that if the Canadian person that you're trying to be friends with doesn't have an international circle or a mixed circle you would have to go out of your way or put in more efforts” | (Ruth, Interview). Ruth seemed to believe that Canadians who did not have existing intercultural

friendships would not be as tolerant or open as those who already had intercultural experience through a racially diverse friendship circle.

Age.

In participants' experiences age could be a factor that impacts intercultural friendship formation friendships with Canadians. Participants thought that friendship with older Canadians (40's and above from participants' perspectives) could be quite different from friendships with younger Canadians. For instance, Taiwo felt that older Canadians were more likely to seek meaningful relationships across racial divides. According to her, "older people tend to relate more with people regardless of your race or anything. According to her, "They just have that friendly tendency. So, they tend to strike up friendly conversations with you." (Taiwo, Interview). Comparing his relationships with older Canadians to his relationships with younger Canadians, Naheem said:

"Once the person is older, he has more experience in his life. He could tell you about how to act in some situations. And even anytime you feel stuck the person would push you more to achieve things. For me and the person (his older Canadian friend) we really had a strong bond so, it was more about everyone being there for each other. With younger Canadian friends it's different. I meet different personalities each time and that's one thing that I have realized is that with each personality you have to handle the risks behind each trait that the person has. So, you must be ready for anything."

Naheem, Interview

The excerpt above captures the fact that offering value or reciprocity may facilitate friendship formation with older Canadians. For instance, during his interview, Naheem explained that with his older Canadian friend, they "helped each other out and if he needed someone to edit something for him, I would be there." Naheem went on to say that checking up on his friend

facilitated their relationship. According to him, “It just also depends on how you develop stronger relationships and I think that I really did an excellent job with that one by checking on him and asking for him.”

Reiterating the role that his older Canadian friends had played in his acculturation, Naheem categorically advised that older Canadian folk are not to be looked down on as they could contribute greatly to successful acculturation. For Naheem, "most students when they come into Canada. They think that person is old. They're just going to be annoying... but they could tell you about how to act in some situations" (Naheem, Interview).

The success of this kind of friendship could further be associated with the fact that older Canadians might have more time and experience that would make them more readily accessible and open to intercultural friendships.

Motivation and Agency.

Participants reported coming to a point in their acculturation where they realised the need to be more intentional about building relationships with Canadians. They shared several personal adjustments they made to overcome barriers to initiating friendship with Canadians.

Rebecca’s account of her experience captures some of this. During the focus group, she explained that making efforts to establish friendships with Canadians dispelled her initial fear that it would be difficult to relate with Canadians. She said, “So when I got to my third year, I had to talk to myself. Like, I'm living in Canada, in a land full of immigrants. For me to grow in this community, I have to get to know people. I have to understand how they do their stuff. So, I started to engage in conversations with Canadians that happened to be friends with my other African friends. So, I realized from this that I could actually relate with them. Like I found it easier to talk

to them and now I have so many Canadian friends and friends from other parts of the world, and I am even shocked at myself right now.”

Naheem also thought that making deliberate efforts helped him to establish better relationships with Canadians. He said he tried to “pop up conversations that kind of relates to the other person” during intercultural encounters with Canadians. He explained that to facilitate friendship development with Canadians he had to overcome his nervousness. According to him, he had to “be more calm, confident, and just try to be the one carrying the conversation. So, that's how I solved being nervous over here.” (Naheem, Interview) Illustrating his point further with an example, Naheem said, “With my roommate, for example. He's Canadian. In most situations, most people will be nervous, and they will go close their door if they don't talk that much. For now, I just found what's relatable to me and him. We talk about football or like work or something. Something that fills up the day, you have an enjoyable conversation, and you go back to your room.”

Naheem Interview

During the focus group, Tayo also stated that to increase opportunities for her to connect with Canadians, she had to break her habit of staying indoors. According to her, “I would say right now I'm intentionally going out more even if I don't have anything to do. So, I just go downtown, walk around, visit restaurants sit and see how things are done. So, I just go out and meet people. I plan to attend a (predominantly) White church once in a while.” The discussion revealed that the process of developing intercultural friendships was not automatic. Rather, participants had to take agency to facilitate friendship formation with Canadians.

Ease in COVID-19 Restrictions.

Participant data point to the effect of the ease in COVID-19 restrictions on intercultural friendship development with Canadians. During the individual interviews (approximately 1 month

after the focus group took place), two participants who had mentioned not having Canadian friends during the focus group said that they had started to develop these relationships. They associated this with the ease in COVID-19 restrictions and opportunities to access more social gatherings. Naheem was incredibly happy to share that the focus group made him “think about how I can fix some stuff or improve in my real life”.

Impact of Canadian intercultural friendships on acculturation.

Participants generally believed that their friendships with Canadian students held some benefits for their acculturation. For instance, Rebecca reported that her Canadian friends have helped her to gain a deeper appreciation of divergent cultural values and improved her intercultural communication skills amongst other things. Her excitement was easy to notice when she said:

“I have Canadian friends and the ways in which they've helped me is that through them I know so many nice spots in Halifax. I have been able to do road trips with them because they know the area and nice places to go. I have had so much fun with them. And the type of friends I have are quite adventurous friends, so I've been able to explore some of the beauty of Nova Scotia. Also, I've learned how to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds better not just with Canadian friends but Asians, Ethiopians, and Bahamians. And it's interesting to learn more about them. So, you learn how to respect people more and accept cultural practices that are quite different from what you do in your own culture through these friendships.”

Rebecca, Focus group

Similarly, despite acknowledging that “I haven’t really been able to build what I’ll call friendship (with Canadians) in my own terms,” Taiwo highlighted some of the benefits she had drawn from her friendship with her Canadian property owner. During the interview she said, “I've learned one or two things from my landlord just by relating with him and his family.” She

mentioned that she had been able to learn how to relate with people better in ways that reflect the social distance between them drawing from her relationship with her property owner.

Sharing her desire to develop more intercultural friendships with Canadians, Taiwo explained that “mingling with Canadians on a personal and social level” would have, “informed me on some things. This might not be directly. They don't have to sit me down to tell me this is how things are done here. From my observations about how they express themselves, the things they say to me, I would have been able to learn one or two things and that would have informed my own behavioral pattern here in the country.” (Taiwo, Interview)

For Naheem, his successful intercultural friendship with his Canadian roommate was an indicator of his successful acculturation. To him, this relationship reflects some of the improvements he had noticed from being shy about initiating conversations with Canadians to being able to keep a conversation going. During his interview, Naheem said, “I feel like right now with my roommate. It's more of a balance. I would say, it's like a 50/50 situation where no one has to carry the conversation on their own. I kind of feel proud about it. You know, at this point, you feel more like you're starting to really adjust to the society.”

Naheem, Interview

Further, during his interview, Naheem mentioned that he learned “some terms” with his Canadian friends that “helped him along the way.” This lends credence to These relationships provide international students with access to the daily lives of host nationals and enrich their understanding of the host culture and communication patterns in the host country (Kim, 2001). Contrary to these, Mugisha believed “there are so many things that you can learn about the Canadian culture from these friendships but for me it's a no.” (Mugisha, interview). She didn't seem to think intercultural friendships with Canadians would impact her acculturation. She thought

some of her relationships “did not last long enough” for her to perceive any benefits to her acculturation. Intercultural friendships with host nationals provide an organic context for AIS to observe sociocultural norms pertinent to their successful acculturation.

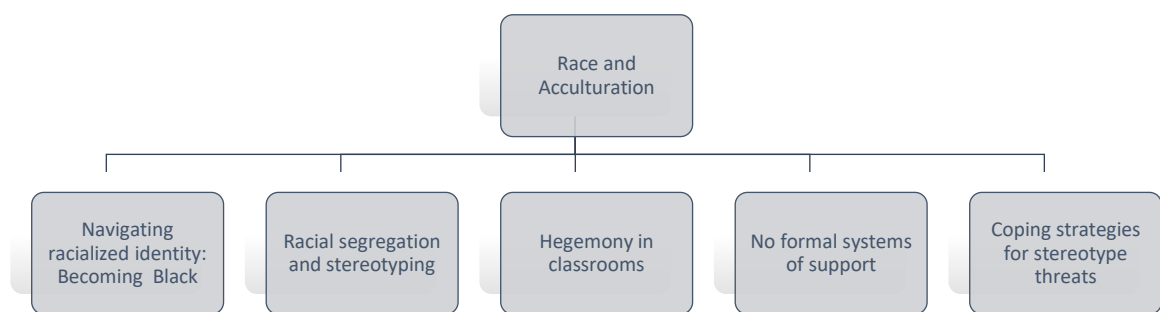
Race and Acculturation

This section includes counter stories of participants experiences with race and racism and some discussion of race related findings. Although race was not an initial focus of this study, it was hypothesized that race might play a role in the acculturation experiences of AIS.

Participants’ reflections on their experiences revealed that having their identities racialized had an overarching effect on their acculturation. By taking off from participants’ racialized identities before focusing on the race related issues participants reported experiencing, I foreground the implications of the social construct of race for their acculturation. Through counter storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), I explore the intersection between race, racism, and the acculturation experiences of AIS in this section. Counter storytelling provides a context to further understand how AIS make sense of their acculturation, and to understand their experiences as they navigate intercultural friendship formation with Canadians. To elaborate the discussion in this section, some findings already highlighted in previous sections are included or integrated into the counter stories.

