

A Brief Description of Culture Shock Among Latin American Nationals in South Korea

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Abstract This document aims to identify the main causes of culture shock experienced by Latin American nationals who visited South Korea. A brief literature review on the subject of culture shock and cultural adaptation is included. The revised Socio-Cultural Adjustment Scale (SCAS-R) developed by Wilson (2013) was turned into an online survey and used as data gathering instrument.

(N=64) Sixty-four respondents answered the 21-question survey sent through a specific group in a major social networking site. Four major categories were surveyed; social interactions, language barriers, religion and traditions and personal issues. According to the data gathered in the sample, and some findings discussed in the theory reviewed, the main causes of culture shock among Latin American nationals who visited South Korea were related to self-reported host country language abilities: understanding and speaking Korean language (M=2.36); reading and writing Korean language (M=2.28); varying the rate of speaking in a culturally appropriate manner (M=2.31).

Keywords Culture Shock, Socio-Cultural Adjustment Scale, Latin American, South Korea

1. Introduction

Cultural, diplomatic and economic influence of South Korea in Latin America has grown over the years. In 2005, South Korea became the second Asian non-

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borrowing member of the Inter-American Development Bank. Additionally, South Korea has forged Free Trade Agreements with Chile and Peru and it is pursuing FTAs with Colombia and Mexico.

According to TradeMap, trade flows have increased gradually, in 2001 Korean exports to Latin American countries amounted to \$9 Billion USD reaching \$28 Billion USD in 2015, imports from the region to South Korea were \$3 Billion USD in 2001 and reached \$15 Billion in 2015. (Trade Map, 2016) Additionally, Korean brands enjoy wide recognition and market share in Latin American countries, particularly in consumer electronics and automobiles. (Interbrand, 2016)

On the cultural front the Korean Wave (Hallyu - 한류) has also made a significant impact in Latin American audiences from wide demographics through cinema and K-Pop. Despite the geographical and cultural distance, the Internet, particularly social media has been the vehicle for diffusion; (Vargas & Park, 2015; Madrid-Morales & Lovric, 2015) have discussed the phenomenon using an innovative online approach.

The study of culture shock, the term first introduced by Oberg(1954), has spanned for several decades but remains a “*fractionated area of research*”, among the several approaches found in the literature there were those focused on cultural awareness, quality of relations, personal development, identity conflict, job performance, life satisfaction, communication effectiveness among others. (Ward & Kennedy, 1999)

An increasing number of visitors from the Latin American region is seen in the data available from the Korea Immigration Service Reports. Table 1, summarizes the total of visitors vis-à-vis visitors from the region focus of our study. Even

Table 1. Overview of Latin American Visitors to South Korea

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total foreign visitors	8.666.503	10.121.950	10.678.334	14.264.508
Total Latin American visitors	34.703	39.280	39.779	58.375

Source: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 출입국·외국인정책 통계연보

though, the proportion seems negligible (0.3% to 0.4% of total visitors) we consider this sample as an initial diagnostic on the most prevalent causes of culture shock and as a tool to improve cultural understanding.

2. Literature Review

This document focuses the attention on two major topics, on one hand, the concept of culture shock, on the other, cultural adaptation. Both topics have been widely discussed by researchers from all over the world. The academic literature regarding culture shock and cultural adaptation is abundant. A summary of the about the first is found in Zhou et al. (2008) and helped to categorize between the

Table 2. Traditional theoretical approaches to culture shock

Theory	Epistemological origin	Originator	Conceptual formulation
Grief and bereavement	Psychoanalytic tradition	Bowlby (1969)	Migration seen as an experience of loss
Locus of control	Applied social psychology	Rotter (1966)	Control beliefs predict migration
Selective migration	Socio-biology (Neo-Darwinism)	Wells (1907)	Individual fitness predicts adaptation
Expectations	Applied social psychology	Feather (1982)	Expectancy-values relate to adjustment
Negative life-events	Clinical psychology	Holmes & Rahe (1967)	Migration involves life changes, adaptation to change is stressful
Social support	Clinical psychology	Brown, Bhrolchain & Harris (1975)	Social skill offers a buffering effect between life-events and depression
Value difference	Social psychology	Merton (1938)	Value differences lead to poor adaptation
Social skills and culture learning	Social psychology	Argyle & Kendon (1967)	Lacking social skills may cause cross-cultural problems

