Intercultural Sensitivity: A Case Study of Foreign Academics in a Public University in Malaysia

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Abstract

Through processes of globalisation, academics are increasingly working in universities in countries other than their place of birth. The intercultural setting of the university requires foreign academics to demonstrate intercultural communication competence to communicate well with people of the host culture. This study focuses on foreign academics working in a public university in the multiracial country of Malaysia to examine how they develop one aspect of intercultural communication competence, namely intercultural sensitivity. Previous studies on intercultural sensitivity have focused on international students, sojourners and immigrants but not on foreign academics. Studies in the Malaysian context have investigated intercultural sensitivity of students but not foreign academics.

To examine the phenomenon of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity, a case study was conducted by having in-depth interviews with thirteen foreign academics, six local academics, four administrative staff members and holding two focus groups with 15 students at a public university in Kelantan, Malaysia. A unique contribution of this research is that it includes perspectives of multiple participant groups on foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. The interview questions were adapted from intercultural sensitivity inventory items from existing intercultural sensitivity models of Chen and Starosta (2000), and Tamam (2010). Thematic analysis was used to synthesise the data which then was further analysed by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). This study engages with CAT to provide an in-depth exploration of intercultural sensitivity by identifying strategies that the foreign academics used to accommodate and interact with culturally different counterparts in their university and the surrounding local community.

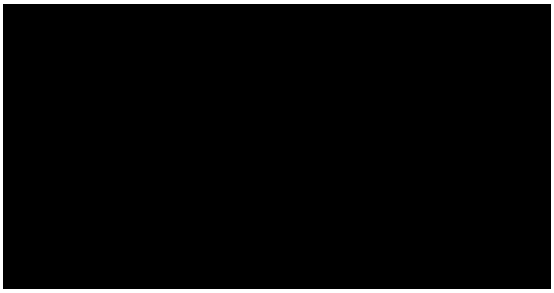
The findings indicate that foreign academics intercultural sensitivity is influenced by three factors, namely: 1) the level of intercultural interaction and engagement with the people of the host culture; 2) engagement with the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect; and 3) knowledge of and respect for the dominant religion of Islam in the host culture. All three factors influence the practices of foreign academics within and outside of the university as they sought to communicate with and develop relationships with the host culture, to support their transition to Kelantan and to develop a sense of belonging.

The three factors of intercultural interaction, language or/and dialect and religion identified in this study contribute to an in-depth understanding of intercultural sensitivity within the

complex cultural and linguistically dynamic setting of a public university in Malaysia. These factors contribute to a new model of intercultural ecology which adds to the existing elements of intercultural sensitivity identified in past studies. This model draws together the complexities of the multicultural environment (host culture inside and outside of the university, local and foreign academics, issues of intercultural interaction, language and religion). The study contributes to public and institutional policy by suggesting appropriate mechanisms to recruit and induct foreign academics to accommodate to the host culture by being interculturally sensitive and competent communicators. The university has an essential role in equipping new foreign academics with informal and formal opportunities to develop knowledge about the host culture and its people.

Declaration

This thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented, including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.



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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is centred on the experiences of foreign academics and aims to investigate the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence by focusing on intercultural sensitivity. This research intends to identify the development of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity when working in a public university in Malaysia. Due the highly multicultural nature of Malaysia society, coupled with the increasing numbers of international academics, issues of intercultural sensitivity have come to the fore as needing further exploration. In exploring the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics, the intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture will be better understood.

The concepts of intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity are relevant to foreign academics within Malaysian universities. As a local academic working in one university with 5.2% or 28 foreign academics on the teaching staff, I have observed how foreign academics interact well with the local students and staff, and the community, both verbally and non-verbally through socialising activities. Nevertheless, some foreign scholars appear to socialise only with other foreign academics in preference to local academics and are not very interested in engaging in local community events. Some appear to find it difficult to adapt themselves to the host culture.

This chapter first introduces the phenomenon of foreign academics teaching in overseas universities, particularly in Malaysian universities. It then discusses the concepts of intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity to make the argument that these conceptual frames can be useful to examine foreign academics' intercultural interaction and sensitivity during their accommodation process in the host culture. The chapter then introduces the research site and the researcher positioning in this research and concludes with the thesis outline.

1.1 Foreign academics in Malaysian universities

Malaysia, as a multiracial country, has three main ethnic groups—Malays, Chinese and Indians—who live side-by-side in relative peace and harmony (Md Zabid & Ho 2003). These ethnic groups maintain their separate ethnic identities and practise their distinct cultures through their customs and language, reinforcing their norms, values and beliefs. This multiracial situation is apparent in many Malaysian organisations, including in all universities

in which the students and staff are also from various cultural and religious backgrounds. The Malaysian context is multicultural in nature thus making intercultural communication essential in day-to-day activities. The need to be an interculturally competent communicator is needed in this context.

Adding to this multiracial mix is that with the globalisation of higher education, universities are increasingly employing foreign academics, who need to interact successfully and sensitively with culturally different counterparts. The profession is considered as being mobile as foreign academics are constantly moving from one university to another (Terri & William 2010; Pherali 2012). The reasons for this mobility include career development, academic opportunities like pursuing a PhD in a foreign country, post-doctoral opportunities and research attachments to do joint research with other higher institutions (Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Dunn & Wallace 2004; Kim 2005; Garson 2005).

The present study is situated within a public university in Malaysia which recruits foreign academics. In this university, the number of foreign academics has grown quite steadily from only two foreign academics out of 86 academics (2.3%) in 2008 to 28 out of 511 academics (5.2%) in 2018. The employment of foreign academics links directly to the national plan to improve higher education in Malaysia that encourages academic mobility programmes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Although studies have researched foreign workers in Malaysia (Crinis 2010; Abdul-Rahman et al. 2012; Mohamed et al. 2012; Salleh et al. 2012), none focus on foreign academics and their interaction with the locals. Since higher education institutions in Malaysia encourage internationalisation, it is a suitable period to study foreign academics in Malaysia especially in the field of intercultural communication and sensitivity and their accommodation process to the host culture. To participate in a globalised sector universities recruit foreign academics. Other strategies also used include making the English language the medium of instruction and developing partnerships with well-established universities (Ali 2013; Nguyen et al. 2016; Marginson & Tran 2018).

This perception of going global for university suggests that the products that a company/university produces and even the buildings and the employees represent the institution's identity to the world (Goodman 2000; Mohamad 2013). Foreign academics can provide new exposure and expand students' views and opinions thus offering a totally new horizon for students to explore. Therefore the idea of exchanging knowledge and skills with

foreign scholars is seen as a key move in achieving the standard of internationalisation and expansion of international networks with foreign universities and academics.

However, due to the dynamic intercultural setting in universities in Malaysia, concerns and conflicts like differences in beliefs, language, cultural values and also workplace culture could arise which may directly and indirectly influence the intercultural interaction of communities within and outside the universities, especially in relation to foreign academics. Communicating competently or communicating effectively verbally and/or non-verbally is not only important for communication but also human well-being. Good communication skills are important in workplaces because ineffective communication skills can lead to problems and conflicts at the workplace (Rana 2013; Thomson et al. 2015; Kamalirad et al. 2017). When intercultural communication competence is limited or ineffective, stress and depression may result and can affect one's motivation for life and decision making (Choi et al. 2005). In new intercultural situations, people may face stress and hardships in the process of adapting to a new language, customs and social norms (Choi et al. 2009).

In this current study, cultural differences may be evident in language, race, religion and beliefs. All of these aspects play important roles in influencing interaction and communication within the workplaces, including universities. When acculturating to a new culture, sudden changes in ones' life can be stressful to the well-being of immigrants. Such changes can include language, relationships and network system, attitudes, values and beliefs, and behaviours. These stressors can lead to ineffective job performance (Ayers et al. 2009; Hwang & Ting 2008; Torres 2010). All people in the host culture are involved in intercultural interactions and communication with the foreign academics. In terms of a university, a host culture would encompass both people within the university and in the neighbourhood. In this research, the community in the university is described as the internal community and the neighbourhood as the external community.

Communication refers to the information which is and should be conveyed vividly, briefly, directly and as sincerely as possible (Scollon 2001). Thus, interacting or communicating with people of various cultural backgrounds requires knowledge of cultural communication. In multiracial Malaysia, therefore, one must be an interculturally competent communicator to communicate effectively. One aspect of becoming an interculturally competent communicator is for individuals to be interculturally sensitive towards the host culture. As explained by Chen and Starosta (1997), intercultural sensitivity is the affective aspect of

intercultural communication competence. Therefore, it is crucial to explore and understand intercultural sensitivity among foreign academics who are teaching in Malaysia, a multicultural country.