Specifically, the counter stories are told in form of narratives that emerge directly from the experiences shared by research participants captured in the data. “Narratives draw on various forms of “data” to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33). To preserve the voices of the participants, rephrasing was reduced to the minimum. The counter stories represent multiple participant voices or collective voices presented in relation to five themes drawn from the data (1) Navigating racialized

identity: Becoming Black (2) Racial segregation and stereotyping (3) Hegemony in classrooms (4) No formal systems of support (5) Coping strategies for stereotype threats. Figure 5 summarizes the themes that emerged from the data.



Navigating racialized identity: Becoming Black.

The concept of race has different meanings and indeed implications for different people. Parris and Brigham (2010) define racialization as the process of classifying people with reference to the social construct of race. They emphasized that the power of race “is sustained through the perseverance of racism and processes of racialization.” (p. 211). Upon arrival in Canada, most AIS must assume an identity that has been cut out for them i.e., Blackness. Before moving to Canada participants’ understanding of their identity was shaped by their ethnicity and culture rather than race. Noreiga & Justin (2020) posited that “Moving from a country where Blacks held the majority racial composition to a country where Blacks are minoritized can be a daunting phenomenon for students” (p. 18).

Hooks (1989) puts the implication of having one's identity racialized in further perspective when she said, "as subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject" (p. 42–43). Hence, stepping into a new racialized identity also implies being objectified.

The story.

When it comes to adjusting, I would take the race path, I guess. In Ghana I was just female but when I came here, I slowly realized that I'm not just a woman, I'm a Black woman. There's a difference with how you are related to, so I think that was one of the things that I had to slowly adjust to.

I was going to say also that race is the hard one. It's funny when she said it, but I got to know I was Black when I went abroad. Back home I tease them that they're not Black yet like when they get here, they would know that they're Black. So, I got to know that I was a Black woman when I got abroad. The first time I experienced this was back in the UK but even here you can't help but notice so it wasn't new for me when I got to Canada. For racism you can't say that you get used to it, or you get to live with it. You just learn how to react to it. When you stay here, you learn a new way to react to it.

As these narratives reveal, there seems to be an intersection between the way students' identity are perceived and their experiences as they navigate the acculturation process. Taking on a new racialized identity and its attending realities implied that in most cases, these students were confronted with realities that they barely understood including racism. Consequently, participants reported only being able to understand racism and the racist experiences that they encountered in

classrooms and at work in hindsight or several years into their acculturation. According to Noreiga & Justin (2020), this phenomenon can be described as racial awakening.

Further, these narratives draw attention to the intercentricity between race, skin color and gender as experienced by the two female participants who shared their experiences with having to take on a racialized identity as a result of becoming an African international student. They had to acknowledge that their gender, skin color, and racial background implied that they would be ‘viewed’ differently and as the experiences they shared during their interviews suggested ‘treated’ differently. Both participants described the identity of Blackness as synonymous with their experiences with racism. Alluding to its effect on shaping their experiences Mugisha described Blackness as something she “experienced.” Beyond the sociocultural and psychological adjustment that generally marks the experiences of international students, race becomes a reality that AIS must confront and address.

Racial segregation and stereotyping.

For participants, the emerging consciousness of being Black was further exacerbated by the racial demographic they encountered in classrooms, the racial segregation, their minoritized status in Canada and the constant subtle reminders they had of being ‘different.’ For many of the students including myself, being the only Black student in most classes was the norm. One of the implications of this is that students were constantly aware of their difference and felt that their voices were not as relevant as that of the majority and their classroom experiences seemed to support this.

The story.

To add to this, the moment I arrived in Canada, I had to come to the shocking realization that I was no longer a face in the crowd. I wouldn’t blend into the crowd here. I’ll always stand

out. My skin color would stand out. And the moment I open my mouth, my accent would give me away. It'll become apparent that I am not from here. It's hard not to see this, really. A few days into my arrival, a friend told me to switch up my accent when I am talking to a Canadian because if I spoke in my accent, they would not hear me properly. Suddenly, the way I have always spoken becomes something I must be constantly aware of, and I must become aware about how I sound when I speak. Would they be able to understand me or understand my accent? And as though to further drive all of this in, I was the only Black student in most of my classes.

Whenever we are having a group discussion, they just sort of indirectly exclude Africans or Black people out of the conversation. I've had group assignments where we're like a group of four girls. Whenever the moderator said something, she would never mention my name. She would mention the other two people, Hilda (not real name), what do you think of this? Karen, (not real name) what do you think of this? I never hear my name and I just crawl back into my shell even if I wanted to bring more to the table. I never speak up about this because mostly, I am the only Black person in the group, so I really don't have a say. It's like four to one. So, at the end of the day, their own decision takes precedence over mine and I feel like that's not really helped me in my classroom learning in Canada.

I remember a class about trauma and its consequences where a classmate made a presentation about Rwandans. During the presentation they said most Rwandan students are fragile and they have problems concentrating due to the genocide. I was stunned by this seeing that it is just a generalization. No one cared to know how I felt. It was like being talked down on with no reference to what my experiences are as a Rwandan. I do understand the negative consequences of trauma, but Rwandans are not like this. It's like taking the consequence and making it into a stereotype. Our trauma is not even an individual trauma. It's more like a community or cultural

trauma. It's something that every Rwandan experience and the students here are the first generation after the genocide so that means that we all experienced that and the aftermath.

Implying that we are or making us fragile or ticking bombs and then sharing something like that in a class presentation is like you being ignorant about this culture but still speaking authoritatively about it. We are resilient. We have been through all that, but we still perform well in class. It's a stereotype! At least ask the Rwandan students in class so that we can tell you more about our trauma! It's like denying me agency in a narrative about my lived experience, especially when the wrong information is being perpetuated. We can share about this, so that you don't just assume. And this happens a lot even when people write books or articles or even read articles there is that cultural aspect missing. I eventually raised this issue in class and during the next class the professor brought a paper trying to support my argument but still that was a traumatic experience to go through. It was a lot.

In one of my classes, we were talking about discipline, and I mentioned that I was spanked as a child. I noticed that my classmates started to look at me differently like they started to look at me as an abused child when I don't see myself like that. I felt bad about sharing that experience in class. Their reaction suggested that spanking was not the norm here. And this is what happens in most cases. You have to be conscious about sharing some of your experiences in class because of how it will be perceived or interpreted.

This narrative reveals participants' race related classroom experiences that seemed to reinforce their perceptions about stereotypes held about them and lead to acculturation stress.

Hegemony in Classrooms.

Although Hegemony has been broadly defined and applied, I find Hall's (1977) definition of hegemony most relevant to the way that it unfolds in the experiences shared by AIS in this

study. According to Hall (1977), hegemony is the "framing (of) all competing definitions of reality within (the dominant group's) range bringing all alternatives within their horizons of thought" (as cited in Lull, 1995, p. 34). Hegemony is generally reified or sustained by systems within the society that serve to (intentionally or unintentionally) enforce the dominance of the dominant group by normalizing their conceptions of reality while marginalizing or even problematizing that of other groups.

AIS highlighted the overwhelming centering of classroom content on Canadian culture and perspectives, which has also been found in other studies (Constantine et al., 2005; Girmay, 2017). An implication was that they sometimes felt a lack of connection to class content and did not have the prerequisite background knowledge to make sense of classroom examples. In addition to hegemony, participants' experiences spotlight the need for a more globalized curriculum and touches on university's preparedness to cater to the educational needs of international students and make them feel welcome and included in classrooms.

The Story.

I can't give specific examples right now but when it comes to classes and lessons, it sometimes happens that the professor is sharing an example and you kind of zone out because you just can't relate. Maybe because we're in a Canadian environment, in classrooms most of the examples used are Canadian examples, or North American examples basically. So sometimes I can't really relate to certain things, and it becomes an issue when we have group assignments. For instance, if we were to use a sample or a case study, Canadians want to use Canadian examples. I prefer to use an example I can relate with. It might not necessarily be African or Nigerian but something that could be a more global example. But I feel that most times they just like to restrict themselves to the Canadian context, which I think is a bit limiting.

I had a friend tell me that they had a group project where her own contribution was eventually ignored. What the Canadian group member said was that he just felt that it was not weighty enough and they already had what they needed. According to her, he said it wasn't what the lecturer was expecting. At the end of the day the professor said what the group submitted was not what she was expecting. If you're saying what I wanted to bring to the table was not what she was expecting and at the end of the day what you submitted was not what she was expecting; where does that leave us?

She'd ask everyone in the group to share their thoughts but neglect to ask me. I forgot to mention that I was the only Black person in the group. It was a small group of 5 people and she mentioned everyone's names except mine. Does that mean my ideas don't count? Or did she think that I do not have enough ideas to contribute to this assignment? Sometimes it just makes me feel laid back and they might have the impression that I don't want to do much on the assignment whereas that is not true. The atmosphere is just not making me feel comfortable enough to bring what I have to the table, so most times I'm always the one trying to make efforts to speak over the chatter. I volunteer to take charge of some duties because I am aware that unlike the others, I wouldn't be naturally assigned these duties. And like I said some of my friends have also experienced the same thing.

For group assignments, I would love to work with Canadians or people from different racial backgrounds. During group work everybody can pull in their ideas which would reflect their perspectives, their backgrounds and where they're coming from. And I feel that we have more resources to work with in that way rather than if everything is centered on the Canadian context. But every other kind of knowledge does not seem to count, so we must work with a Canadian example. I believe since we are different people coming from various parts of the world, we should

be able to come to a common ground where we choose something that everybody can at least relate to in some way. And it's not just me, I've spoken to some of my colleagues, and they also shared their experiences with feeling disconnected from classroom content.