Source: Zhou et al. (2008)

traditional and contemporary approaches to the subject as follows:

In the influential book by Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2001) the authors discuss the ABC model of culture shock. ABC stands for Affect, Behavior and Cognition in intercultural encounters. The model draws from a wide source of theoretical approaches and experimental research with all kinds of sojourners: tourists, students, business travelers, immigrants and refugees. Table 3 summarizes the ABC model of culture shock and cultural adaptation. The psychological approach is influenced by personality, life changes, coping mechanisms and others. On the

Table 3. ABC Model - Contemporary theories of intercultural contact

Theory	Conceptual Framework	Theoretical premise	Factors affecting adjustment	Intervention guidelines
Stress and Coping (Affect)	Cross-cultural travelers need to develop coping strategies to deal with stress	Life changes are inherently stressful	Adjustment factors involving both personal (e.g. life change, personality) and situational (e.g. social support)	Training people to develop stress management skills
Culture Learning (Behavior)	Cross-cultural travelers need to learn culturally relevant social skills to survive and thrive in their new settings	Social interaction is a mutually organized and skilled performance	Culture-specific variables such as: knowledge about a new culture, language or communication competence, cultural distance	Preparation, orientation and culture learning, especially behavioral-based social skill training
Social Identification (Cognition)	Cross-cultural transition may involve changes in cultural identity and inter-group relations	Identity is a fundamental issue for the cross-cultural travelers	Cognitive variables such as: knowledge of the host culture, mutual attitude between hosts and sojourners, cultural similarity, cultural identity	Enhancing self-esteem, overcoming barriers to inter-group harmony, emphasizing intergroup similarities

Source: Zhou et al. (2008) lightly edited by document authors.

other hand, the sociocultural approach is based on behavioral competence, culture learning, social skills, language fluency and others. (Ward & Kennedy, 1999)

3. Survey Application

Surveys are a prevalent technique for data gathering in studies on culture shock and cultural adaptation. The literature review showed that some instruments have been widely used for comparative and longitudinal studies. (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) The Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) developed by Searle and Ward (1990) is the base for the adapted version used in this document.

SCAS-R is a 21-question survey developed by Wilson (2013) based on the work by Searle and Ward called was lightly adapted to the target audience and host country. To see the survey, please refer to Appedix 1. The online survey was published in a major social networking site group of Latin American nationals in South Korea and was opened for answering during two weeks in April, 2016.

One of the limitations of this approach is the lack of a control group and the self-report nature of the answers given. This could be addressed by increasing the number of respondents and doing a follow-up interview that could be introduced in a next experimental design.

4. Sample Analysis

The online survey included some demographical questions that are discussed below. Out of the sample collected (N=64), 63% of the respondents were female and 37% male. Three major nationalities made 80% of the respondent's population. 36% reported to be Colombian nationals, 25% Guatemalan and 19% Mexican, the remaining 20% are respondents from other Latin American countries. Among the respondents, there was a mean stay of 29.18 months in a range going from 4

Table 4. Sample Basic Information (N=64)

SAMPLE	N	MEAN STAY (months)	RANGE (months)
Latin American nationals in South Korea	64	29.18	4-85

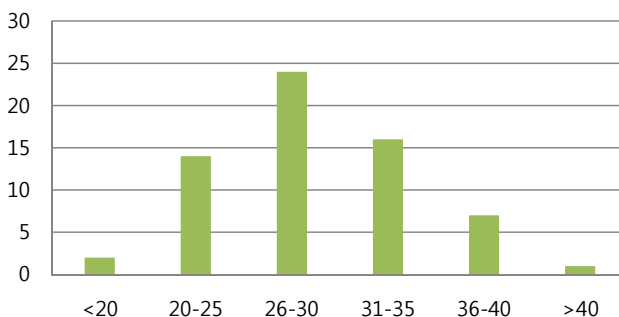
Source: Authors, with data from survey.

months to 85 months.