1.2 Intercultural communication

Intercultural communication is central in contemporary linguistically and culturally diverse societies or contexts (Sarbaugh 1988; Neuliep 2018). The study of intercultural communication competence dates back to 1959 to the early work of Hall who is considered as the father of intercultural communication competence. Hall published his famous book in 1959 that explains the paradigm of intercultural communication competence—*The Silent Language*. Hall explained in detail the history of how he conceptualised intercultural communication and that intercultural communication competence is relevant to multiple disciplines such as cultural anthropology, linguistics and ethology—the study of animal behaviour (Rogers et al. 2002). Hall's seminal ideas have been developed further by Chen and Starosta (1996) and Bennett (1998). These three authors believe that a person who is an interculturally competent communicator is able to interact and convey meanings to their culturally different counterparts and to behave accordingly.

Although Chen and Starosta and then Bennett describe intercultural communication competence in an almost similar manner, Chen and Starosta (1997) develop a broader theory of intercultural communication competence. Their theory based on the theory of communication competence incorporates the affective, behavioural and cognitive domains. Their argument states the need for individuals to be interculturally sensitive, to possess cultural awareness and cultural adroitness. Therefore in relation to this study, it is essential for individuals to be interculturally sensitive for them to be an interculturally competent communicator. Similarly Tamam who studies intercultural communication and sensitivity in the Malaysian context stresses that knowledge and implementation of intercultural sensitivity is essential and increasingly in high demand in Malaysia, a multicultural and collectivistic country (Tamam 2010). As Tamam argues, intercultural sensitivity is 'not only theoretically relevant but also a practically pertinent construct' (p. 174). It can affect intercultural interactions and communications within universities in Malaysia.

In intercultural interactions, however, misunderstandings might arise because each culture has its own dynamics that might not suit other cultures. Differences in cultural values may

lead to different understandings or perceptions of what is right or wrong or inappropriate in another culture (Md Zabid & Ho 2003; Jenifer & Raman 2015). The understanding of one's culture is essential and as suggested by Hammer et al. (2003), someone is considered as interculturally sensitive when he/she understands and recognises differences in other cultures. Furthermore, being culturally aware *per se* does not guarantee effective communication when the language used is not taken into consideration as an element in ensuring the understanding and the success of the message delivery.

In multicultural Malaysia, it is essential for individuals to understand intercultural communication and be interculturally sensitive. Studies on intercultural sensitivity among Malaysians found that intercultural sensitivity is essential in interactions between Malaysians of various ethnicities such as Malays, Chinese, Indians and others (Tamam & Abdullah 2012). These Malaysian ethnicities have lived together for more than six decades since the independence of Malaysia. Therefore, interactions between foreigners and Malaysians will be challenging because of differences in terms of the cultural aspects as well as the language/s used between the foreign academics and foreign workers and the people of the host culture. Highly skilled foreign workers have been coming to Malaysia before the independence era and until today when they are considered as assisting and contributing to the development and growth of the country (Kassim 2017).

Interaction of foreign academics with the community in the university is the most important aspect in their everyday lives as most of their days in a week are spent in the university. Communication between the foreign academics and the community of the university is not limited to verbal interaction (teaching, lecturing, discussion and supervision) but also non-verbal interaction (behaviour, lifestyle). Clearly many aspects influence intercultural communication competence like the cultural differences, language differences, race, religion as well as beliefs.

In the context of this research, foreign academics interact in English with Malaysian students, other foreign and local academics, administrative staff as well as the local population. English is the medium of interaction between the foreign academics with the students and the community within the university and outside the university. As English is a second language in Malaysia, it is clearly understood that foreign scholars have to deal with people at different levels of proficiency in the English language. As second language speakers, the local staff and students have different levels of proficiency in the language used in the workplace or

universities (Mäkelä et al. 2007). Some Asian foreign academics also have English as a second language. In Malaysia, English was identified by Kachru (1998) as being used in institutions as an additional language as Malaysia was classified as a country in the 'outer circle'. Due to the exposure of English as the second language in Malaysia, the use of English in Malaysia is quite extensive, with many children starting to learn English in year one of primary school (Mahadzir & Phung 2013; Kabilan & Veratharaju 2013). Foreign academics use English with the local community both inside and outside of the university even though it is not used widely by the majority of Kelantanese people. Although English language is a second language for many Malaysians, the local community in Kelantan normally interacts in their local dialect known as the Kelantanese dialect and in standard Malay (Bakar & Harun 2015). A research study in a Malaysian technical university found that despite the university advertising that English is the medium of instruction, lectures, tutorials and interaction with administrators is mostly done in Malay, thereby causing challenges for international students who were recruited mainly from African countries (Mohd Faiz 2014). These international students could not rely on communicating in English and therefore some started to learn Malay.

While language may be an issue in developing intercultural communication and sensitivity, still not enough is known about other potential influences on intercultural communication competence. Therefore, it is important to explore and understand the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in the Malaysian context. However, there are no studies on international academics in the area of intercultural sensitivity. Transnational academic mobility discusses matters concerning professional development of academics who seek better opportunities in foreign countries (Kim 2005). This academic mobility has also encouraged the mobility of knowledge and skills. The international academics who move to foreign universities bring new knowledge and skills in exchange for academic positions in the universities. Other than professional development, studies also discuss matters concerning the challenges faced by the international academics in the context of transnational teaching and working environments that are culturally different than their own (Dunn & Wallace 2006; Kim & Locke 2010; Poole & Ewan 2010). As for example, the study done by Dunn and Wallace (2006) examined the preparedness of local Australian lecturers who were involved in transnational teaching in their respective institutions. Their teaching preparedness includes induction programmes for the transnational teaching lecturers so that they could develop their teaching skills for their transnational students. The study found that most universities did not have proper and

effective programmes that could assist the transnational lecturer to develop their teaching skills. In contradiction to this study, the foreign academics not only teach multi-ethnic students, the foreign academics live in that multi-ethnic community. The foreign academics' preparedness and intercultural sensitivity do not only involve intercultural interactions with the students but the people of the host culture outside the university context.

Therefore, in this research, as a fellow academic and researcher, I examine intercultural communication and intercultural sensitivity in relation to foreign academics within a public university in Malaysia.

1.3 Research aims and research questions

The study examines the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics within the university and the staff and student perspectives on their interactions with the foreign academics. The study addressed the following research objectives and questions:

1 To explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a public university in Malaysia

   Research question: How do foreign academics develop intercultural sensitivity in a public university in Malaysia?

2 To investigate the influence of intercultural sensitivity amongst foreign academics on the intercultural interaction of a public university in Malaysia.

   Research question: How do foreign academics accommodate to the intercultural context of a public university in Malaysia?

   Research question: How does the foreign academics' intercultural interaction at the university influence their intercultural sensitivity?

1.4 Multiculturalism in Malaysia

This section provides the necessary background about Malaysia and then about the host culture in Kelantan and the university, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). Malaysia is a multicultural country with diverse ethnicities namely Malays, Chinese, Indians and other indigenous peoples like Iban, Kadazan, Dusun, Bajau. The cultural context of Malaysia is multiracial where the citizens practise various religions and beliefs and therefore tolerate and

respect cultural differences. Malaysia has 13 states and three federal territories. Malaysians have witnessed seven prime ministers since Independence in 1957.

The Malays are the majority in the country thus making Islam the official religion and the Malay language the official language (Federal Constitution 1957). As per definition in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (1957), a Malay is described as someone who is a Muslim, speaks the Malay language and follows the Malay customs. The rights of Malays and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak are given special privilege as stated in the constitution.

As a Muslim-dominated country, Islam has been the official religion in Malaysia since Independence and Islam is known as 'the religion of federation'. According to the Federal Constitution of Malaysia (1957), the official religion of Malaysia is Islam and other religions can be practised freely in Malaysia. It is also stated in the constitution that any religious groups in Malaysia have the right to:

> a) manage its own religious affairs;
> b) establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and
> c) acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law (p. 26).

The freedom to practise other religions and beliefs is evident in Malaysia as mosques, temples and churches can be seen everywhere. Malaysia respects and supports people of other ethnicities and religions (Mastor et al. 2000).

