What causes culture shock?

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Sarkhan Jafarov
PhD in German Languages
Institution: Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University
Address: Guba, Azerbaijan
E-mail: sarxan_cafarov@mail.ru

Yusif Aliyev
Doctor of Philosophy
Institution: Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University
Address: Guba, Azerbaijan
E-mail: yusif_aliyev@adpu.edu.az

ABSTRACT
Culture shock can be described as the feelings one experiences after leaving one's family or home to live in another cultural or social environment. Many people associate culture shock with extreme changes from one country to another. Still, it can also be experienced closer to home, such as when travelling from one city to another within your own country. Even the most open-minded and culturally sensitive among us are not immune to culture shock. Culture shock isn't a clinical term or medical condition. It's simply a common way to describe a person's confusing and nervous feelings after leaving a familiar culture to live in a new and different culture. When you move to a new place, you will face many changes. That can be exciting, but it can also be overwhelming. You may feel sad, anxious, frustrated, and want to go home.

Keywords: Culture, Shock, Feelings, Changes, Travelling, Social Environment, Difficulty.

1 INTRODUCTION

Culture shock can be described as the feelings one experiences after leaving one's family or home culture to live in another cultural or social environment. Many people associate culture shock with extreme changes from one country to another. Still, it can also be experienced closer to home, such as when travelling from one city to another within your own country. Even the most open-minded and culturally sensitive among us are not immune to culture shock.

Culture shock isn't a clinical term or medical condition. It's simply a common way to describe a person's confusing and nervous feelings after leaving a familiar culture to live in a new and different culture. When you move to a new place, you will face many changes. That can be exciting, but it can also be overwhelming. You may feel sad, anxious, frustrated, and want to go home.
It's natural to have difficulty adjusting to a new culture. People from other cultures (whom you'll be hanging out with and going to school with) may have grown up with values and beliefs that differ from yours. Because of these differences, the things they talk about, how they express themselves, and the importance of various ideas may vary significantly from what you are used to. But the good news is that culture shock is temporary.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate and identify the primary causes of culture shock experienced by individuals when they encounter new cultural environments. By understanding the psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to culture shock, this research aims to provide a comprehensive framework for recognising and addressing the challenges associated with cultural transitions. The findings will offer insights into developing effective strategies for individuals and organisations to manage and mitigate the effects of culture shock, facilitating smoother adjustments to new cultural settings and enhancing cross-cultural interactions.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to understand the causes of culture shock comprehensively.

3.1 QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT

Survey Distribution: A structured survey will be administered to a diverse sample of individuals who have recently relocated to a new cultural environment. The survey will include questions related to demographic information, frequency and intensity of culture shock symptoms, and specific challenges faced.

Data Analysis: Statistical analysis will identify common patterns and correlations between demographic factors (such as age, gender, education level, and previous cross-cultural experience) and the severity of culture shock. This analysis will help identify critical predictors of culture shock.
3.2 QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

**In-depth Interviews:** A subset of survey participants will be interviewed semi-structured to gain deeper insights into their experiences with culture shock. These interviews will explore their emotional, social, and cognitive adjustment process.

**Thematic Analysis:** The interview data will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and narratives that provide a nuanced understanding of the subjective experiences and specific triggers of culture shock.

3.3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A comparative analysis will examine the differences in culture shock experiences across various demographic groups and cultural contexts. This will help identify specific factors that may influence the intensity and nature of culture shock in different settings.

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All participants will be informed about the study's purpose and given consent before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured throughout the research process, and participants will have the right to withdraw from the study without any repercussions.

By integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of what causes culture shock and to develop evidence-based recommendations for managing cultural transitions effectively.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Culture shock is a complex phenomenon that occurs when individuals are exposed to a significantly different cultural environment. This experience can lead to feelings of disorientation, anxiety, and stress. Understanding the causes of culture shock requires examining various theoretical perspectives that elucidate psychological, sociological, and anthropological factors.

From a psychological perspective, the *Adjustment and Adaptation Theory* posits that culture shock arises from the challenges individuals face in adjusting to new social norms, values, and practices. Personality traits, previous experiences, and individual coping mechanisms can influence this adjustment
process. The U-Curve Model further explains the emotional stages of culture shock, which include initial excitement, crisis, recovery, and adjustment (Zhang; Goodson, 2011).