These narratives reveal a hierarchy of systems that seem to reinforce the normalcy or dominance of one group over another in participants' classrooms. They also bring up the question of privilege. For instance, a student categorically emphasizes the irrelevance of another students' contribution to classwork while another pointedly ignores a participant during a group work where everyone else is asked to contribute. While some students can relate to classroom examples, some cannot, hence, they are inadvertently excluded from accessing knowledge. There is a need to consider the implications of consistently facing experiences like this for AIS' educational outcomes and psychological adaptation.

No formal systems of support.

Even though Mount Saint Vincent University highlights its commitment to supporting Black students and scholars on its website participants' narratives shed light on the absence of clear institutionalized mediums to address their race-based experiences. Consequently, they mostly had to deal with these issues personally or go about with the hurt or trauma from these experiences.

The story.

I don't want it to look (especially in terms of bringing it up in class) like I'm trying to instigate or insinuate that they're being racist, or anything related to that, or that they're not including me because of my race. I don't want to bring up that topic because it's a classroom environment and the last thing I want to do is try to bring up topics like that. So, I just want to do my work and get going.

If I do report what if I am not believed? And what if the person I report to does not understand my experience? How do I prove that it even happened? Let's assume the issue is taken up, it's most likely going to be their words against mine. And again, I was a first-year student, so I didn't know who to talk to, who to go to, or where to go to and I kind of got like a really shaky grade in that class because of the discrimination I experienced in the group.

The narratives reveal the realities participants must face when considering how to respond to their experiences with racism. Being the target of racist actions is a reality that is challenging to admit because of their deprecating nature. It could imply that rather than being treated as an individual one is reduced to being reacted to based on the color of one's skin. An added consideration is the difficulty of proving race related incidences which in participants experiences was sometimes not explicit. For instance, these incidences could sometimes be reduced to the discriminatory attitude of their Canadian interlocutors rather than specific racist remarks they made. For some, it was hard to reconcile their experiences with their expectations of what should happen in class. Further, there seemed to be the general assumption that incidences like this do not occur on campus hence participants were not aware of official channels available to them to address race related incidences.

Coping strategies.

Some of the experiences shared by the participants reveal an underlying narrative on AIS' resilience as a coping strategy for navigating racism and stereotype threats. Steele and Aronson (1995) define stereotype threat as "a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely known stereotypes about one's group. The existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes" (p. 797).

The story.

My biggest takeaway from that experience (with racism) is that I need to excel in everything I do. I need to excel. People should feel my contribution everywhere I am. I should make a mark in everything I do to change the narrative. If it is true, I need to be part of the generation of people or the set of people that would change that narrative about Africans or about Black people that they are not intellectually sound enough.

I remember reading an article in one of my summer courses about the racial wealth divide in the US. One of the speakers said Black people in America are not seen as intellectual people or people that are academically sound. For me, this is just a wrong narrative that has been going on in the Black community for years. So, it's not just something that just started. In Canada, I believe we might have the same thing going on so I just want to be part of the people or generation that would change that mindset. We Black people or Africans have a lot to offer if given opportunities or if given a chance. They would prove themselves to be deserving of everything, where they are and where they want to be. So that's my biggest takeaway from that experience. It doesn't affect me socially or outside school. No, it doesn't. It just motivates me to want to do better in my field.

The narratives reveal participants' responses to the stereotype threats they perceived. There seemed to be a need to disprove these stereotypes by succeeding against all odds. Although resilience is not a negative trait, this narrative spotlight some of the additional stressors that AIS experience because of their racialized identities. As Lee and Rice (2007) conclude in their analysis of literature on international students' experiences, many studies problematize challenges international students face as adjustment issues and put the onus on them to change assuming that there are no inadequacies in the host society that could impact their experiences. In this chapter, I

discussed the findings of this study in relation to acculturation and intercultural friendships, acculturation and pragmatic competence and race and acculturation.

“Òrò ò lè wúwo wúwo kí á fi òbẹ̀ bù ú” -There is no other way to convey a message than to discuss it. - Nigerian proverb

Chapter 5: Discussion

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the acculturation stressors and facilitators for AIS at a small Canadian university focusing on their intercultural friendships with Canadians, racialized identities, and pragmatic competence. In this chapter, I discuss the findings from this study with reference to the core focus areas of the research questions including pragmatic competence, intercultural friendships, and AIS racialized identities.

Acculturation and Pragmatic Competence

1. What are the acculturation experiences of AIS as it relates to pragmatic competence?
2. What are AIS' experiences developing pragmatic competence?

Before discussing the findings on pragmatic competence in relation to the research questions, it is important to reiterate that AIS in this study represent a unique group because prior to their arrival in Canada, they had mostly learned English in second language contexts. Specifically, despite speaking English deemed sufficient for academic success in Canada, their English language use reflect the socio-cultural norms in their home countries, and this seemed different from the prevalent culture that drives English language use in Canada. The participant population included bilingual and monolingual English users who were simultaneous bilinguals, sequential bilinguals, and circumstantial bilinguals hence they represent a variety of English language learning backgrounds.

Association between AIS Pragmatic Competence and Acculturation Experiences.

In relation to the association between AIS pragmatic competence and their acculturation experiences, findings revealed some aspects of pragmatics that AIS encountered challenges with

as they navigated their acculturation. These challenges appeared to be associated with the high level of cultural distance between AIS home cultures and their understanding of the host culture. Specifically, participants reported struggling with apologizing, culture of respect and conversational power dynamics, academic writing conventions, understanding accepted behaviours and discourse practices, and understanding humour and small talk.

Two processes or levels of acculturation were evident from the findings - academic acculturation and acculturation into the wider host society. In addition to adjusting to living in a new society international students will adjust to a new and, in the case of AIS, entirely different academic subculture. Participants' experiences revealed that they had some access to pragmatic knowledge through their relationships, observations, and feedback they got from intercultural encounters, and this facilitated their acculturation into the wider Canadian society. However, findings also suggest that they had little or no support with understanding norms that guided academic discourse practices and writing conventions in their host culture, and this was a challenge for them. To illustrate, Taiwo reported that she learned how to word her emails appropriately "When most of my colleagues send emails to professors and I'm copied in the mail." For Tayo, she "looked at all the emails that I had been getting from school. So, I noticed their style of writing."

There are possible implications of not having ready access to crucial pragmatic knowledge on AIS academic acculturation and learning outcomes. For instance, findings suggest that some participants struggled with understanding host culture norms about plagiarism. Ruth thought "the school didn't really do an excellent job at explaining it (plagiarism) in full details alongside the consequences." Hence, she mentioned that "it was a big problem for me" in her academic journey. It appeared that it is presumed that international students will "learn the ropes" or adjust automatically into the academic subculture. The reality that international students may not have

sufficient access to the target discourse practices that would facilitate their adjustment is generally overlooked (Duff, 2010; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

When reflecting on their acculturation experiences, AIS reported struggling with aspects of pragmatic competence that seemed to differ significantly from the social norms in their home cultures. It appeared that the challenges emerged from the high level of cultural distance between their home cultures and Canadian culture as they knew it. According to Masgoret and Ward (2006), cultural distance is the adjudged similarities and differences between one's home culture and one's host culture. Findings revealed significant differences between AIS home cultures and what they considered to be Canadian culture, as other studies have found (Girmay, 2017; Warren & Constantine, 2007). For instance, while AIS come from cultures that emphasize collectivism, individualism is more prevalent in Western countries (Girmay, 2017; Ward et al., 2001).

AIS' cultural orientations and values seemed to be reflected in their preferred communication styles, writing styles, and behaviour and findings indicate that these were sometimes different from what they observed to be the norm in Canada. People from individualist and collectivist cultures bring differing value systems, behavioural systems, and social views to intercultural encounters (Ward et al., 2001). Interactions between these conflicting cultural orientations during intercultural encounters appeared to produce acculturation stress and lead to more adaptation challenges as participants navigated their acculturation, as other studies found (Berry, 2006; Girmay, 2017; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). For instance, individualistic cultures are generally informal during conversations and are likely to use first names as a form of address (Ward et al., 2001). However, societies with a high power distance have been found to prefer forms of address that reflect differences in status e.g., using titles (Ward et al., 2001). Likewise, in some of participants' home cultures, it appeared that respect had to be explicitly signified through

language in conversations between an older person, or somebody with a higher status and a younger interlocutor. For instance, Taiwo and Ruth reported addressing their professors as Mr. or Mrs. because “we had to show respect back home”. Consequently, participants noted struggling with feeling “rude” or “disrespectful” when they realized that they had to address people by their first names through feedback they got from intercultural encounters.

Further, findings from this study extend understanding about aspects of AISs’ cultural backgrounds that seemed to inform some of the challenges they had with pragmatic competence. For instance, Taiwo’s sensitivity to what would be appropriate to include in an email she wrote to a professor can be better understood when contextualized against the collectivist orientation of her home culture. Ward et al., (2001) explained that collectivists are generally more concerned with sociocultural norms and constraints that guide behavior. A direct reference to this is when Taiwo explained that she would have “learned one or two things and that would have informed my own behavioral pattern here in the country” from her intercultural friendships with Canadians. Consistent with this, Girmay (2017), emphasized the role that international students’ cultural and regional backgrounds could play in their acculturation.

AIS’ collectivist cultural orientation could also explain the tendency of their culturally and racially similar friends to socialize them explicitly into host culture appropriacy norms as they interacted. When reflecting on her early adjustment Tayo mentioned that her Black friends from church, “let me know what I shouldn’t do because they are not acceptable in the society. And they also guide me on how to behave.” Phrases like “this is how it is done here” seemed to signal the socializing intent of the information shared. Further, the fact that individualist cultures are generally characterized by a more direct conversational style than collectivist cultures Ward et al., (2001) was evidenced by some of Naheem’s experience. According to him, through his

friendships with Canadians, he “came to understand that it's OK to be blunt with your friends and not shy away from them.” Naheem’s access to information on host culture conversational style lends support to the assertion that friendship with host nationals may facilitate international students’ pragmatic competence development (Kim, 2001; Ward, et al., 2001).