Although the government encourages peace and harmony and many Malaysians would attest to that statement, some ethnic tensions happen in the country. For example, one incident happened in Sabah in which the use of the word 'Allah' was allowed by the Kuala Lumpur Court to be used in a Catholic magazine, *Herald*. The use of the word Allah in a Catholic magazine had caused discomfort among the Muslims and it resulted in ethnic tensions and a few individuals had set fire to few churches in Malaysia (Mohd Roslan 2011). Despite the tensions between ethnic groups, Malaysia is considered as being stable as the citizens are able to live side-by-side and maintain peace. Although ethnic tensions and issues may always fluctuate, they do not have a negative effect on the socio-economic development of the country (Muis et al. 2012). Ethnic tensions and religious tolerance have existed even before independence, due to the colonisation of the British before the independence. During colonisation, the British brought immigrants from China and India and formed a policy that divided the ethnics based on their profession (Ghani & Awang 2017). These immigrants have since helped formed the pluralistic society of Malaysia. The immigrants brought with them

their languages, cultures and also religions. This segregation between the ethnic groups has caused some tensions between the ethnic groups (Noor & Leong 2013). Since then various initiatives and Government policies have promoted ethnic inclusivity, for instance, by imposing the Malay language as the official language and a national education policy that promotes an education system that would use only one medium of instruction at schools (Razak Report 1956). The current prime minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, published a book in which he wrote about the dilemma of Malays. In his book, he describes that to live harmoniously does not mean that ethnic tensions and conflicts are disregarded or do not exist, rather the tensions and conflicts do not cause any major distress and divide the citizens (Mohamad 1982).

Nevertheless, despite being a Muslim-dominated country, not all Malaysian states implement Islamic principles. One state that has been slowly implementing and encouraging the Islamic ways of life for local believers is Kelantan (Stark 2004). It practises an Islamic way of living culturally, socially, economically and also in terms of the political governance of the state (Stark 2004). Kelantan also provides sufficient infrastructure and support to other ethnicities and religions to practise their beliefs in Kelantan. The majority of the locals in Kelantan are Malays (1,673,200) with an Islamic background, with a small number of Chinese (55,500), Indians (4,800) and other ethnic groups (11,000) (Department of Survey and Mapping Malaysia 2016). The Malay culture is heavily influenced by Islam as it plays an important role in the identity of Malay ethnicity (Mastor et al. 2000). The state government of Kelantan nevertheless also embraces uniqueness of different religions which demonstrates a sense of unity. In Kelantan the diverse ethnic groups have their various places of worship like churches, and Hindu and Buddhist temples. Studies on the Buddhist minority community in Kelantan (Ismail 2006, 2010) show that both the Buddhist community and the Malay Muslim majority community have been living in harmony without any ethnic incidents reported despite Kelantan being known as the corridor of Mecca (*Serambi Mekah*) for its Islamic governance and influence of Islam in the everyday lives of its people. This situation also indicates that the religious tolerance has been in practice in Kelantan for almost two decades.

The development of Islam in Kelantan has risen quite significantly after the victory in the 1959 election of Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PMIP), currently known as the Malayan Islamic Party or Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) which resulted in the ruling of PAS in Kelantan. The political party acknowledges itself as following the religious movement that

protects Malays and encourages the practice of Islam and Islamic law and also redefines the concept of modernity in an Islamic way (Roff 1974; Ismail 2014; Abidin & Hamzah 2018).

Besides the diverse ethnic groups and religions in Malaysia, it is also worth acknowledging the various languages and dialects spoken by Malaysians. The majority of Malaysians are considered to be at least bilingual. Besides the official language, each ethnic group has its own native language. For instance, the Chinese speak their own language as well as the Indians and other minority ethnics in Malaysia speaking their own distinct languages. Also different states in Malaysia speak different dialects. As is the case in Kelantan, where the local people of Kelantan, also known as Kelantanese, speak their own local dialect which is Kelantanese dialect (Yusuff & Zakaria 2018).

Therefore in the context of this study, Malaysia is not only a multiracial and multilingual country but there are added complexities in Kelantan, where this study takes place because the foreign academics are challenged with not only the Malay language but also the local dialect, the Kelantanese dialect. Other than the language aspects, the strong influence of Islam in Kelantan could become a challenge to the non-Muslim foreign academics.

1.5 Researcher positioning

This research is situated in a public university in Kelantan where I have been a lecturer for almost eight years. I have observed how foreign academics interact in the workspace and outside in the community in social activities. The ways the foreign academics interact with the people of the host culture varies in terms of the language they use and sometimes they resort to using body language to explain something. In terms of the language, the dominant language of interaction in the university is English. Some foreign academics appear to accommodate to the new cultural experience better than others.

As a fellow academic and researcher, I belong to the host culture and have an understanding of both parties. I am the ‘insider’ of the local community as I have lived in this community for almost 21 years. I had taught at another public university in Kelantan for almost three years before teaching at Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. I also know what it is to be a newcomer to an overseas foreign community where I was an ‘outsider’ to the Australian community of Adelaide. I was in Adelaide for almost 4 years for my postgraduate study so I can also empathise with the foreign academics who need to negotiate living in a new and foreign community. I also understand the concerns of people of the host culture especially the

elders who are afraid that the community, especially the teenagers and the young adults, might become influenced by foreign cultures. The local people want to ensure that their culture is protected, preserved and practised among its people, especially the youngsters.

Throughout my years of living in Kelantan, I have observed many aspects of the local community or the people of the host culture. The Kelantanese are known among people in Malaysia as being a close-knit community. The sense of belonging among the Kelantanese is strong to the extent that Kelantanese who live outside of Kelantan can establish a quick and strong rapport and relationship with other fellow Kelantanese. The Kelantanese identify themselves as '*oghe kito*', our people. This term is something common not only among the Kelantanese but also to other Malaysians. The togetherness among Kelantanese is strong and evident to other people who are not Kelantanese. The widely accepted 'close-knit' aspect of Kelantanese society provides an additional layer of complexity for foreign academics who need to be able to accommodate to and integrate with the people of the host culture.

1.6 Thesis outline

The next chapter, Chapter 2, reviews the literature on intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity. It starts by reviewing the phenomenon of foreign academics and possible challenges teaching in Malaysia and Kelantan. Then theories of intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity are examined before discussing four key models of intercultural sensitivity and their associated scales. The review identifies a research gap in which past studies on intercultural sensitivity have not explored intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in Malaysia. Past studies have only investigated individuals' intercultural sensitivity from the perspective of the individuals and not from the community of the host culture whom they interact with. Chapter 3 then provides details of the qualitative case study approach to explore intercultural sensitivity in relation to the foreign academics at a public university in Kelantan. The chapter also details the research context followed by data generation and analysis. The chapter ends with an explanation on the ethical approach of this research.

The next three chapters present the findings of this study according to three identified themes related to intercultural sensitivity. Although the themes are separated into three different chapters, they interconnect with one another in drawing an overall picture of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity in a public university in Malaysia. The key aspects of

foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity are related to intercultural interaction of foreign academics with the people of the host culture (Chapter 4), the foreign academics accommodation to the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect of the host culture (Chapter 5), and foreign academics' respect and tolerance towards the strong influence of Islam to the people of the host culture (Chapter 6). The analysis in each of these chapters is structured to commence with insights into the foreign academics' awareness of intercultural interaction, language and the influence of Islam in the host culture. These insights were followed by how the awareness was practised and how the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity was demonstrated.

This thesis ends with Chapter 7 on the overall findings of this study and develops the concept of intercultural ecology as a useful model in understanding intercultural sensitivity in a multicultural context. The chapter explains how this research contributes to the field of intercultural communication and sensitivity and provides a better understanding of intercultural sensitivity in a diverse cultural setting of multicultural Malaysian universities.

Chapter 2: Intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity: a literature review

As this research study aims to explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a public university in Malaysia and how the foreign academics develop their intercultural sensitivity in the university, this chapter reviews the research literature on intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity. As explained in the previous chapter, an analysis of the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics using models of intercultural sensitivity has not been the focus of previous studies. Most studies investigate intercultural sensitivity of sojourners, international students also immigrants. To address these issues, this chapter starts with a detailed discussion on the increasingly mobile field of academia and the complex process of resettlement foreign academics face as they adjust to the host culture. This section aims to provide an understanding of the accommodation processes of international academics.

