

“Communicative Lingerings”: An Exploratory Study of the Emergence of ‘Foreign’ Communicative Features in the Interactions of American Expatriates After Re-entry

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Research has shown that learning a second language (L2) can have significant effects on a person’s primary language (L1). Whereas work in this area has typically focused on children, this exploratory study identified evidence of adult expatriates’ L1 strategies containing subconscious traces of L2 features after re-entry.

Drawing upon research in many fields including code switching, second language acquisition, culture shock and cross-cultural pragmatic awareness, data were collected via interviews with Americans (L1-English) who had recently repatriated from various countries around the world. Participants recounted experiences in which they had become aware that some feature of the former host country’s linguistic culture had manifested itself spontaneously in their English during interactions with others who did not share knowledge of the former host country’s ways. Such unintentional traces of foreign language behaviors were given the label, “Communicative Lingerings.” Analysis yielded three sub-categories: linguistic/paralinguistic lingerings (e.g. lexical insertion), interactional lingerings (e.g. expectations for ritualized exchanges), and perceptual lingerings (e.g. hyper-sensitization to environmental stimuli). Engaging in deeper metalinguistic discussion of these occurrences facilitated exploration of possible causes. Findings regarding lingerings and awareness of what causes them offer evidence for the need for more naturalistic context in L2 instruction to facilitate greater socio-pragmatic and pragmatic competence.

Key terms: second language acquisition (SLA), cross-cultural pragmatics, ethnographic interviewing