The average age of the population in the sample is 29 years; the following graph shows the age distribution of the respondents. Even though, this was not asked in the survey sent, an assumption is that the large majority of the population pursued graduate degrees (Master’s & PhD) in South Korean Universities.

Cultural distance is a concept that was found in the literature as a possible cause of cultural shock (Hofstede, 1980; Mumford, 1998). The Power Distance Index originally covered five cultural dimensions (Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism v. Collectivism, Masculinity v. Femininity and Long Term v. Short Term Orientation). The additional sixth dimension Indulgence v. Restraint was included in a most recent work. (Hofstede et al. 2010).

The following graph depicts a comparison of the Power Distance Index comparing the six dimensions of the index among South Korea, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. The first dimension, Power Distance which measures the acceptance of



Graph 1. Age Distribution of Respondents

Source: Authors, with data from survey.

inequality in society, it can be seen than despite the Confucian tradition in South Korea, it has a more equitable society than Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala. There is a 58% (95 v. 60) difference between Guatemala and South Korea when analyzing the power distance dimension. According to the Hofstede Center data, Guatemalan nationals accept inequality as a common characteristic of their society.

On the second dimension, Individualism v. Collectivism, the data shows that all four countries have low levels of individualism but probably from different reasons. In the case of South Korea, the Confucian tradition might cause these results, in the case of the Latin American countries, the central role of family.

Masculinity v. Femininity is the third dimension compared; Colombia and Mexico have higher score in this dimension than South Korea and Guatemala. Societies with high levels of masculinity tend to be more assertive and competitive and there is a marked difference in the gender role. According to Hofstede (2011), in masculine societies there is admiration for the strong rather than sympathy for the weak, there are few women in elected political positions among other descriptions.

The next dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance, the four countries show a high score in this dimension. This dimension is related to the society tolerance for ambiguity, Hofstede (2011) mentioned that countries with Strong Uncertainty Avoidance tend to have high stress, emotionality, anxiety and neuroticism. Additionally, Strong Uncertainty Avoidance is related to low tolerance for deviant persons or ideas, what is different is perceived as dangerous, people stay in jobs even if disliked.

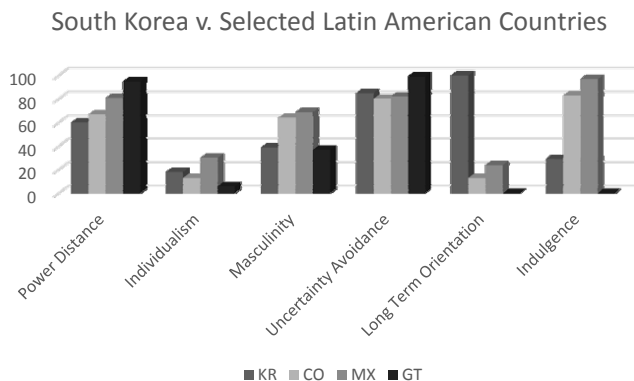
Long Term Orientation v. Short Term Orientation and Indulgence v. Restraint are complementary dimensions. Hofstede (2011) asserts that in fact these two are negatively correlated. As seen in the graph below, it can be seen that South Korean society has a Long Term Orientation, people in this society tend to believe that “the best is yet to come” and there’s a proclivity for savings and investment. Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala score low on this dimension, in Short Term oriented countries, the past or present are the best moments lived; success is attributed to good fortune instead of hard work.

The most recent dimension added to this model of analysis is Indulgence v. Restraint, as mentioned before it correlated negatively with Long Term Orientation. As seen in the data, South Korea scores low on indulgence while Colombia and Mexico score higher on this dimension. Apparently there is no available data for this dimension for Guatemala. Indulgence is associated with immediate gratification, “play now, work later” stance at life.

Cultural distance is a key aspect to keep in mind when analyzing culture shock for Latin American nationals in South Korea. There are dimensions in the Hofstede model that are quite different between host country and sample countries, especially Long Term Orientation and Indulgence. Other dimensions seem to be a little bit more homogenous but significant difference remains.