Then the concepts and theories of intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity are discussed to provide the detail for exploring foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. The section compares theories on intercultural communication competence to identify which theories could appropriately frame this study. It identifies the value of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) (1984) as a comprehensive framework and analytical approach for considering accommodation strategies used by foreign academics. Then the review narrows to comparing models of intercultural sensitivity to identify which intercultural sensitivity model could provide the basis for conceptualising this research. This chapter concludes with research gap and concluding remarks arguing that the CAT framework would be useful to understand foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity underpinned by the intercultural sensitivity models which fit the multicultural context of this research.

2.1 Foreign academics: possible concerns

While numerous studies investigate foreign or transnational academic mobility, these studies do not focus on the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics, which is a critical aspect influencing their experiences in both professional and personal contexts and influencing the likelihood that they will prolong their stay and renew their contract with their respective universities. Transnational academic mobility encompasses the concept of academics moving

locally or internationally (Kim 2005). Some studies on international academics could be categorised as international academics who are non-native English speakers teaching in English speaking countries. For example, Pherali (2012) explored struggles and challenges in terms of lack of support for transnational academics in British higher education institutions. Other studies focus on native English speakers teaching in non-English speaking countries (for example, Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Garson 2005). For example, a study conducted in three Australian universities examined the cross-cultural training and support given to Australian academics teaching offshore (Gribble & Ziguras 2003). A similar study investigated the cultural and academic experiences of Australian academics who were teaching in a university in Singapore and their respective Singaporean students (Dunn & Wallace 2004). Garson (2005) explored the impact of culture on the writer's own academic experience and the meaning of her experience towards her profession as an academic. These studies discuss and explore the cultural and academic experience and interaction of non-native English speakers teaching in English speaking countries and vice versa. The majority of the abovementioned studies indicate the importance of being competent in intercultural interaction and also accommodating to the host culture.

The profession of foreign or international academics and the needs for intercultural knowledge among academics have been a trend for more than a decade (Trede et al. 2013; Aiston & Jung 2015; Bauder 2015). These studies also indicate the profession is mobile in a sense that foreign academics are moving from one place to another. The increasing mobility of foreign academics has raised concerns for some scholars in investigating and exploring the welfare and well-being of foreign academics when they are overseas or in foreign countries. Therefore, it is essential to also explore the intercultural interactions of foreign academics with their colleagues and the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. Neo-liberal strategies for increasing the knowledge economy of nations means that there is a growing higher education export industry and therefore the need for expertise (in the form of domestic and international foreign academics) (Altbach & Knight 2007). Although the abovementioned studies discuss the welfare of academics and issues of transnational academic mobility, none of the studies investigate the affective aspect of intercultural communication competence which is intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 1996) by using any intercultural sensitivity model. It is important to understand the affective aspect of foreign academics in interacting with culturally different counterparts, particularly in

identifying what contributes to foreign academics sensitivity when interacting hence helping their accommodation process.

As with all migrants, foreign academics moving to Malaysia have to go through processes of resettlement in the host country of Malaysia. Their resettlement process in the host country can be considered as being a complex or multi-layered resettlement process (El-Shaarawi 2015). Several additional aspects of resettlement are anticipated for foreign academics settling into Kelantan, the place where this study was conducted. Two key dimensions of language and religion are likely to impact upon the resettlement experiences and practices of foreign academics in this research. Kelantan has its own local dialect which is quite distinct from the standard Malay language. Thus, it is anticipated that foreigners would experience some challenges in communicating with the people of the host culture—the Kelantanese. Religion is likely to be another apparent difference for foreigners, especially for non-Muslim foreign academics, due to the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people in Kelantan compared with Malaysia more broadly.

The ability of people to feel a sense of belonging in a new host culture are influenced by gender, ethnicity, place of origin, level of 'skill' or education and level of language proficiency (Amit & Bar-Lev 2015). These factors can have cumulative advantages or disadvantages on people's lives and their resettlement (Yuval-Davis 2006; Johnson et al. 2007). Of these factors, most studies on intercultural sensitivity have embedded the aspect of language when discussing and defining intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural sensitivity involves one's willingness to change behaviour such as being respectful towards the people of the host culture and willingness to experience the cultural aspects of the host culture, for example, food, entertainment and nature (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992; Bae & Song 2017). Scholars also indicate that knowing more than one language affects one's intercultural sensitivity. In particular, language is representative of the identity of a culture which influences the people's attitudes, policy and social interaction (Kulyk 2011). It can be inferred that a lack of proficiency in the language of the host culture can often result in 'cultural alienation' for new immigrants or sojourners. This situation is reflective of foreign academics in this study as in this context the people of the host culture speak in their own Kelantanese dialect.

In the context of this research, the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect are used to interact with the host community. It can be anticipated that foreign academics may

experience challenges in terms of the language used within the university community and neighbouring community. Past studies indicate that learning the language of the host culture contributes to individuals' intercultural sensitivity and helps the adaptation process (Hokanson 2000; Peltokorpi 2010; Starks & Willoughby 2015). The Kelantanese dialect helps shape the identity of the people of the host culture. It may therefore be beneficial for the foreign academics in Kelantan to be able to communicate, understand and also participate in everyday conversations with the locals. For the Kelantanese, the dialect is the foundation of their culture and identity and it symbolises the group membership and loyalty (Don 2003). The Kelantanese are also proud of their dialect and use it everywhere they go (Bakar & Harun 2015; Yusuff & Zakaria 2018). Speaking the same language and dialect indicate a people's way of identifying themselves with their sociocultural group (Cleveland et al. 2015).

Language and intercultural sensitivity are closely related (Hokanson 2000). Hokanson's (2000) study on students living in homestay situations found that the individuals who have good language proficiency and fluency are more likely to develop their sociolinguistics and cultural skills which will result in a better and increased intercultural sensitivity. Another study that also supports the relationship of language and culture was conducted by Peltokorpi (2010) with Nordic expatriates in Japan. The study found that expatriates who have different linguistic elements like handwriting and the alphabet experience difficulties in mastering the language of the host culture. Expatriates who are married to locals, seem to be more proficient and fluent as compared to other expatriates. Starks and Willoughby (2015) believe that individuals' language proficiency will improve through socialising with the people of the host culture. Thus, the acquisition of the language of the host culture will assist the accommodation and resettlement process of foreign academics in Malaysia thus increasing their intercultural sensitivity.

In Malaysia, the culture is heavily influenced by Islam which is integrated visibly among the Malays (Mastor et al. 2000). In Kelantan, an Islamic state (Stark 2004), foreign academics who live there will be directly impacted by the religious practice and norms in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. Kelantan practises an Islamic democracy and has an Islamic government which is led by *Ulama*[1] (Stark 2004). Although Kelantan is an Islamic

[1] Ulama is Muslim scholar.

state, other religions in Kelantan are free to practise their own beliefs. There is a peaceful tolerance of religions in Kelantan.

However, some cultural and religious tensions among Malaysians date back decades (Majid 1985; Yousif 2011; Talib & Gill 2012; Mior Jamaluddin 2016; Ghani & Awang 2017). These studies highlight that despite tensions and some conflicts between religions in Malaysia, Malaysians are still able to tolerate the differences and the conflicts and live together harmoniously. Some examples, given in the abovementioned studies, are the concept of 'open house' during major festivals. However, some researchers might critique the idea by saying that the open house concept is merely the tip of an iceberg where many issues are hidden beneath (Talib & Gill 2012). In ensuring and maintaining the religious harmony and tolerance in Malaysia, the former government of Malaysia initiated the concept of *1Malaysia*, with the intention to strengthen the unity among Malaysians of diverse cultural backgrounds and religious practices. The current government also promotes the concept of *Sayangi Malaysiaku* (Love My Malaysia). This concept was selected as the theme for 2018 Malaysia Independence Day in August. With the initiatives from the government of Malaysia, it can be seen that Malaysia stresses the importance of respecting other cultures and religions.

In accordance to the unique cultural context of Kelantan and the varieties of cultures and religions in Malaysia, the foreign academics' will experience apparent differences with the people of the host culture. Foreign academics' accommodation process is deemed to be challenging to some but possible. This is because, intercultural sensitivity does not entail being inclusive to the extent of adopting the culture and beliefs of the people of the host culture. Rather, being respectful to one another's differences and accommodating oneself with the host culture. Therefore, despite of the dominance and strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture, foreigners in Kelantan are free to practice their own religion and beliefs. As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, there are other places of worship like temples, churches as well as monasteries present in Kelantan. This situation indicates that the locals, although the majority are practicing Muslims and obedient to the teachings, have respect for cultural differences. Foreign academics in this context will experience some obvious differences, however this provides an in-depth understanding of foreign academics' experiences and intercultural sensitivity during their accommodation process in Kelantan. This situation indicates an important view of the host culture that the influence of Islam in the lives of the people of the host culture is an important aspect of

cultural life that foreigners incorporate into their own life worlds—in a complex entanglement with maintaining their own cultural practices and beliefs.