Sociologically, the Social Identity Theory highlights the role of social group dynamics in culture shock. When individuals enter a new culture, they may need help losing familiar social roles and support networks, leading to identity confusion and isolation. The Acculturation Theory emphasises the interaction between the individual and the host culture, identifying four acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalisation. Each strategy impacts the intensity and duration of culture shock differently.

Anthropologically, the Cultural Distance Hypothesis suggests that the more significant the cultural difference between an individual’s home culture and the new culture, the more severe the culture shock. This hypothesis underscores the importance of cultural understanding and competence in mitigating culture shock (Ward; Szabó, 2019).

In summary, culture shock is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by psychological adjustment, social identity, and cultural distance. Understanding these theoretical frameworks provides a comprehensive approach to analysing and addressing the causes of culture shock.

Table 1: Theoretical Perspectives on Causes of Culture Shock

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Perspective</th>
<th>Key Concepts</th>
<th>Implications for Culture Shock</th>
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<td>Adjustment and Adaptation</td>
<td>Adjustment to new norms, values, practices</td>
<td>Individual coping mechanisms influence adjustment process</td>
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<td>U-Curve Model</td>
<td>Stages: excitement, crisis, recovery, adjustment</td>
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<td>Social Identity Theory</td>
<td>Social group dynamics, loss of familiar roles</td>
<td>Identity confusion, sense of isolation</td>
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Source: by Sarkhan Jafarov
5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Understanding culture shock helps to understand culture. You may know that genes determine a big part of how you look and act. You might not know that your environment—your surroundings—significantly affects your appearance and behaviour.

Your environment isn't just the air and food you breathe; culture is a big part of your environment. Culture comprises the everyday things the community learn from family, friends, media, literature, and strangers. These are the things that influence how they look, act, and communicate. Often, you don't even know you're learning these things because they become second nature to you — for instance, the way you shake hands with someone when meeting them when you eat your meals each day, the kind of things you find funny, or how you view religion (Jafarov, 2024).

When you go to a new place, such as a new country or even a new city, you often enter a culture that is different from the one you left. Sometimes, your culture and your unique culture are similar. Other times, they can be very different and even contradictory. What might be perfectly normal in one culture — for instance, spending hours eating a meal with your family — might be unusual in a culture that values a more fast-paced lifestyle.

The differences between cultures can make adjusting to new surroundings very difficult. You may encounter unfamiliar clothes, weather, food, different people, schools, and values. You may need help to do things in your new surroundings that were easy back home. Dealing with the differences can be very unsettling; those feelings are part of adjusting to a new culture (Smith; Khawaja, 2011).

On the other hand, some people never wanted to move in the first place. Their frustration starts when they realise they have to move to a new location when they're pleased with where they are. It continues as they find out just how unfamiliar their new home is.

Though people experience culture shock in different ways, these feelings are common: not wanting to be around people who are different from you, sadness, loneliness, anxiety, trouble concentrating, feeling left out or misunderstood, developing negative and simplistic views of the new culture, frustration, extreme homesickness.

These complex feelings may tempt you to isolate yourself from your new surroundings and dismiss the new culture. It's best not to withdraw like this. If you stay calm, observe and learn, and keep things in perspective, your difficulties will likely pass. But suppose you're feeling depressed and unable to function normally even after the first few months in your new environment. In that case, you should talk to a parent or trusted adult about whether to seek help from a physician or mental health professional.

So, how do you deal with your frustrations and fears? How can you begin to feel comfortable in your new surroundings?
Depending on where you come from and where you are now, you may or may not have trouble with the native language. Becoming comfortable with the language as soon as possible is a good idea. Not understanding what people are saying is almost as frustrating as not knowing how to make people understand what you are saying.

Lots of good resources are around to help you practice. Many schools with many students new to the country have language classes. If your school doesn't offer one, check out some of your area's community centres and libraries. In addition, books are good resources, and some websites are, too.

Whatever method you choose, practice is critical. Many people are worried about speaking a language they aren't entirely comfortable with and think that people who say it well will tease them when they stumble over words. This might tempt you to practice the language with someone at the same comfort level as you, but it's also essential to practice with people who have mastered the language to know when you make a mistake and learn from it (Demes; Geeraert, 2015).