According to the self-reported answers of respondents, there were five main causes that contribute to culture shock among Latin American nationals in South Korea, according: Obtaining community services (M=3.33); Understanding and Speaking Korean Language (M=2.36); Reading and Writing Korean Language (M=2.36); Varying the speaking rate in a culturally appropriate manner (M=2.31); and Attending or participating in community activities (M=3.36).

Self-reported language abilities (lack thereof) were found to be the main three causes of culture shock among Latin American nationals. To sum up, language



Graph 2. Hofstede Power Distance Index

Source: Authors, with data from The Hofstede Center.

Table 5. SCAS-R Survey to Latin American nationals in South Korea

Categories	Items	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MEAN IN TOTAL
Social Interaction	Managing my academic/work responsibilities.	3.95	0.84	3.54
	Working effectively with other students/work colleagues.	3.42	1.05	
	Gaining feedback from other students/work colleagues to help improve my performance.	3.36	0.96	
	Expressing my ideas to other students/work colleagues in a culturally appropriate manner.	3.44	0.97	
Language Barriers	Interacting at social events.	3.75	0.94	3.2
	Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions.	3.42	1.24	
	Obtaining community services I require.	3.33	1.04	
	Understanding and speaking [host language].	2.36	1.25	
	Finding my way around.	4.08	1.07	
	Dealing with the bureaucracy.	3.19	1.15	
	Reading and writing [host language].	2.28	1.24	
Religion & Tradition	Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner.	2.31	1.28	3.35
	Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions.	3.47	0.99	
	Attending or participating in community activities.	3.36	1.06	
	Interacting with members of the opposite sex.	3.42	1.17	
	Adapting to the pace of life.	4.00	0.84	
	Changing my behaviour to suit social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs.	3.53	0.87	
Personal Issues	Building and maintaining relationships.	3.64	0.93	3.92
	Maintaining my hobbies and interests.	3.78	0.93	

Personal Issues	Adapting to the noise level in my neighborhood.	4.23	0.71	
	Adapting to the population density.	4.02	0.88	

Source: Authors, with data from survey.

barriers undermine the rich experience of Korean life for Latin Americans residing or visiting the peninsula. According to the ABC Model of cultural adaptation discussed above, Culture Learning (Behavior) in which language ability is included could be improved by appropriate preparation in culture learning and social skills training.

On the other hand, Latin American nationals reported high level of adaptation in the following aspects: Managing my academic/work responsibilities ($M=3.95$); Finding my way around ($M=4.08$); Adapting to the pace of life ($M=4.00$); Adapting to the noise level in my neighborhood ($M=4.23$); Adapting to the population density ($M=4.02$).

There are positive aspects found in the survey, most respondents found easy to adapt to the noise level of the neighborhoods they lived in, also adapting to the population density of major Korean cities. Using transportation and “finding my way around” is a positive aspect to highlight given the fact that most street signs are Romanized and transportation systems are basically “foreigner-proof” meaning so easy and convenient that no foreigner could be lost for too long. In the same note, adapting to the pace of life seems to be easy for Latin Americans in South Korea where the **빨리 빨리** pace of living.

5. Conclusions

South Korea and Latin American countries are getting closer in terms of international trade and cooperation, it is important to understand the implications of these interactions in the cultural level. As seen in the data from the Korean Immigration

Service, there was an increase in Latin American visitors to South Korea in recent years and there is a considerable probability these numbers will keep increasing. Even though the proportion of Latin American visitors is negligible (ranging 0.3% to 0.4%) of total foreign visitors, achieving a better cultural understanding between South Korea and Latin America is pivotal to further and deepen relations.

Cultural distance among South Korea and Latin countries should be further analyzed and more research is recommended to mitigate the negative effects of culture shock. According to the findings from the survey, the top three causes for culture shock among Latin Americans in South Korea are language related, as seen in the research literature on the subject matter.

In order to gather more data, replicate methods and achieve robust results, more research is suggested among Latin American nationals in South Korea and among the South Korean diaspora in Latin American countries.