Even though some aspects of language proficiency did not appear to impede participants’ acculturation, it seemed that gaps in their sociocultural norms did. To illustrate, Mugisha explained that even though, “I might understand English” working with Canadians implied that she needed to understand the culture to communicate better. It could be argued that efforts to support the transition of AIS into Canadian classrooms might be ignoring the value of second language pragmatic competence for their successful acculturation. For instance, explicit pragmatic instruction has been found to support students’ understanding and awareness of pragmatic differences and subsequent pragmatic competence development (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2003). Among other things pragmatic instruction is generally incorporated into EAP programs at MSVU to facilitate international students’ transition into Canadian classrooms. However, because of their language backgrounds AIS students mostly did not take part in these programs, hence they do not draw the benefits associated with the program. Notwithstanding, programs that target pragmatic competence are not in place to support their transition. It appeared that AIS were presumed to already have pragmatic knowledge crucial to their acculturation, however, their experiences seemed to indicate that this was not the case.

Further, as with (Douglas, Doe, & Cheng, 2020) Mugisha reported struggling with understanding small talk and humour due to gaps in her sociocultural knowledge. She said, “sometimes they are laughing and I’m not sure if I should laugh too. But sometimes I just laugh along or say ‘oh, wow.’ This is consistent with the experience of African students in Girmay’s

(2017) study who “felt left out” because of gaps in their sociocultural knowledge (p. 141). Sociopragmatic norms could be highly nuanced and contextual (Kim, 2001). Analogous to this, findings suggest a need to focus on providing access to relevant pragmatic knowledge to facilitate international students’ acculturation.

AIS Experiences Developing Pragmatic Competence

It appeared from the findings that AIS went through a process of pragmatic competence development as their acculturation progressed. Data indicated that AIS gained a heightened pragmatic awareness over time through their observations and through feedback they received from their interactions with interlocutors. However, consistent with Kasper and Rose (2011), their experiences revealed that pragmatic competence development was not solely dependent on explicit knowledge of or exposure to pragmatic information. For instance, Tayo did not start to refer to her professors by their first names when she became aware that they’d prefer to be referred to that way. Instead, she mentioned that she couldn’t bring herself to do this. As Kecskes (2015), pointed out second language (L2) pragmatic competence is a bidirectional process with necessary interaction between new pragmatic knowledge and existing pragmatic knowledge. As will be further discussed, L2 Pragmatic competence development would involve “modifications, adjustments and additions to the existing L1-based pragmatic competence” (Kecskes 2015, p. 421).

Rather than seamless assimilation of new pragmatic knowledge, participants’ experiences revealed a process of negotiating meaning, and identity as they encountered pragmatic differences. It appeared that participants struggled more with new pragmatic knowledge that conflicted significantly with their existing pragmatic knowledge especially those associated with their long-held values and identities. For instance, with respect to apologizing, Ruth struggled with being viewed as “insensitive” when she did not apologize in contexts that she was learning to understand

that it wouldn't be the appropriate thing to do. Mugisha negotiates this by stating her reason for apologizing instead. However, pragmatic competence development seemed to occur easily in cases where there appeared to be no conflict between new pragmatic knowledge and existing knowledge. For instance, Naheem did not report facing any challenge with assimilating new terms and communication styles that he learned from his Canadian interlocutors which helped him to communicate more effectively during intercultural encounters.

These findings suggest that participants make conscious or unconscious decisions regarding what pragmatic norms to attend to between their home culture and host culture norms—sometimes as a part of negotiating their linguistic identities and retaining their value systems. This extends understanding of the bidirectionality involved in bilingual pragmatic competence development. Further, findings demonstrate that negotiating a linguistic identity and value system is one of the emergent features of intercultural encounters (Kecskes & Asimakopulos, 2017).

Sometimes it seemed that language socialization into different groups was challenging because participants were juggling the differing expectations of the culturally or racially similar groups around them alongside the sociocultural expectations of their host culture. For instance, Ruth alludes to this when describing her experiences with using apologies. For her, she must “remind myself that I'm not with my friends and family” and “switch my personality or mindset not to apologize when something happens.” This reveals some of the mental process that bilinguals go through for appropriate language use to occur. It suggests that in addition to acquiring new pragmatic knowledge conscious attention or deliberate choice is necessary for bilinguals to produce contextually accurate language use. A crucial part of this finding is that it separates pragmatic awareness from language use. Hence, using the wrong linguistic form in some cases may not be a result of lack of pragmatic knowledge.

Data suggests that understanding the sociocultural orientation behind interlocutor's linguistic behaviour may be crucial to AIS pragmatic competence development. For instance, Mugisha tried to 'get behind the scenes' of interlocutors' linguistic choices and behaviour by asking "so many questions to understand where it came from ...and just compare it to my culture." Mugisha's example seems to indicate that access to this sociocultural information may facilitate pragmatic competence development and possibly a sense of being 'in' on the culture. This lends credence to Lenchuk and Ahmed's (2014), argument for incorporating deliberate attention to the cultural norms, values and beliefs that drive language use (in the host community) into pragmatic instruction to further pragmatic competence development. Further, incorporating discussion about differences between home culture and host culture norms in second language classrooms could help language learners notice and make sense of new pragmatic information.

Data revealed that participants had to take agency for their learning for pragmatic competence development to occur. For instance, in response to challenges Tayo encountered with pragmatic competence, she recognized the "need to overcome it so that I can easily fit into the environment." She approached this by "learning" and "trying to understand." This positions the language learner as an integral and pivotal part of pragmatic competence development. Further, it appeared from AIS experiences that pragmatic competence development was dependent on how the individual interacts with new pragmatic knowledge and whether they are willing to accept it as part of their developing linguistic identity or not. For instance, as highlighted above, pragmatic competence development occurred when Taiwo adapted to addressing her professor by first name drawing from her observations in class. Meanwhile Tayo, couldn't bring herself to address her interlocutor by first name. These examples support Kecskes' (2015), assertion that the "Willingness, motivation, and ability of adult bilinguals to assume L2 (or subsequent language)

socio-cultural beliefs, conventions and norms seem to play a decisive role in bi- and multilingual development and language use” (p. 422).

As participants learned context specific rules of language use through intercultural encounters, they were simultaneously being socialized into the dominant culture in their new sociocultural contexts. It seemed that to communicate effectively in their host culture, a level of assimilation or adaptation to host culture was expected (Girmay, 2017). For instance, when Tayo said “I’m the one who has come to meet them in their own community, so I need to adjust to their way of life” she seemed to inadvertently allude to a cultural learning process that would necessitate assimilation as a strategy for acculturation and pragmatic competence development. Szczepaniak-Kozak (2014) described this learning process as a cultural enrichment process that involves “enriching (of) initial culture with grains of the target language culture” (p. 86). As earlier discussed, challenges that participants encountered with aspects of pragmatic competence seemed to be heightened by the high level of cultural distance between their home cultures and what they understood to be Canadian culture.

Approaching intercultural encounters with existing pragmatic competence in both their native languages and in English seemed to make the process of pragmatic competence development more challenging for AIS. For instance, in response to her Canadian interlocutors’ responses to her style of speaking, Rebecca mentioned that prior to arriving in Canada she “thought that the way that I speak is the correct way of speaking English and that everyone else speaks like that.” It is possible that being in situations where they didn’t see a need to modify existing knowledge could add an extra layer of challenge for AIS with reference to adapting to host culture sociocultural norms.

Data points to the critical role of AIS' Canadian friends, their Canadian interlocutors as well as their racially and culturally similar friends in facilitating their pragmatic competence development. These relationships appeared to provide participants with explicit and implicit corrective feedback that seemed to lead to a heightened pragmatic awareness over time and in some cases pragmatic competence development. For instance, after coworkers drew Mugisha's attention to her use of apologies she shows evidence of pragmatic competence development when she started to state the reason she was apologizing (to avoid miscommunication). e.g., "I'm sorry you are feeling that way or I'm sorry that that happened to you." This finding supports Duff's (2010) assertion that "community members explicitly and implicitly provide mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language, and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identities of community members" (p. 172).

Findings revealed that AIS pragmatic competence development evolved or progressed over time. For instance, after initially struggling with the lack of linguistic forms for expressing respect as in her home culture, Tayo came to understand that "respect is shown more in actions compared to Nigeria where you must add the title to it to demonstrate it." She learned that with Canadians "some of their actions and the way they relate to you tells you that they respect you." With this and several examples from the data in mind, it becomes important to acknowledge that some of the challenges participants encountered as they developed pragmatic competence seemed to be temporary as participants reported overcoming most of these challenges as their acculturation progressed.

Participants' experiences with pragmatic competence development elucidates the relationship between language, culture, and identity. The findings extend understanding of some of the developmental processes involved in second language or bilingual pragmatic competence

development specifically in the case of AIS. The overriding finding on AIS acculturation as it relates to pragmatic competence is that pragmatic competence plays a critical role in AIS acculturation. However, it wasn't in all cases that they had ready access to pragmatic knowledge especially those relevant to their academic acculturation. Further, findings suggest a high level of cultural distance between AIS homes cultures and what they understood to be Canadian culture, and this seemed to heighten some of the challenges they reported experiencing with aspects of pragmatic competence.