It might make you uncomfortable when it takes you twice as long to say the same thing as a native speaker or when you use the wrong word, but remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

Even if you're familiar with the new language spoken around you, chances are you don't know much of the slang — casual speech that doesn't make it into translation dictionaries (or most dictionaries, for that matter). This is one of the many reasons why studying the culture you are immersed in is a good idea. Much of the anxiety of moving to a new place is due to not knowing what to expect in your new environment. Learning things about your new environment will help you become more comfortable.

School is a great place to do this. Watch and learn from the people around you — see how the students interact with teachers. Find out what your classmates do for fun and what things are important to them.

You can also get some insight from television and movies, but be careful — not everything you see on the screen is meant to be realistic. But these media help if you're still trying to learn the language or catch up on some slang, and at the very least, give you something to talk about when trying to make a new friend.

You don't have to love everything you learn about the culture or start acting like others do, but when you know what people mean when they say specific phrases or why they dress a certain way, you begin to feel better.

Your accent might be different from everybody else's. Your clothes may also be very different from those around you. Sometimes, being different can be difficult, especially compared to the other kids at school. But some people at your school will want to get to know you because your differences seem cool. Different people, though, might try to give you a hard time.
Some people who try to tease you might do so because of stereotypes. Stereotypes are simplified ideas one group holds about another, often exaggerated or distorted negatively. An example of a stereotype would be that everyone with curly hair is lazy. Like this example, stereotypes are usually wrong and can be hurtful.

If someone harasses you, walk away — don't give the person the satisfaction of seeing that their comments bother you. Talk about it with good friends, siblings, or parents if you can't shake off the words. The people who love you and know you're a great person can often help you understand that the bully has no idea what they are talking about. It also helps to find people at school to hang out with who are cool enough not to care what the bully says.

As much as you would hate to be boxed into a specific type, try to avoid doing the same to others. These characterisations are just as unfair as the ones people might use to describe you. And beliefs in these can get in the way of making some good friends.

It's important to realise that some people have an easier time adjusting to a new culture than others. Sometimes, if family members have an easy transition, they'll be a great source of support — a group of people going through something very much like what you're going through. In addition, your family can play a big part in keeping ties to home.

But sometimes, family members might want to keep your ties to home too tight. Your parents might not expect the changes that may happen as you begin to learn more about your new culture. Or they might need your help understanding the new culture, especially if you know the language better. Be patient with them; chances are they're trying to manage their culture shock — just like you.

You can do a lot to help yourself adjust to a new culture. But don't forget that you aren't alone — there are people you can go to who can help:

Find someone with experience with culture shock — maybe an older relative who moved to the area before you did. Ask how they handled the newness of their surroundings.

If you don't know someone who has been through what you're going through, try talking to counsellors and teachers at your new school. They've been trained to help all students deal with various concerns. Although they may not have personal experience with culture shock, they have experience assisting people in dealing with rough times.

Making friends who aren't new to the culture may help you better understand it and have someone to talk to when feeling down.

Rather than giving up your culture so you can fit in, keep your mind open to new ways of doing and thinking about things. Notice the same things and the different things — appreciating that variety is what makes people so interesting.
Everyone feels the pressure to fit in at one time or another — whether they've lived in the area for days or years. But don't feel you need to change everything about yourself to stand out less. All your experiences before you came to your new home are part of you and what makes you unique.

6 CONCLUSION

Here are a few tips for making sure your new culture doesn't overpower the old:

Educate people about your culture. Just because you're entering a new culture doesn't mean you should be doing all the learning. Take the opportunity to teach classmates and new friends about your culture; they may know little about it. It will also help them to learn more about you in the process. Please invite them for traditional dishes from your culture, or show them how you celebrate your holidays.

Keep in touch with home. When you moved, you probably left behind good friends and family. Keep in touch if it will be a long time until your next visit. Email, text, Skype, or call so you can stay updated on what's happening there and talk about your new experiences. You've left people and other things behind like your favourite hanging spot. This can comfort you while away and help you minimise reverse culture shock when you get home.

Remember, the key to overcoming your culture shock is understanding the new culture and finding a way to live comfortably within it while keeping true to the parts of your culture you value.

It's important to be yourself. Avoid forcing yourself to change too fast or too many things simultaneously. You will have your own pace of adjusting. Everyone goes through changes in their life, and it may seem that you are going through more changes than the average person — but as long as you hold on to what's important to you and find a good combination between old and new, you'll be fine.
REFERENCES