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한국의 남미 출신자 문화충격에 관한 소고

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요약 이 글의 목적은 한국을 방문한 남미 출신자들이 경험하는 문화충격의 주요 원인을 살펴보는 데 있다. 또한 이 글은 문화충격과 문화적응에 관한 간략한 리뷰를 포함하고 있다. 월슨(2013)에 의해 재구성된 사회-문화 적응 척도(SCAS-R)를 활용하여 온라인 조사를 하였고, 이를 통해 데이터를 수집하였다. 21문항으로 구성된 설문지는 주요 사회관계망에 속한 특정 집단에게 보내져 이에 64명이 답하였다. 네 가지 범주, 즉 사회적 상호작용, 언어 장벽, 종교와 전통, 개인적 이슈에 대한 조사가 이루어졌다. 자료와 몇 가지 이론적 검토에 따르면 한국 방문 라틴 아메리카 출신자가 겪는 문화 충격의 주요 원인은 자기가 진단한 한국어 능력과 연계되어 있다. 구어 이해는 평균 2.36, 읽기와 쓰기는 평균 2.38, 문화적으로 적절한 언어 구사 능력의 평균 점수는 2.31이다.

주요어 문화충격, 사회-문화 적응 척도, 남미인, 대한민국

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[Appendix 1] Online Questionnaire SCAS-R based on Wilson (2013)

Demographic Questions:

Gender (M/F)

Nationality: _____

Age: _____

Length of Stay in South Korea (time in months): _____

SCAS-R Survey

Please rate your competence at each of the following behaviors (1=Not at all competent; 5=Extremely competent).

QUESTIONNAIRE					
1. Building and maintaining relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Managing my academic/work responsibilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Interacting at social events.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Maintaining my hobbies and interests.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Adapting to the noise level in my neighborhood.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's gestures and facial expressions.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Working effectively with other students/work colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Obtaining community services I require.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Adapting to the population density.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Understanding and speaking Korean language.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Varying the rate of my speaking in a culturally appropriate manner. (Proper use of 반말 & 존댓말)	1	2	3	4	5
12. Gaining feedback from other students/work colleagues to help improve my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Accurately interpreting and responding to other people's emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Attending or participating in community activities.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Finding my way around.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Interacting with members of the opposite sex.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Expressing my ideas to other students/work colleagues in a culturally appropriate manner.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Dealing with the bureaucracy.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Adapting to the pace of life.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Reading and writing Korean language.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Changing my behavior to suit social norms, rules, attitudes, beliefs, and customs. (분처)	1	2	3	4	5

Open Question:

Would you like to elaborate on your answers with any culture shock personal experience lived in South Korea during your stay?

[Appendix 2] Selected answers to the open question “Would you like to elaborate on your answers with any culture shock personal experience lived in South Korea during your stay?”

Spanish Answer	Translation by Authors
<p>“La apropiación del lenguaje es fundamental, si no se maneja puede generar exclusión de grupos y círculos sociales de manera indirecta, inclusive.” (sic)</p>	<p>“Language appropriation is fundamental, if (language) is used it could create exclusion from groups and social circles.”</p>
<p>“Me era difícil mantener la relación con los coreanos.” (sic)</p>	<p>“It was difficult for me to have a relationship with Koreans.”</p>
<p>“No fue muy complicado para mí el choque cultural porque desde el principio escogí estar allá, aprender y aceptar la cultura coreana para empezar a quererla. En cuanto a vivir como un extranjero en Corea puede ser una experiencia maravillosa siempre y cuando lleves una mente abierta y estés dispuesto a adaptarte. Entrar en una familia coreana, como mujer de hogar ya es un poco más difícil de lograr con éxito.”</p>	<p>“It was not complicated for me the culture shock because from the beginning I chose to be there, learn and accept the Korean culture to start to love it. Living as a foreigner in Korea could be an amazing experience if you have an open mind and are able to adapt. To enter into a Korean family as a housewife it is a bit more difficult to achieve successfully.”</p>
<p>“Es un choque cultural que tus capacidades y oportunidades de crecimiento dentro de una organización estén limitadas a la edad. Que por tener cierta edad “tus compañeros de trabajo o tu jefe” esperen “específica” cantidad o calidad de trabajo. Los coreanos y sus clasificaciones de 막내, 사원, 대리, 고장 hacen que el ambiente laboral se convierta en un conjunto de tareas y acciones que todo el mundo espera según su posición y el estereotipo que esta tenga. Qué un 대리 te diga: “la próxima vez que hagas un reporte no es necesario que te esfuerces tanto, porque en tu nivel de 사원 no es común dar tan buenos resultados. Que nadie espera nada del 사원 laboralmente porque por nuestra edad no podemos hacer nada bien.” Entonces si haces algo muy bien está mal visto para tu superior. Ejemplos como ese son choques culturales difíciles de sobrellevar en el ambiente laboral.</p>	<p>“It is a culture shock that your abilities and opportunities for growth inside an organization are limited to your age. If you are of certain age “your colleagues or boss” expect “certain” quantity or quality of work. Koreans and their classification of 막내, 사원, 대리, 고장 make that the work environment turns out into a collection of tasks and actions in which everyone have expectations according to one’s position or stereotype. For example, a 대리 could tell you: “Next time you write a report it is not necessary that you make such an effort, because of your level as 사원 it is not expected to achieve such good results. No one expects anything from 사원 because of the age we could not do anything well.” So if you do anything well done it is not well seen from your superior. These kinds of situations are culture shocks in a working environment.</p>