Debates around foreign academics or some studies refer to them as sojourners or international academics (Kulyk 2011; Pherali 2012; Bauder 2015), have been controversial and remain unfinished as there is yet definite conclusion to whether the foreign academics should be made more like the locals or should they protect their own culture, beliefs, and self and remain foreign to the host culture? And would the culturally diverse international academics affect the teaching and learning process of the students and the university? The cultural differences, for instance, can be a hindrance in the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Hockings 2005). Despite the abovementioned challenges on foreign academics, it is deemed to be important for the university to empower the foreign academics' expertise in teaching and researching and to encourage the cultural differences rather than perceiving the differences negatively (Luxon & Peelo 2009). A more recent study in 2014 identified challenges as well as opportunities of 40 non-UK international academics teaching in Scotland. The study found that it was important to acknowledge and support the expertise and the cultural differences that could promote positive intercultural exchanges between the international academics and the host culture (Kreber & Hounsell 2014). A similar notion of this matter was proposed by Balasooriya et al. (2014) that, appropriate support to international academics in terms of overcoming the challenges such as cultural and social differences was needed in order to provide a more conducive and supportive environment for international academics.

As per above discussion on past studies on foreign academics' exploring challenges for foreign academics such as the different language of the host culture, different religions and cultural beliefs, foreign academics in my study are expected to encounter similar situations—due to the multicultural context of this current study. The foreign academics would experience difficulties, as discussed by past studies in the earlier part of this section, and also due to the multicultural context of the host culture. However, it is not the intention of this research to explore how foreign academics adopt the cultural differences. Rather the intention is to explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in accommodating to the host culture. The setting of this research, although a multicultural country with various local dialects and believers of different religions, the foreign academics are expected to be able to practice their religions and beliefs freely thus implying their freedom to remain as who they

are while accommodating to the host culture. Arising issues and challenges faced by the foreign academics will be discussed and suggestions to the university and the community will be made to support harmonious intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture.

Therefore, given the context of this research, foreign academics during their accommodation process will experience differences with the people of the host culture. Foreign academics may experience some differences in terms of understanding and interacting with the people of the host culture in terms of local customs such as local cuisine, clothing and local festivals/activities. Most foreign academics will also experience differences related to language and religious practices. All of these aspects and differences will contribute to the foreign academics' intercultural interaction and their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture. Foreign academics in their accommodation process will have to develop intercultural sensitivity for them to be an interculturally competent communicator. The next section explains and discusses these concepts.

2.2 Intercultural communication

In general, an interculturally competent individual has the ability to communicate successfully with culturally diverse counterparts without offending, disrespecting or making negative remarks. This section provides background about intercultural communication and how it links to intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity.

In a globalised world where interaction is becoming more intercultural, intercultural sensitivity is essential and crucial in ensuring effective interaction (Hammer 2015). As people become more interculturally sensitive, they will improve their cultural worldview and move from being ethnocentric towards being more ethnorelativistic as they become more interculturally sensitive (Olson & Kroeger 2001). Intercultural sensitivity is also seen as the prerequisite in order for someone to be interculturally competent (Chen & Starosta 2000). In the multicultural Malaysian context, additional aspects have been proposed for intercultural communication competence. Chua (2004) suggests that effective communication skills also include self-confidence and respect of the relationship with the people of other cultures. In other words, intercultural communication competence shows that intercultural sensitivity plays an important role in improving one's ability to interact, behave and react in intercultural

settings. A person has to be sensitive towards different cultures and its people so that they could adapt well and be competent when interacting with people of other cultures.

Intercultural communication competence has been defined in several ways over the past two decades. Gudykunst (2002) defines intercultural communication as physical face-to-face interaction that involves people of various nationalities and ethnicities. Another scholar (Philipsen 2002) in the same year argued that intercultural communication involves an individual's knowledge of the host culture's code of conduct so that they could act appropriately in any situation with any group of people of the host culture, at any given time and in any setting. Not only do individuals need to have knowledge of the host culture, Deardoff (2006) argues that individuals must also have the appropriate skills and attitudes in ensuring the effectiveness of the communication. Hunter et al. (2006) added that in the globalised world, intercultural communication competence is deemed essential so that individuals are able to equip themselves with adequate intercultural information and knowledge. Other than having the knowledge of the host culture, behaving accordingly and possessing the right attitude, intercultural communication competence is also about managing intercultural interaction with culturally distinct counterparts in ensuring effective communication between the interlocutors.

Intercultural communication is necessary when large 'cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently' (Lustig & Koester 2010, p. 66). Nevertheless, individuals can become competent in intercultural interactions in a variety of ways. Lustig and Koester believe that intercultural communication is also contextual in that it produces behaviours that are both appropriate and effective in a specific setting and it 'requires sufficient knowledge, suitable motivations and skilled actions' (Lustig & Koester 2010, p. 66-67). They further describe that every intercultural setting and context is unique and different to every individual. Lustig and Koester's statement that intercultural communication is contextual resonates well with the context of this study. The foreign academics in this study would have to behave as such that would produce effective communication with the people of the host culture. The specific setting for foreign academics in this study is the interaction between foreign academics and the people of the host culture both within the university workplace (other academics, students and administrators) and outside the university, in the neighbourhood where they engage with shopkeepers and in local events. The foreign academics need to have sufficient knowledge about the host culture and

the people of the host culture in order to accommodate well in the host culture. The foreign academics would also need to have appropriate and suitable motivations to learn about the host culture and the people of the host culture. They also need to possess skills to react and respond appropriately when interacting with the people of the host culture.

Intercultural communication competence can enable individuals to achieve mutual understanding in a culturally diverse society (Bennett 1998). It can reflect an individual's ability to understand the meaning and behaviour of culturally different counterparts and to illustrate their understanding through their behaviours and interactions. Two factors have been identified as keys to the effectiveness of intercultural communication, namely empathy and open-mindedness (Tamam 1996).

In Malaysia, studies on intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity have mostly taken place in higher education institutions in Malaysia with students but not with foreign academics. For example, studies have focussed on intercultural sensitivity of Malaysian students who study in foreign countries (Straffon 2003) and undergraduate students in public and private universities (Tamam 2010, 2012; Tamam & Abdullah 2012; Shah et al. 2014; Tamam & Krauss 2017). These studies will be discussed in depth in Section 2.4 to identify the types of issues potentially experienced by foreign academics. The lack of focus given to understanding the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in Malaysia has led to this current research.

Intercultural sensitivity is part of the bigger concept of intercultural communication competence. An interculturally sensitive person is someone who is able to adapt to the new culture and behave accordingly (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992; Morales 2017). An individual can gradually become interculturally sensitivity when one changes from being ethnocentric—when one believes that one culture is superior than other culture—to gradually being more sensitive and ethnorelative—a stage where an individual can adapt to different culture comfortably (Bennett 1993). Other than behavioural adjustment, intercultural sensitivity is also an affective aspect of intercultural communication competence which reflects how an individual appreciates and respects different cultures as well as differentiates and acknowledges the differences in terms of the behaviours, views and feelings of the culturally different interactants (Chen & Starosta 1997).

As described by Bennett (1998), an interculturally competent communicator is an individual who is able to successfully understand a culturally diverse society. In order for an individual to successfully achieve mutual understanding, they need to be in an ethnorelative stage of intercultural sensitivity which means that one is able to accept, adapt, and integrate with the culturally different counterparts. A number of more recent studies have examined intercultural sensitivity of international students as well as expatriates. These studies focused on teachers who teach students from various cultures and ethnicities but not on foreign or international academics (Fritz et al. 2000; Straffon 2003; DeJaeghere & Zhang 2008; DeJaeghere & Cao 2009; Spinthourakis et al. 2009; Del Villar 2010; Tamam 2010, 2012; Tamam & Abdullah 2012). These studies explore the intercultural sensitivity of international interlocutors from various backgrounds like, teachers, students and also international workers or expatriates. Although the studies used different scales of intercultural sensitivity, the context and also participants can be of relevance to this study as the participants were from various nationalities and ethnicities, similar to the foreign academics in this study. For instance, a study done by DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) used Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986) to explore the change in intercultural competence of educators in Midwestern US urban district. Tests of intercultural sensitivity were conducted at two different times with the purpose to study the change in the teachers' intercultural communication competence during the two periods of time. The researchers found that despite having various intercultural experiences and education levels, intercultural competence can be developed when an intercultural sensitivity model serves as a guide to intercultural development.