Acculturation and Intercultural Friendships

1. What are the acculturation experiences of AIS as it relates to intercultural friendships?
2. What factors facilitate or inhibit AIS from forming intercultural friendships with Canadians?

Association between AIS Acculturation Experiences and Intercultural Friendships

This research question sought to understand the acculturation experiences of AIS with reference to their intercultural friendships. Findings indicated that AIS experiences with developing intercultural friendships with Canadians was far from seamless. Consequently, participants did not report establishing these relationships until much later in their acculturation. Participants generally relied on people from their home countries who had immigrated to Canada before them, Africans, family, and other international students for friendship and social support during their early adjustment. Despite this, participants generally expressed their desire to develop intercultural friendships with Canadians and indicated that having Canadian friends held positive benefits for their acculturation.

Asides being a familiar source of needed comfort and support during their early adjustment it appeared that AIS racially and culturally similar friends were better equipped to pre-empt

challenges that participants would face related to sociocultural adjustment. Findings indicated that these relationships facilitated participants' acculturation by helping them navigate the initial challenges they encountered and preparing them to interface more successfully with their host community, from a sociocultural standpoint. To illustrate, Taiwo explained that "these relationships (with home country friends) kind of prepared me for the differences that I would encounter." Also, Ruth indicated that her home country friends "made it easier for me to transition."

Another possible explanation for AIS' tendency to connect with culturally and racially similar groups could be the collectivist orientations of their home cultures and the emphasis on communalism and group survival (Constantine et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2001). Further, data suggested that language and cultural similarities facilitated AIS' relationship with culturally and racially similar groups, like Izwayyed (2014) found. To illustrate, Mugisha explained that "there is already the language that we have in common and a lot of similarities." Associating with racially and culturally similar groups is not unusual in acculturation literature. In fact, in a recent study, Vaccarino, Feekery and Matanimeke (2021), emphasized that despite living in a host culture environment, international students tend to relate to culturally and racially similar groups rather than to domestic students. The authors described this as birds of a feather ending up flocking together. However, findings from this study extends understanding about possible reasons why AIS would develop these relationships and benefits they perceived towards their acculturation.

As reflected in the literature, (Constantine et al., 2005; Izwayyed, 2014; Vaccarino et al., 2021) findings indicated that participants developed friendships with other international students during their early adjustment. It was evident from the data that most of participants' friendships with other international students were intercultural friendships i.e., the international students were

from distinct cultures than the participants. Contrary to findings in Sias et al., (2008) cultural differences did not seem to hinder the success of these friendships. It appeared that the success of these friendships was due to the shared status of being international students and the shared experiences that this would engender. For instance, in Mugisha's experience, international students in her classes would mostly "come over to say hi because they know that you are going through the same things as them" while Canadian students would "stay on their phone." Further, data suggested that participants' intercultural friendships with other international students facilitated their psychological adaptation by constituting a support system for them. For instance, Ruth recounted that her relationships with international students helped because "we're figuring things out together." According to her, "not having to do it alone kind of made the transition easier because I knew that I wasn't in this alone" and "we kind of figured out life in Halifax together."

International students may as a matter of necessity seek to establish new relationships in their host country. This is because they have mostly left their friendships and familiar sources of social support behind in their home countries (Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Izwayyed, 2014). It however appeared that Canadian students could have been less disposed to doing this because they were more likely to have established friendship circles and support systems. The success of participants' intercultural friendships with other international students could also be due partly to the fact that international students' early adjustment is mostly characterized by a need for support. As Mugisha explained, "when you come for the first time, you are nervous in class. That's your first time in that country or in that environment."

Findings suggested that participants experienced isolation and loneliness in response to not having established friendship systems. This appeared to be a motivating factor for some participants to attempt to establish intercultural relationships with Canadians. For instance, Tayo

explained that she had not had any success with developing intercultural friendships with Canadians and “this place can be lonely if you don't relate to people.” This lends credence to Boafo-Arthur (2014), Gareis et al., (2011) and Constantine et al's, (2005) findings that international students experience isolation and loneliness in response to difficulties they experienced with developing intercultural friendships. Further, Smith and Khawaja (2011), conclude that friendships with individuals from the host culture helped reduce loneliness among international students.

All but one participant believed that their intercultural friendships with Canadians had impacted their acculturation positively. For Naheem, his friendship with his Canadian roommate was an indicator that he had started to adjust to Canadian society. Participants identified a deeper appreciation of divergent cultural values, improved intercultural communication skills, increased tolerance for difference and opportunities for sociocultural learning as benefits they got from these friendships. This supports Kim's (2001) claim that friendships with host nationals provide international students with access to the daily lives of host nationals and enrich their understanding of the host culture and communication patterns in the host country.

For Mugisha who believed that her friendship with Canadians had not impacted her acculturation significantly, length of friendship seemed to play a role in informing her opinion. To illustrate, Mugisha believed that her friendships with Canadians “did not last long enough” for her to perceive any benefit to her acculturation. Acculturation literature provides evidence for the benefit of intercultural friendships on international students' sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Further, intercultural friendships with host nationals facilitates international students' acculturation, satisfaction, contentment, social support, and success (Berry, 2006; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

To conclude, AIS experiences developing intercultural friendships with Canadians during their acculturation can be viewed as a continuum where developing these relationships appeared to be predicated on higher levels of acculturation. This finding is consistent with Torres & Rollock's (2004) findings that international students only develop intercultural friendships later in their acculturation. During their early adjustment AIS developed relationships with culturally and racially similar groups as well as with other international students. Findings indicate that these relationships facilitated participants sociocultural and psychological adaptation. As will be later discussed, beyond the convenience and familiarity of relating to culturally and racially similar groups, participants reported experiencing some challenges that inhibited them from developing intercultural friendships with Canadians. Regardless, participants expressed interest in developing friendships with Canadians and mostly believed that these relationships held positive benefits for their acculturation.

Factors that facilitate or inhibit intercultural friendship formation with Canadians.

This research question sought to understand the challenges AIS encountered with developing intercultural friendships with Canadians as well as the factors that facilitate these relationships. Findings indicated that participants desired to establish friendships with Canadians but encountered some challenges with initiating these relationships. The challenges they identified include personal reasons, cultural and religious differences, communication-related barriers, experiences with racism, and COVID-19 restrictions. Further, age, exposure, similarities, and agency were factors that facilitated intercultural friendship development with Canadians.

Challenges with Establishing Intercultural Friendships with Canadians.

Developing intercultural friendships could be likened to walking through unfamiliar grounds with eyes closed and being expected not to hit a wall. This is because the nature of

intercultural friendships makes it such that cultural differences are almost inevitable and this generally seems to increase the potential for conflict, misunderstanding and miscommunication in these friendships. Consequently, in intercultural friendships there tends to be a lack of similar cultural backgrounds or orientations on which friendship could be premised. Participants generally shared their desire to establish friendships with Canadians but highlighted some constraints they had encountered with initiating these friendships.

Some individual related factors seemed to explain participants' reluctance to make efforts to connect with Canadians and slowed down their attempts to do so. For instance, Taiwo and Naheem identified shyness as a constraint to developing intercultural friendships with Canadians. Further, limited opportunities to connect with Canadians emerged as a factor that impeded intercultural friendship formation, similar to findings in Kudo & Simkin (2003). It appeared that both personal and contextual reasons may have contributed to this. On one hand, the shift from physical to online classes and restrictions on social gatherings because of the Covid-19 Pandemic was shown to play some role in inhibiting participants' access to activities that could otherwise foster the development of intercultural friendships with Canadians. To illustrate, Taiwo said she "arrived (in Canada) in the wake of the pandemic and people were not so open to mingling with other people and could not go out to socialize." Mbous, Mohamed, & Rudisill (2022), found this to be an effect of Covid 19 restrictions on international students' acculturation. On the other hand, findings suggest that the ways AIS spent their time also impacted intercultural friendship development with Canadians. For instance, Tayo identified always being on the phone with her friends in Nigeria as a constrain.

Further, cultural differences emerged as a factor that impeded intercultural friendship formation between AIS and Canadians. Similarly, existing literature (CBIE 2014; Leung, 2015;

Smith & Khawaja, 2011) identify cultural differences as a factor that mitigates intercultural friendship formation. It appeared that differences participants encountered when trying to relate to Canadians could have been exacerbated by the high degree of cultural distance between participant' home cultures and their host culture (Berry, 2006; Girmay, 2017; Ward et al., 2001). To illustrate, findings revealed that participants' views about what constitutes close friendships and their expectations about the norms of friendship formation seemed to differ from that of their Canadian interlocutors and this impeded friendship formation. AIS seemed to prefer a level of intimacy in their friendships, while their Canadian interlocutors seemed okay with bonding over outdoor activities, and this suggested less intimacy from the perspective of participants.

In Mugisha's experience her Canadian interlocutors only invited her to go camping and hiking however, she desired to have "Good Canadian friends" which for her, would imply visiting each other's homes, doing holidays together, having intimate conversations etc. Collier (2007) asserted that "ideas about what friendship is, as well as norms for what friends should and should not do, are learned in national, ethnic, and socioeconomic class group contexts" (p. 320). Cultural differences are an expected attribute of intercultural friendships and the success of this kinds of friendships is usually reflective of friends' ability to navigate these differences successfully.

Although the data point to cultural differences between participants' home cultures and their understanding of Canadian culture, findings suggest that some of the differences participants initially perceived were later challenged. For instance, Ruth said, "I didn't make friends with any of them because I thought that we did not have anything in common." However, she revealed that some of her assumptions were disproved when she developed friendships with Canadians later in her acculturation. This suggests that when approaching intercultural friendship formation, it is

possible for such initial assumptions to be made. In this case, there appeared to be no obvious similarity as well as cultural similarity on which friendship could be premised.