<p>“Una experiencia interesante, pero adaptarse a la cultura requiere más tiempo y preparación previa antes del viaje.”</p>	<p>An interesting experience, but to adapt to the culture it requires more time and previous preparation before the trip.</p>
<p>“El mayor choque en mi caso fue la desconfianza en el ámbito laboral frente a mi desempeño, así como la comunicación en Korean en ambientes laborales.” (sic)</p>	<p>The biggest shock for me was the lack of trust on my performance in working environments, also the communication in Korean in working environments.</p>
<p>“La alimentación.”</p>	<p>Food</p>
<p>“La forma en que se mueven en el metro no me gusta, no son cuidadosos y bruscos. El mejor ejemplo las mujeres mayores (ajummas).” (sic)</p>	<p>“I do not like the way they move in the metro, they are not careful but rude. The best examples are older women (ajummas).</p>
<p>“Me parece que el conflicto cultural es al inicio y puede ser superado con mucho esfuerzo, paciencia y sobre todo evitando comparar con las costumbres y con el esquema mental que uno lleva de su país de origen.” (sic)</p>	<p>I think that cultural conflict is in the beginning and could be overcome with a great effort, patience and above all, avoiding comparisons with customs and the mental scheme from the country of origin.</p>
<p>“Me parece interesante que beben demasiado alcohol, incluso para nuestros estándares latinoamericanos, es un exceso.”</p>	<p>I think it is interesting that they drink too much alcohol, even for our Latin American standards, it is excessive.</p>
<p>“Este país me hizo cambiar la perspectiva del compartir.... en mi país se suele ser un poco egoísta.... aquí aprendí que el dar a los demás trae mucha satisfacción. (sic)</p>	<p>This country made me change my perspective on sharing... in my country we could be a bit selfish... here I learned that giving to others bring a lot of satisfaction.</p>
<p>“Nunca he sentido discriminación por ser mujer, pero en Corea si notaba un trato diferente.”</p>	<p>I have never felt discrimination for being a woman, but in Korea I felt a differential treatment.</p>
<p>“Hay mayor choque cultural para un extranjero a nivel laboral que al ser estudiante de intercambio. La cultura laboral continúa siendo muy cerrada para un extranjero y más difícil aún para una mujer.”</p>	<p>There is a bigger culture shock for a foreigner in a working environment than being an exchange student. Work culture is still very closed for a foreigner and even more difficult for a woman.”</p>
<p>“Es chocante tener que ser “obediente” y/o actuar como sumiso para que la gente mayor piense que eres respetuoso. El no poder cuestionar a los profesores en clase, argumentar (mucho menos debatir) es algo que no permite el enriquecimiento durante los seminarios.” (sic)</p>	<p>It is shocking having to be “obedient” and acting submissive so older people think you are respectful. Not being able to question your professors in class, argue (even less, to debate) is something that does not allow to be enriched during the seminars.</p>