Spinthourakis (2009), on the other hand, studied the intercultural sensitivity of students at a Greek University Elementary school by using Chen and Starosta's (2000) intercultural sensitivity scale. The study found that the students scored high in intercultural sensitivity, however, the students felt that they needed to be more sensitive and required more intercultural training for their future careers. While the scale told them they were interculturally sensitive, they still felt they were not interculturally sensitive enough. This mismatch between the test results and self-reflection/identification of participants implies that intercultural sensitivity is an ongoing process of becoming rather than simply crossing a line from non-sensitive to interculturally sensitive. Another study on intercultural sensitivity that used Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale (2000) was conducted in the

Philippines by Del Villar (2010) who measured the intercultural sensitivity of students in the University of the Philippines. The students were found to be highly interculturally sensitive as they behaved in a mature and self-conscious way when interacting with people of different cultures.

Two Malaysian studies on intercultural communication and sensitivity have investigated the intercultural interaction between Malaysians within the workplace (Chua 2004; Zakaria et al. 2004). Both studies explored communication skills and behaviour in multicultural Malaysian organisations. These studies aimed to understand the challenges faced in organisations and suggested ways to improve communication competence among workers. The studies highlighted the importance of understanding and studying communication in a multicultural setting. The studies suggested that competency in intercultural interaction is essential in preparing for a more globalised world. The studies also show that interaction with people of different ethnicities affects one's intercultural sensitivity.

Another study on intercultural communication and sensitivity in the Malaysian context has also investigated the intercultural interaction between Malaysians of different ethnicities (Tamam & Hashmi 2015). This study examined the correlation between interethnic interaction, intercultural sensitivity and 'interethnic bridging social capital' among students of different ethnicities at a Malaysian public university. The study showed that students who often engaged in interaction and socialisation with friends of different ethnicities displayed a higher level of intercultural sensitivity. The study also found that interethnic interaction and intercultural sensitivity are strongly related to interethnic bridging social capital which means that social interaction with people outside the ethnic inner circle influenced individuals' intercultural sensitivity. The context of that study in a multi-ethnic Malaysian university is the same context as the current study implying that interaction between foreign academics with the people of the host culture would influence the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

Several studies were conducted on intercultural communication competence in Malaysian higher education contexts. A study done in 2017 explored intercultural communication behaviour among eight international postgraduates at a public university in Malaysia (Dalib et al. 2017b). All participants were non-native speakers of English and had been in Malaysia for at least a year. The study found that cultural understanding and language ability played an important role in helping the students to communicate in an intercultural setting. The findings

indicated that it was important for the participants to understand the appropriate behaviour and social norms of the host culture. As for language differences, it was evident that the knowledge of English language as a sole lingua franca, was not fully helpful in interacting with the people of the host culture. This is because the people of the host culture mostly use their mother tongue as the medium of interaction rather than English. The study portrays a similar context to the current study in which both groups of participants represent people of various nationalities and speak different languages.

Dalib et al. (2017a) further investigated the intercultural communication competence of 13 local students of different ethnicities; mainly Malay, Chinese, and Indian at three public universities in the Northern Malaysia. The study specifically aimed to understand the cultural identity and ways the students made sense of their intercultural competence (Dalib et al. 2017a). The in-depth interviews found that identity was associated with the obvious cultural markers like language, religion and traditions. The participants' cultural beliefs and views were shaped by their own ethnic identities which contributed to their understanding of cultural differences. Their research indicated that one's identity was moulded by the group's cultural markers. It was also found that the participants believed intercultural competence was achieved more easily when the interlocutors shared similar language or cultural values. Due to the multicultural context of the study, the participants described that they managed to adapt quite conveniently to other ethnics and the non-Malaysians. Dalib et al. (2017a) explained that although the language and cultural markers of an ethnic group influenced individuals' identities, it could not be denied that intercultural competence contributed to the individuals' appreciation of culturally different counterparts. The findings of the study speak similar view to this current study in which the people of the host culture, although belong to a certain ethnic group, they hold their own understanding and acceptance of cultural differences.

In a more recent study Dalib et al. (2019), they conducted in-depth interviews with 13 students from three major ethnic groups in Malaysia; Malay, Chinese, and Indian from three different public universities in the Northern part of Malaysia. The study aimed to explore the students' intercultural competence skills in interacting with specifically, international students. The study found that language ability and language strategies influence the success of the 13 local students in establishing intercultural connection with the international students. The findings indicate the lack of proficiency in English that acted as a lingua franca

among the participants and the international students led to frustration and miscommunication. In overcoming the frustration and the miscommunication, the participants would seek help from local friends who speak similar a language to the international students and sometimes employed other communication strategies like the use of body language. The study demonstrated that the participants were interculturally competent as they managed to attune their language and communication strategies to suit to their culturally different counterparts.

In summary, to be a competent intercultural communicator, one has to be able to behave, understand and respond appropriately and effectively when communicating with people of different cultures. Intercultural sensitivity is one aspect that is essential for an individual to communicate effectively interculturally. To present a deeper understanding of intercultural communication competence and also intercultural sensitivity, the next section examines theories in intercultural communication competence, before discussing models of intercultural sensitivity.

2.3 Comparison of intercultural communication theories

This section, in discussing prominent theories in intercultural communication competence, will argue their impracticality for the current research study on the grounds that they do not sufficiently capture the accommodation process of foreign academics in a dynamic intercultural setting.

A number of prominent theoretical frameworks for intercultural communication competence have been developed namely Ruben's Behavioural Approach to Intercultural Communicative Competence (Ruben 1976), Systems Theory Approach (STA) (Kim 1991, 1995, 2002), European Multidimensional Models of Intercultural Competence (Byram 1997), Risager (2007) expansion of Byram's model and Intercultural Communication Competence Theory (Chen & Starosta 2000). Not all these theories, although comprehensive for their respective contexts, are necessarily applicable for the present study. For instance, Ruben's Behavioural Approach to Intercultural Communicative Competence delves into the concept of understanding the individual's behaviours in an intercultural situation. Ruben (1976) identifies seven dimensions of intercultural competence which include displaying respect, orientation to knowledge, empathy, interaction management, and tolerance for ambiguity. This theoretical framework focuses on the understanding of individuals in being

interculturally competent and what they actually do in intercultural situations, namely behavioural aspects of the interlocutors. When it comes to interacting interculturally, behaviour is not enough to understand the intercultural sensitivity of an individual because interaction also involves accommodating to the counterparts verbally.

The other four theories of intercultural communication competence and their key features are summarised and compared in Table 1.

Kim's Systems-Theory Approach (1991, 1995, 2002) to intercultural communication competence comprises four elements that influence intercultural adaptation which are: 1) the predisposition of individuals, 2) the environment of the host culture, 3) the dynamics of the hosts, and personal, interpersonal and mass communication, as well as 4) the intercultural transformation of the individual. Kim argues that intercultural communication competence is not merely based on an individual's understanding of a particular context but also is an internal capacity within each individual. Kim recognises adaptability as, 'the capacity of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment as important components of intercultural communication theory' (Kim 1991, p. 268). A person's adaptability refers to the ability to be versatile when interacting in any unfamiliar intercultural situation. Three dimensions of an individual's adaptability identified by Kim are: 1) cognitive (discerning meanings), 2) affective (emotions showing a willingness to accommodate different cultural ways) and 3) operational dimension (being flexible and resourceful in intercultural interaction). Kim's perspective and theory, although discussing an individuals' adaptability to the host culture, which is also about being accommodative to the host culture, does not entail the strategies that individuals may use in their adaptability process. Consequently, this theory is insufficient in understanding and exploring the accommodation process of foreign academics in this study of whether they converge or diverge when they interact with the people of the host culture.

The foreign academics response and reaction when interacting with the people of the host culture would influence their intercultural sensitivity. Kim further argues that individuals who are culturally competent are not necessarily interculturally competent communicators. She further argues that to be culturally competent an individual need only one aspect of intercultural communication competence, not all three aspects.