Further, data suggests cross-cultural differences in the way friendship was established in participants' home cultures compared to Canadian culture as Smith & Khawaja (2011) found. Participants reported going into intercultural encounters with the expectation that as in their home countries making small talk or having a conversation with Canadian interlocutors in class would set the tone for subsequent interactions and or friendship. However, it appeared that their interlocutors felt no obligation to maintain communication despite having had initial contact. Also, Tayo wanted to be able to call her friends on phone, but it appeared that her Canadian interlocutors would not exchange phone numbers.

These findings could be understood further with reference to the degree of cultural distance between participants' home cultures and Canadian culture. To illustrate, collectivist cultures like participants' home cultures have been found to value intimate relationships while individualist cultures may embrace more superficial relationships (Constantine et al., 2005; Ward et al., 2001). According to Izwayyed (2014), "Canadians tend to regard intercultural friendships as a function of socializing, activity-sharing, fun seeking and cultural learning" (p. 72). It appears that international students will evaluate the quality of their intercultural friendships with reference to their own cultural standpoint and this could be different from the cultural norms that guide intercultural friendships in their host culture. Awareness about cross-cultural differences like this may help international students better understand the tendencies of their Canadian friendships in culturally appropriate ways and this could apply to Canadians in intercultural friendships with international students as well.

It was evident from the data that AIS experienced communication related barriers to friendship formation with Canadians. These were mostly related to perceived accent and interlocutor related (Douglas, Doe, & Cheng, 2020; Vaccarino et al., 2021) and not related to language proficiency (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Leung, 2015). Participants reported finding their Canadian interlocutors' speech too fast. This appeared to be a significant challenge for participants who had only recently arrived in Canada. To illustrate, Tayo, who had only been in Canada for six months when data was collected thought that "their pace when they're talking is one of the challenges." This could be because speech in Tayo's home culture is generally not fast paced compared to the Canadian context. Effective communication is crucial to intercultural friendship development. It is possible that some level of awareness on the part of Canadian interlocutors may be key to overcoming this barrier. As Douglas, Doe, and Cheng (2020) discussed Canadian interlocutors may be unaware that newcomers sometimes struggle with understanding them.

Interlocutors' disposition towards participants' accents also impacted their confidence about initiating friendship with Canadians, as Girmay (2017) found. To illustrate, when Rebecca's Canadian interlocutors made her "feel like I don't understand English, and they are trying hard to understand me" she became more reserved "even though I'm normally a talkative person." According to her, intercultural encounters with Canadians became "so frustrating for me." It was evident from the situation that her interlocutors' reactions, even though they could have been unintended, had started to take a toll on Rebecca's second language confidence, something (Masgoret & Ward, 2006) defined as one's belief in being able to communicate effectively in a second language.

It appeared from the data that participants might have experienced second language anxiety related to their perceptions that their accents could be a barrier to effective communication with their Canadian interlocutors. This anxiety seemed to impede intercultural friendship formation. Taiwo for instance, wondered if her Canadian interlocutors would “be able to understand me or understand my accent” when considering initiating friendship with Canadians. This is consistent with Girmay’s (2017), study where he reported that “students’ accents led to feelings of anxiety.” (p. 151). On the other hand, Ruth sometimes found that her interlocutors had some trouble with understanding her even though they nodded their heads and would not admit it. She said, “So, it’s like sometimes when you are speaking, the accent can be a barrier in communicating.” These findings suggest that opportunities to facilitate mutual understanding across groups may need to be explored.

Beyond the challenges that have been highlighted so far, findings suggest that AIS race and the realities they had to confront because of this, significantly impeded opportunities to establish friendships with Canadians and sometimes AIS motivation to do this. Similar to other research on Black students’ experiences (Coleman 2018; Constantine et al. 2005; Girmay 2017; Headley 2018; Zewolde, 2020) participants reported experiencing race-based discrimination or racism that impeded friendship formation with Canadians. Further, it was evident from the data that participants thought their classroom environment was sometimes hostile or “uncomfortable” due to discriminatory treatment from some of their Canadian classmates. For instance, Ruth explained her reluctance to initiate friendship with Canadians by referencing “a really bad (classroom) experience in my first year” which she described as a “racist” occurrence.

It appeared that participants were sometimes excluded during classroom group work, and this seemed to impede friendship formation. To illustrate, Taiwo reported that she “never heard

her name” when other group members were asked to contribute to group work. This led to feelings of being viewed as incompetent and led to Taiwo holding back ideas she had. Similarly, Black students in Lee and Rice’s (2007), study “felt ignored in lessons or excluded by other students” because they were left out of students’ study groups or social events (p. 397).

These findings point to an opportunity to focus on environmental or contextual factors that may contribute to the dearth of intercultural friendships between AIS and Canadians. It appears that AIS experiences with racism would lead to negative perceptions about Canadians and further confirm stereotypes that AIS seemed to believe that their Canadian interlocutors have about them, and this seemed to demotivate them from attempting to initiate friendships with Canadians. Like Taiwo who described the atmosphere in some of her classes as “uncomfortable” participants in Lee and Rice (2007), identified “feelings of discomfort” based on the atmosphere they perceived in their university (p. 396). Further, Taiwo explained that a Nigerian friend of hers had her contribution to groupwork taken out by a Canadian group member on the pretext that it wasn’t “weighty” enough. These experiences seemed to reinforce the impression of participants like Taiwo, Ruth, and Rebecca’s that Canadian students viewed them as unintelligent, as Constantine et al., (2015) found. Further, in their review of acculturation literature, Lee and Rice (2007), noted that studies point to different levels of social acceptance towards international students based on their national origins as well as cultural backgrounds.

Findings revealed that participants believed that their interlocutors had race-based misconceptions about them that might have informed some of their actions, similar to findings in Girmay (2017). For instance, speaking about the “indirect exclusion of Africans or Blacks from classroom conversations,” Taiwo reported that she and her other African international student friends had repeatedly experienced the same thing and they thought “Canadians don't really see

Africans as intellectual enough. They don't see Black people as people that are sound enough to bring much to the table.” Race based discrimination that participants experienced and the stereotype threats they perceived in their classrooms illustrate that the host culture’s climate or environmental factors contributes significantly to the quality of international students’ acculturation experiences (Lee & Rice, 2007; Leung, 2015) and impeded intercultural friendship formation with Canadians.

A tenet of Critical Race Theory is that racism is deeply embedded in North American culture and needs to be recognized and brought to consciousness to be combatted. These findings further shed light on the need to provide opportunities to diffuse the racial misunderstanding that seemed to exist between these group of students.

Factors that Facilitated Intercultural Friendships with Canadians.

Despite the seemingly gloomy outlook noticeable in the data that participants shared about their experiences with developing intercultural friendships there were some examples of successful friendships with Canadians. It was interesting to note that despite the negative experiences that participants had shared about intercultural friendship formation they still expressed a strong desire to develop intercultural friendships with Canadians. It was apparent from the data that as AIS’ acculturation progressed, they started to overcome some of the barriers they encountered with friendship formation with Canadians and adopt strategies to make these relationships work. Participants felt that similarities they observed between them, and their Canadian interlocutors were a significant factor that facilitated friendship development, like findings in other studies (Izwayyed, 2014; Sias et al. 2008). For instance, Taiwo, Ruth and Naheem observed that sharing similar “ideas, interests and common ground” facilitated their intercultural friendships with Canadians and “made us closer.”

Findings indicated that taking agency was associated with improvements AIS saw in their ability to make friends with Canadians and the intercultural friendships they were able to establish with Canadians. For instance, Naheem tried to “pop up conversations that kind of relates to the other person” during intercultural encounters with Canadians while Ruth started to “engage in conversations with Canadians that happened to be friends with my other African friends.” Meier and Daniels (2011) suggested that rather than waiting for opportunities to connect with host nationals to present itself, students in an international context must make deliberate and intentional effort to make these connections happen. It appeared that participants generally had an ‘aha’ moment in their acculturation where they became more aware of the need to be more deliberate about establishing relationships with Canadians. For Rebecca, this moment did not occur until she was in her third year and “I had to talk to myself.... For me to grow in this community, I have to get to know people.”

Participants indicated that exposure or prior intercultural experience on the part of Canadian interlocutors also played a role in facilitating friendship formation with Canadians, as Izwayyed (2014) found. Data suggested that Canadians who already had other international student friends were more tolerant and open, and this seemed to facilitate friendship formation. It is possible that Canadians who already have a diverse friend circle might have better developed intercultural communication skills as well as a heightened tolerance for difference. Hence, it would appear that these could be some benefits of intercultural friendships for host nationals.

Age played a role in facilitating friendship formation with Canadians. Specifically, two participants found older Canadians were more likely to seek meaningful relationships across racial divides and contribute to acculturation. According to Taiwo, “tend to relate more with people regardless of your race or anything, So, they tend to strike up friendly conversations

with you.” Also, Naheem emphasized that older Canadians could contribute to international students’ successful acculturation because they could serve as guides on sociocultural norms, and they have “more experience in life.” Dei (2022)¹ described elders as “cultural holders, community educators, mentors and socializing agents” (Slide 7). Hence, a possible explanation is that older Canadians (40’s and above from participants’ perspectives) would generally be described as elders in participants’ home cultures. In participants’ home cultures elders play the significant role of guiding the youth and sharing their wisdom gained from life experiences. This could further explain why Naheem seemed to value relationships with older Canadians.

Increased opportunities to connect with Canadians which was made possible by the ease in COVID-19 restrictions also appeared to facilitate intercultural friendship formation with Canadians, in participants’ experiences. During the individual interviews (approximately 1 month after the focus group took place), two participants who had mentioned not having Canadian friends during the focus group said that they had started to develop these relationships. Izwayyed (2014) found that more opportunities to connect with Canadians is a factor that facilitated intercultural friendship formation among her participant group. Findings from this study points to an opportunity to understand some of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students’ experiences. Two of the participants in this study arrived in Canada just when the pandemic began and had not been able to socialize. This suggests that being in the middle of a pandemic while this study was conducted could have impacted the results in some ways seeing that this period was marked by limited opportunities for contact.

Race and Acculturation

1. How do AIS’ racialized identities impact their acculturation experiences?

This research question sought to determine the implications of AIS racialized identities for their experiences as they adjusted to their host culture. This question emerged from emergent narratives from the data that indicated that race played a significant role in the acculturation experiences of AIS. Findings revealed that having their identities racialized had an overarching effect on AIS acculturation experiences. Further, data shed light on the intersection between race, racism, and the acculturation experiences of AIS. Specifically, themes that emerged from the data include navigating racialized identity: becoming Black, racial segregation and stereotyping, hegemony in classrooms, no formal systems of support, coping strategies for stereotype threats. In this section, I present a brief discussion to complement earlier discussion that accompanied the counter stories of participants' race related experiences presented in the findings.

Race and Acculturation

As earlier discussed, the concept of race has different meanings and indeed implications for different people. Parris and Brigham (2010), define racialization as the process of classifying people with reference to the social construct of race. They emphasized that the power of race "is sustained through the perseverance of racism and processes of racialization." (p. 211). Upon arrival in Canada, most AIS must assume an identity that has been cut out for them i.e., Blackness. In essence they must become racialized even though this is a reality that they had not experienced previously.

Findings from this study suggest that for AIS the challenges or stressors typical of the acculturation process are compounded by race, the racialization of their identities and the realities of racism that they had to confront because of these. Specifically, participants reported that before their arrival in Canada they had conceptualized their identities in terms of their ethnicity and culture. However, when they arrived in Canada, they had to assume an identity that has been cut

out for them i.e., Blackness. This seemed to have implications for their experiences as they navigated the acculturation process, as Constantine et al. (2005) found. It appeared that participants considered the identity of Blackness to be synonymous with their experiences with racism. To illustrate, alluding to its effect on shaping her experiences, Mugisha described Blackness as something she did not “experience” until she left her home country. Similarly, participants in Girmay (2017), study reported that they had to reconceptualize their identities in terms of race upon arriving as AIS in the US.

Because this was a reality that they had never had to confront, participants reported that they mostly understood their experiences with racism in retrospect, years into their acculturation. Noreiga and Justin (2020) described this phenomenon as racial awakening. It was evident from the data that navigating this was an additional pressure AIS had to deal with alongside adjusting to a new academic system and sociocultural milieu that was mostly different from their home cultures. Further, participants reported facing racial segregation and stereotyping that impacted their psychological adaptation and, in some cases, led to trauma. For instance, Mugisha (a Rwandan student) reported being traumatized by a classroom experience where a classmate had categorized Rwandans as “fragile and ticking bombs” during a class presentation on the genocide in Rwanda.

Further, Ruth and Taiwo reported experiences with being racially segregated in class. For Ruth, racial segregation implied that she got a bad grade in a course. Similarly, in Lee and Rice’s (2007), study AIS reported being “left out of students’ study groups or social events” (p.397). Findings in this study extend understanding of some of the practical implications of AIS experiences with racial segregation for their learning outcomes. These findings also point to the

implication of AIS race-based experiences for their psychological and sociocultural adaptation, the quality of their learning experiences and educational outcomes.

Findings indicated that hegemonic nature or the overwhelming centering of classroom content on Canadian culture and perspectives had a negative impact on AIS acculturation and learning experiences. An implication was that participants sometimes felt a lack of connection to class content. Also, they indicated that they mostly did not have the prerequisite background knowledge to make sense of classroom examples. In addition to hegemony, participants' experiences seem to spotlight the need for a more globalized or inclusive curriculum that makes room for diversity in Canadian classrooms. It further appears to raise the question of the university's preparedness to cater to the educational needs of international students and make them feel welcome and included in classrooms.

These race related narratives from the data appear to reveal a hierarchy of systems that reinforces the normalcy or dominance of one group over another in participants' classrooms. It could also be argued that these narratives bring up the question of privilege. For instance, a student categorically emphasizes the irrelevance of another students' contribution to classwork while another pointedly ignores a participant during a group work, where everyone else is asked to contribute. While some students can relate to classroom examples, some cannot, hence, they are inadvertently excluded from accessing knowledge.

Despite the serious implications of AIS race-based experiences for their acculturation and learning outcomes, findings suggest an absence of clear institutionalized mediums or formal systems to address these experiences. Participants reported that when considering how to respond to their race-based experiences they didn't know "who to talk to, who to go to, or where to go to". Further, they were worried about not being believed or understood if they reported their

experiences. For Taiwo, “. I don't want to bring up that topic because it's a classroom environment and the last thing I want to do is try to bring up topics like that. So, I just want to do my work and get going.” Another possible explanation for AIS reluctance to report racist experiences is that collectivist cultures tend to emphasize the need to maintain group harmony by avoiding direct confrontations (Ward et al., 2001). It follows that like Taiwo who said she just wanted to do her work and get going, AIS might be very unlikely to call out these situations when they occurred in class regardless of the implications for them.

Findings point to an underlying narrative on AIS' resilience as a coping strategy for navigating racism and stereotype threats. Taiwo reported trying to “excel in everything I do” and attempting to change the narrative about Africans by being successful. It appeared that participants had taken on the additional pressure of disproving stereotypes they believed were held about them. Similarly, AIS in Nebedum-Ezeh and Chizoba (1997), reported studiousness and working harder as a way of coping with barriers they encountered with adjustment.

“Ààjò ò le dùn tíí kí onílé má rélé”– Every exciting or interesting adventure leads you back home. - Nigerian Proverb

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of the acculturation stressors and facilitators for AIS at a small Canadian university focusing on racialization, intercultural friendships, and pragmatic competence. Conclusions from this study are drawn from the findings with reference to the focal points of the research questions that this study sought to answer namely, pragmatic competence, intercultural friendships, racialization, and acculturation.

Efforts to provide relevant support to improve international students’ learning experiences and facilitate their successful acculturation need to catch up with internationalization efforts in Canada. The findings of this study point to an opportunity to provide relevant support to facilitate AIS acculturation and more specifically to improve the quality of their learning experiences and acculturation experiences.

Findings on pragmatic competence provide insight into the challenges that AIS encounter with aspects of pragmatic competence and further reinforce understanding of the centrality of pragmatic competence to the successful acculturation of international students. Further, the findings provide crucial information on aspects of AIS cultural backgrounds that seemed to heighten some of the challenges they reported experiencing with aspects of pragmatic competence. Challenges that AIS encountered with pragmatic competence made it difficult for them to participate fully in their host culture. It was evident from the findings that despite having language proficiency deemed necessary for successful completion of academic programs, AIS struggled with adjusting to Canadian academic culture as they experienced it at MSVU as well as the

sociocultural norms that guide this space, which they shared is quite different from academia in their home cultures. It appeared that AIS had limited access to pragmatic knowledge relevant to their academic acculturation.

A conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that universities must put proactive measures in place to better support and provide opportunities for AIS to access pragmatic knowledge especially those pertinent to their academic acculturation. It is apparent that explicit pragmatic instruction would be beneficial because despite being pertinent to acculturation, some sociocultural norms “tend to operate below the level of consciousness and even sensitive sojourners may miss some vital cues” (Ward et. al., 2001, p. 59). Aspects of pragmatic competence that participants had challenges with could be targeted for instruction. It is important to acknowledge the impossibility of presenting sociocultural norms as a specific set of homogenous rules that would apply to all Canadians. Below I present a recommendation on this.

Seeing that the data suggests that AIS generally will not draw benefits to their pragmatic competence that might be associated with taking EAL courses, a recommendation is that noticing activities that draw attention to pragmatic differences or that raise awareness about pragmatic knowledge could be incorporated into orientation programs geared towards AIS. Knowledge about aspects of their cultural backgrounds that seem to heighten challenges with pragmatic competence as well as aspects of pragmatics that they struggled with can be further harnessed to shape instruction. For instance, regarding the challenges AIS reported experiencing with conventions around writing emails to superiors, sample emails could be presented as guides. This could help AIS to notice differences or commonalities among the emails and engender discussion about cultural differences in the ways they would have presented similar information in their home cultures. Doing this will reflect an acknowledgement from the university that academic subcultures

differ across national contexts. Also, universities will be acknowledging their role in providing relevant support to international students as they transition into the Canadian academic context.

Further, findings from this study extend understanding about some of the developmental processes involved in second language or bilingual pragmatic competence development specifically in the case of AIS. This information could be relevant to understanding how AIS learn pragmatic competence and inform efforts to provide relevant instruction.

With reference to intercultural friendships with Canadians and race, findings from this study indicate that in addition to difficulties associated with intercultural friendship formation reflected in the literature e.g., cultural, and religious, shyness, communication related barriers, limited opportunities for contact- difficulties that AIS experience with intercultural friendship formation were sometimes associated with negative experiences with racism. Further, the results spotlight the pervasiveness of race related discrimination in the classroom experiences of AIS as well as their inability to relate to classroom content due to an overwhelming centering on Canadian culture and examples.