Table 1: Intercultural communication competence (ICC) theories

Models	Elements of ICC	Perspective
Kim's (1991, 1995, 2002) Systems Theory Approach	Four elements: 1 Predisposition 2 Environment 3 Dynamics of host & communication 4 Intercultural transformation	• Argued that individuals should be distinguished by their cultural competence and intercultural communication competence • Culturally competent individuals can differentiate the differences in cultures and react accordingly; cultural competence is one element in intercultural communication competence.
Byram's (1997) European Multidimensional Model of Intercultural Competence	Five-factor model: 1 Attitude 2 Knowledge of self & others 3 Interaction: skills of interpreting & relating 4 Skills of discovery & interaction 5 Critical cultural awareness	• Skills of interpreting and relating demonstrate the individual's ability to explain, relate and interpret actions and information gained from other cultures to one's own culture • Interaction factor include communication verbal and non-verbal modes, and the development of various linguistic competencies
Risager (2007) Expanded conceptualisation of Byram's model	10 elements: 1 Linguistic (languastructural) competence 2–4 Languacultural competences & resources (LC&R): 2 LC&R: semantics & pragmatics 3 LC&R: poetics 4 LC&R: linguistic identity 5 Translation and interpretation 6 Interpreting texts (discourse) 7 Use of ethnographic methods 8 Transnational cooperation 9 Knowledge of language as critical language awareness 10 Knowledge of culture, society and critical cultural awareness	• Risager claimed that the model is broader in scope, however, 10 elements outlined are largely manifested in linguistic development and proficiencies which Risager believed to be narrow competences that can be assessed. • Factors 9 and 10 include awareness 'as a world citizen'.
Chen & Starosta (1996) Intercultural Communication Competence theory (general)	Three components: 1 Intercultural sensitivity (affective aspect) 2 Intercultural awareness (cognitive) 3 Intercultural adroitness (behaviour)	• Theory aims to understand the influence of culture on attitudes, beliefs and behaviours to reduce misunderstandings that result from cultural variations. • Argued that intercultural communication competent individuals are: aware of cultural differences, sensitive to cultural differences and behave appropriately in culturally different contexts.

Another framework which considers both verbal and non-verbal communication forms and is quite prominent in intercultural communication competence theories is Bryam's (1997) European Multidimensional Models of Intercultural Competence. This five-factor model comprises of: 1) attitude where an individual is able to make sense of one's self as well as appreciate others, 2) knowledge of one's self and others in which an individual has knowledge when interacting with people of different cultures and understands other people's practices and culture, 3) the skills of interpreting and relating which demonstrate the individual's ability to explain, relate and interpret actions and information gained from other cultures to one's own culture, 4) the skills of discovery and interaction when an individual is able to apply knowledge and cultural skills in cross-cultural interactions, and 5) critical cultural awareness. Byram further clarifies that the model is inclusive of varieties of verbal and non-verbal communication forms, linguistic and sociolinguistic development as well as discourse competencies. Of importance is knowing when and how a person changes one's behaviour and linguistic aspects when interacting with and accommodating to people of different cultures. This model has mostly been applied in measuring students' intercultural communication competence in foreign language education (Garrett-Rucks 2014; Hoff 2014).

This framework has been extended by Risager (2007) who argued that a model for intercultural communication competence must be extensive and resourceful yet able to assess specific competencies. Risager' argument stresses on the importance of integrating linguistic proficiencies and development to the framework namely linguistics aspects like semantics, pragmatics, discourse and also language and society. Although this theory was expanded with the inclusion of linguistic elements, this extension limited intercultural communication to only the linguistic aspects, ignoring non-verbal communication. Risager's argument assumed linguistics competence of interlocutors and that interlocutors are linguistically capable to analyse the people of the host culture's aspects of language during their intercultural interaction. However, intercultural communication competence is not only about one's linguistics capability when interacting with culturally different counterparts, it also includes non-verbal components.

Chen and Starosta (1996) theory of intercultural communication competence explains that an interculturally competent individual is one who has the ability to negotiate cultural meaning and to enact appropriate communication behaviours that recognise the 'interactant's multiple identities in a specific environment' (p. 359). They further argue that interculturally

competent communicators should have cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Thus in their intercultural communication competence theory, they proposed elements of intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness (Chen & Starosta 2000). Intercultural awareness is described as the individuals' cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence where individuals understand the customs of the host culture which then affect the way individuals think and behave. The element of intercultural sensitivity is described as individuals' affective aspect in intercultural communication. This is when individuals are motivated to understand the host culture and appreciate and accept cultural differences. The last element, intercultural adroitness, is described as the behaviour of individuals during their intercultural interaction which would help them to achieve their communication goals (Chen & Starosta 1996, 1998). Although this theory stated that intercultural sensitivity as one part of intercultural communication competence, it is not completely relevant to the current study which explores the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics. The current study did not intend to explore the intercultural awareness neither adroitness of the foreign academics. Therefore, this theory is unsuitable in the context of this research.

These theories of intercultural communication competence suggest that intercultural communication is: the adaptability of oneself to other cultures (Kim 1991), one's behavioural aspect towards people of other cultures (Ruben 1976), one's attitudes and knowledge of other cultures and its people (Byram 1997), one's linguistics competencies when interacting with people of other cultures (Risager 2007) and one's awareness of cultures of others, being sensitive of the cultural differences and able to behave accordingly (Chen & Starosta 1996). These theories examine either verbal or non-verbal interaction between dyads or interlocutors of different cultures but not the accommodation process of the interlocutors as compared to Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) initially conceptualised by Giles et al. (1991) which is more exhaustive in understanding the accommodation process.

Communication Accommodation Theory provides the advantages of not only understanding the verbal and non-verbal interaction between dyads of different cultures in various contexts, but also the strategies of converging and diverging their interaction in achieving the meaning and aims of intercultural interaction. Of the many theories which discuss intercultural communication competence and intercultural sensitivity, Communication Accommodation

Theory provides a comprehensive analysis of significant factors in communicating and interacting with people from different cultures.

2.4 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

This section introduces Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as an alternative to understanding the accommodation process. I argue that this theory allows me to frame the discussion of the findings in-depth to understand the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity in accommodating to the host culture. I then provide details about CAT and explain how it is used in research studies.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) which can add insights into processes of developing intercultural communication competence is based on a predecessor theory of Speech Accommodation Theory developed in the context of intercultural communication (Gallois et al. 2005). This theory has developed to become a theory of 'both intergroup and interpersonal communication' (p. 122). CAT, as explained briefly in the previous section, provides diverse and clarifying explanations of behaviours within varying contexts of interactions. This theory was developed to understand the dynamics of speech from the concepts of social psychology (Giles et al. 1991, p. 6). As this theory developed and was applied in various interdisciplinary fields, the focus of the theory was expanded and further elaborated. The focus, then, was not only on the verbal and linguistic aspects of communication, but also shifted to non-verbal interaction as well, which then resulted in the current and wider concept of CAT. One eminent influence on the establishment of the theory is attribution theory. Attribution theory suggests that people's behaviours are informed by their motives and intentions. Generally people tend to view someone's behaviour more favourably when ascribing behaviour to an internal cause (own intention or motives) rather than an external cause (situational or contextual) (Gallois & Giles 2015).

During verbal interaction, some people tend to accommodate their language use to their recipient(s) by adapting to the speech patterns or behaviours of the recipient(s). They do so when they want to feel a sense of belonging, to appear similar to the recipient, gain their approval, and facilitate the development and smoothness of the conversations (Beebe & Giles 1984). At times the interactants also diverge from the recipient(s). This divergence happens when the interactants want to distinguish themselves from their conversation partners, so as to maintain their own cultural identity and portray their own cultures. The tendency of people

to accommodate and adapt themselves to other people of different cultures may depend on factors like one's motivation to converge or diverge in an intercultural conversation as well as the knowledge of the other culture and communication patterns and behaviour. CAT explains that in intercultural conversations individuals may choose to converge or diverge their communication behaviours to that of others or between dyads (Lustig & Koesler 2010, p.188; Williams 1999, p. 152). Also interlocutors may apply the approximation strategies in which they try to make their communication patterns and language either more similar or different than one another (Farzadnia & Giles 2015).