These findings point to the urgent need for universities to review their readiness to make learning more relevant to their African international student population. Also, universities may need to occupy a primary role in providing opportunities to facilitate intercultural contact and improve relationship between AIS and Canadian students as well as members of the wider community. This would help to improve mutual understanding and tolerance, promote cross cultural awareness, improve intercultural skills, dispel stereotypes, and diffuse the racial tension that seem to exist between both groups.

A recommendation is for universities to invest into promoting intercultural spaces and programs that would not only target international students (as is customary) but include domestic

students as well to promote intercultural friendship formation. Further, friendship groups could be created that focus on promoting intercultural friendships between AIS and domestic students. Programs like this are being run successfully in some universities. For instance, Michigan State University has an International Friendship Program where members of the university and community and international students sign up with the intention of being paired to facilitate intercultural friendships. As a former participant in this program, I would say that programs like this improve intercultural awareness and were the only opportunity for me as an AIS in the US to develop close friendships with Americans and to be invited into their homes. Six years later, I am still in contact with friends that I made from that program.

Classroom content could also be evaluated to ensure that best (inclusive) practices are adopted that would further serve to enrich the learning experiences of all student groups by taking advantage of the cultural diversity in classrooms. Further, with reference to the findings, proactive measures need to be put in place to check incidences of racism on campus. Thus, a recommendation is that in addition to ongoing diversity trainings in universities, there might be the need to institutionalize clear mediums to address racist occurrences on campus. This would reflect an awareness that these issues do happen and reiterate the universities' commitment to improving the learning and acculturation experiences of its African student population.

Findings on AIS race related experiences point to the need to consider the implications of race as a social construct and racialization as a lived reality for their acculturation as well as the role of the host society in reifying these systems. Experiences with racism can be reduced to individuals in real life as well as systems that facilitate the effects of this construct. Proactive rather than reactive measures must be put into place to curb these occurrences. In addition to promoting intercultural friendships, a recommendation is that diversity and inclusion training be extended

beyond faculty and staff to include students as well. This is because most of the racial segregation, discrimination and AIS race related experiences mostly emanated from intercultural encounters with Canadian students, specifically in the classroom context and during group work. A limitation to the examination of race in this study is that this study did not set out to examine race as a factor that could be salient to AIS acculturation experiences. Focusing on pragmatic competence and intercultural friendships implied that emergent narratives on AIS race-based experiences could only be examined on the fringes.

In view of the findings from this study, it is important to consider the role that host society should assume in facilitating the acculturation of AIS seeing how contextual and environmental factors in the host society hold serious implications for their acculturation and learning outcomes and contributed significantly to the quality of their acculturation experiences. As Berry (2005) discussed acculturation should be a bidirectional process.

Recommendations for Future Research

The result of this study point to the need to examine AIS' classroom experiences especially within smaller classroom groups to support efforts to improve their experiences. In addition, further research is needed to investigate the possible effect of gender on AIS racialized identities and on their acculturation. It is necessary to explore bilingual pragmatic competence development by collecting data on participants' broader pragmatic experiences rather than focusing on specific speech acts. This way, it may be possible to cover a broader range of pragmatic skill sets than is possible when specific speech acts are examined. Based on the limitations of this study, further research is needed to focus on the acculturation experiences of AIS from a race-based perspective.

Personal Reflections

The purpose of this study was to examine acculturation stressors and facilitators from the perspectives of AIS by focusing on racialization, pragmatic competence, and intercultural friendships. Analysis revealed broader race related issues that seemed to have an overarching effect on their acculturation experiences. In a context like Canada where the acculturation experiences of AIS are understudied, understanding the acculturation experiences of AIS is a first step in determining necessary courses of actions that must be taken to improve efforts to better support AIS. Clearly, university's role in facilitating AIS acculturation cannot stop at enrollment. While things can go back to normal in that internalization efforts and diversity trainings continue, while universities continue to reiterate their commitment to eliminating racial discrimination on their campuses, more can be done. The question today is this. Will we go back to the status quo, or chart new pathways to better serve AIS population in Canadian universities? How we proceed from here says a lot about the commitment to African international students not as enrolment figures but as individuals who have come into Canadian institutions, fully trusting that these institutions are prepared to receive them.

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Survey

1. Full Name: _____
2. Please indicate the country you grew up in _____
3. Which category below includes your age?
 - 17 or younger
 - 19 to 30
 - 30 to 40
 - 40 or older
4. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male
 - Other (specify) _____
5. Please indicate the number of years or months since you arrived in Canada _____
6. Please indicate your program of study at MSVU _____
7. What is your current level of education? E.g., Undergraduate or Graduate _____
8. Please identify the language(s) that you speak (including your first language)

9. Please indicate if the UBP or GPP were the first courses you took at MSVU or indicate N/A
if not applicable

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Interview Protocol

The questions are geared towards getting participants to reflect on their acculturation experiences from a communication standpoint before the individual interviews. In some cases, some questions were rephrased to give room for participants to better understand the questions. Using semi-structured interview protocols gave room for flexibility in the ways participants responded to the questions.

Pragmatic Competence

1. Think back over the first few days or weeks of your arrival in Canada, what were some of the things that stood out to you as differences from your previous experiences and culture. Prompt: How elders are addressed, the culture of respect, how politeness is expressed, directions, food, dressing etc. How have you been able to navigate these differences?
2. Please describe any successful or difficult intercultural encounters or conversations that you have had with Canadians or people from other cultures. What stands out to you from these experiences?
3. Have you noticed any differences or similarities (home vs host culture) regarding social expectations on how to act, greeting norms, sending emails to superiors, relating with elders etc. How did you learn about these?
4. Have there been situations where you had challenges communicating your intentions or where somebody else seemed not to understand what you meant by what you said?
 - a. Were these situations a result of cultural or language differences or challenges with language use?

- b. How have these experiences shaped the way that you handle subsequent interactions?

Intercultural Friendships

1. Think back over the time that you have spent here and the people that you have been in contact with. How would you describe your friend circle in Canada? Where are your friends from? Do you have Canadian friends? If yes,
 - a. How would you describe your friendships with these individuals?
 - b. What is the nature of your relationship? Are you close friends, acquaintances etc.?
 - c. In what ways have these friendships helped you to understand the language and culture better, if at all.
2. Compared to when you were in your home country, what are some similarities or differences you have observed (home vs host culture) in the way that relationships or friendships are formed here?
3. Do you have Canadian friends? What are some things that have been helpful in building these relationships?
4. Tell me about your relationships with Canadians in general. If you don't have Canadian friends, is this a deliberate choice? What are some challenges you have encountered with establishing these relationships? Prompts: language difficulties, lack of motivation to make friends, opportunities to connect with people.
5. For your successful intercultural friendships what characteristics of that person or what did they bring to the friendship that you think made it work better?

Acculturation

1. What were some of your expectations about blending in before you arrived in Canada? In what ways have your experiences been similar to or different from your expectations?
2. How would you rate your adjustment now compared to when you first arrived? What are some of the things that you think could help you adjust better?
3. What role has language played in your adjustment? You could reflect on any challenges that you have had with language use or your understanding Canadian culture and some of the ways you have navigated these.
4. What roles have your friendships with Canadians played in your adjustment?
5. What are some of the challenges that you have encountered with adjusting to being in Canada and being at MSVU?

APPENDIX C

Individual Interview Protocol

An initial review of participants' responses during the focus group was used to generate follow up questions for the individual interviews. The individual interviews provided the opportunity to follow up on participants' responses in the focus group interview and for participants to share their acculturation experiences in more depth. The protocol includes some questions that were tailored to participants' responses in the focus group. Each individual interview had some of these questions.

1. Some social expectations are cultural e.g., how younger people should relate with elders, what is considered as appropriate dressing, turn taking during conversations etc.
 - a. Have you had circumstances where you have been unsure about what would be appropriate for you to say or about specific social expectations? E.g., making a request, consoling a friend, thanking somebody for a favor, giving or responding to compliments, emailing a professor.
 - b. How were you able to navigate these situations?
 - c. How did you learn about some of these expectations?
2. What would be your description of someone who has successfully adjusted to Canadian culture e.g., in terms of what they are able to do, how involved they are with society, how they communicate etc.
3. What relationships have been pivotal towards your adjustment. In what ways have these friendships helped you to understand the language and culture better (in Canada), if at all.
4. Would you describe your home culture as very similar or dissimilar to Canadian culture?
In what ways?

5. You mentioned having initial doubts about your English language use during the focus group, can you speak about this further? What were some of your experiences that led to you having this perception?
6. You referred to differences in your personality since arriving in Canada. Can you go into more details about this?
7. You mentioned that friendship is somewhat different with younger Canadians. Can you discuss this further?
8. Do you think being able to understand conversations and communicate more effectively i.e., with an understanding of Canadian cultural nuances, makes it easier for you to adjust to the society here. What's your perspective on this? Or what are other predictors of successful adjustment or acculturation in your opinion?
9. What are some strategies that you use to navigate cultural differences when you have conversations with Canadians or locals?
10. You mentioned that you find it easier to relate with other international students than with Canadian students in your classes. Can you discuss this further?
11. What or who has been the greatest source of the knowledge of Canadian culture that you currently have?
12. You mentioned that you didn't try to make friends with Canadians because you had friendships that aided your adjustment when you first arrived. Has this changed over time?
13. You described your experience with racism during group work. How have incidences like this impacted your adjustment?

14. You spoke about not fitting into specific spaces during the focus group. Can you explain this in more detail?
15. You said it has been difficult to relate to Canadians that don't have international friends. Can you speak to this further?