Although CAT has been in existence for almost three decades, the relevance of this theory is substantive even in today's world. CAT provides a comprehensive framework applicable in various contexts in understanding the strategies individuals make in accommodating and interacting with people of different culture in many fields (Giles & Ogay 2007). Individuals may converge or diverge their behaviour in the way they establish their social interactions and relationships with the people of the host culture. This theory also works as a framework for understanding and exploring the dynamic interaction of speakers as they adjust their language and non-verbal patterns to one another (Farzadnia & Giles 2015). In the process of resettlement among foreign academics (see Section 2.1), aside from adjusting to the language differences, other possible aspects like the cultural differences in terms of the local cuisine, food, clothing and also the apparent difference of religion could be analysed by CAT which would be able to encapsulates the non-verbal patterns of foreign academics in accommodating to the host culture and the people of the host culture.

This theory has been and continues to be applied in various disciplines, and is not only analysed from speech or linguistic aspects. This theory has also been continuously applied in various settings with people of various nationalities and ethnicities. Studies have focused, for example, on the mass media and interviews between a talk show host with his guests which found that people of lower status accommodated to their partners of a higher status by converging their voices so that they will be perceived better by their partner (Gregory & Webster 1996) and with the elderly (Coupland et al. 1988a, 1988b). The theory has also been used to study various aspects and issues, for example, communication acculturation (Ng 2007). Ng's study investigates the New Zealand Chinese community's acculturation to the mainstream language while at the same time maintaining their ancestral language with their family members. CAT has also been used in investigating inter-ethnic accommodation styles

among Malaysian Chinese and Malays (Ibrahim et al. 2009), linguistics aspects of code switching and code mixing (David & McLellan 2011). David and McLellan (2011) used Communication Accommodation Theory as the main perspective in determining the social distance and relationships between dyads in a multi-ethnic country.

Other studies using CAT include a study on language identities (Mohd Nadzri & Hassan 2013) and, language choice and policies in the Soviet Union (Guadagnolo & Guinn 2014). In Guadagnolo and Guinn's study, the theory was applied to explain the effects of the 1920s and 1930s Soviet Language policies on the Volga Tatars (a family of Soviet nationalities). Other studies have used the theory in family studies to examine interaction strategies of convergence and divergence between children and the parents in a mixed-race family of a Filipino and Malaysian family (Dumanig et al. 2013; Mahadhir et al. 2014).

CAT has been used also as the theoretical framework to examine intercultural conversational effectiveness in Facebook interaction between Thai and American students (Chuang 2014). The study examined accommodative social cue behaviour in intercultural computer-mediated settings and identified factors influencing effective communication. The study found that accommodation and intercultural communication competence was influenced by the environment, language, motivation, speaking partner, medium of communication and type of tasks. In other words, intercultural communication competence determines one's perception of how individuals view others and themselves. In this study the native language for both groups of respondents was linguistically different. In Chuang's study, the demographic of respondents varied similar to this current research study of foreign academics in Malaysia in which the native languages of the foreign academics are different from the people of the host culture.

CAT has been used also in the medical field. For example, a study uses the theory to examine communication strategies of older adults in explaining their pain to their care practitioners during medical ambulatory care visits (Hehl & McDonald 2014). This theory helped to understand the communication behaviour of the patients and the care practitioners. The results suggest that preconceived ideas that some practitioners had towards older adult patients, like hearing problems which require the practitioners to speak slowly and loudly, may be helpful to some yet insulting to other older adult patients. The results also suggest that it is important for care practitioners to be aware of their own preconceived judgements of older adults and for the patients to be guided effectively in turn taking in communicating their

pain. The context-based nature of CAT was useful to explain changes in communication patterns and what the care practitioners have achieved.

Another study in the medical field by Farzadnia and Giles (2015) used CAT to study the interaction between patient and health care provider. The study found that providers play important roles in ensuring success of interactions with the patients. Furthermore, socio-psychological aspects also play an important role in the accommodation process aside from language and speech aspects. In an intercultural setting, among challenges or difficulties that could hinder the interaction between providers and patients are language discordance between the provider and patient, and lack of attention to non-linguistics aspects like nationality, ethnicity and religion (Scholl et al. 2011).

CAT has also been used in studies to examine the multicultural Malaysian context. One study observed and analysed the phenomena of code switching in the multicultural multi-ethnic interactions in Malaysia between the Malays, Chinese and Indians from social psychological perspectives (David & McLellan 2011). The researchers used CAT to determine the social distance and relationships between dyads in this multi-ethnic country. This study shows the many reasons for code switching among Malaysians is based on various reasons and contexts. For example, Malaysians tend to code switch when they want to emphasise certain issues or topics, to establish rapport or solidarity with people or certain groups, to talk about a third party, or to achieve certain speech acts. This study concluded that code switching is one of the strategies that brings positive impacts to the interlocutors. The researchers believe that people code switch because they want to accommodate to the interlocutor and bridge gaps between the dyads.

Another Malaysian study guided by CAT was done by Mohd Nadzri and Hassan (2013). The study discussed language identity in Malaysia as portrayed in one famous animation series about twin boys whose names are *Upin* and *Ipin*. This study focuses on how the characters *Upin* and *Ipin* in the animation converge and diverge when they interact with one another, as to show or portray the sense of belonging and distinction between ethnicities. The study suggests that Malaysians tend to use both accommodation strategies—they converge and diverge depending on the ethnicity of the other interlocutor(s). This study is also another example that studies the interactional pattern between dyads.

The findings from these studies by David and McLellan (2011) and Mohd Nadzri and Hassan (2013) can be related with the present research in terms of how people actually use accommodation strategies to communicate and how the sense of belonging can actually influence the reason of one's convergence or divergence. The ability of an individual to converge or diverge also shows the intercultural sensitivity of the individual as intercultural sensitivity refers to when a person is able to adapt their communication and behaviour to the target culture (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992). The core intention of this research study is to understand accommodation strategies used by foreign academics when interacting with the people of the host culture.

Most past studies that apply this theory have one common aspect—that of language. The convergence and divergence aspects of individuals in their daily interaction indicate their change in the language that they use and also the way they communicate between dyads. It is anticipated that CAT will be useful in this current study to examine the role of language as possibility causing some problems for the foreign academics. As discussed earlier in the chapter, in Kelantan, the locals mainly use the local dialect which is the Kelantanese dialect in their daily interaction. Therefore, the foreign academics not only have to learn the national language of Malaysia which is the Malay language but also the Kelantanese dialect.

CAT discusses the ability of an individual to converge or diverge when interacting with people from other cultures. This convergence and divergence can be intentional as the interlocutor intentionally either wants to show solidarity to the other interlocutor or to distinguish himself/herself from the interlocutor. This approach to analysing convergence or divergence also examines the ability of individuals to accommodate their interaction which can be both verbal and non-verbal behaviour in social interactions when relating with people of the host culture. These behaviours could also be in connection with other cultural differences, including religion. Furthermore, CAT has the potential to provide insights into the importance of foreign academics being interculturally sensitive especially when interacting with their students so they will better understand the lesson taught in class, with colleagues to ensure that the workplaces function effectively, and in the wider community.

In summary, this section has discussed various intercultural communication competence theories which can potentially be used to explore the effectiveness of communication in multilingual contexts. Some limitations also exist, despite the advantages of these theories—the emphasis on the cognitive aspects and awareness of different cultures, behaving

appropriately towards people of different culture and constructing appropriate words and sentences. The limitations of these theories include: adaptability to other cultures without detailing the strategies to achieve the adaptation (Kim 1991), behaviours are important aspect in order to be interculturally competent communicator (Ruben 1976), the cognitive aspect and attitudes towards people of other cultures (Byram 1997) and to be linguistically competent during intercultural interaction (Risager 2007).

These limitations have led to the need to consider another theoretical framing to understand intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a Malaysian university. Therefore, this study investigates foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity through studying their convergence and divergence by applying CAT. This research perspective is supported by Martin and Nakayama (2007, p. 53) who suggest that people will adjust their ways of interacting to facilitate understanding. This study contributes to the application of CAT in understanding intercultural sensitivity in multicultural contexts. CAT provides the benefits of understanding the strategies that interactants use in accommodating themselves with interlocutors of different cultures—whether they converge, diverge or maintain and approximate their verbal and non-verbal interaction in becoming interculturally sensitive. In understanding and exploring the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in this study, a further understanding and discussion of models of intercultural sensitivity is needed to determine how the models will guide this study of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. The next section discusses the models of intercultural sensitivity.

2.5 Intercultural sensitivity models

Many models of intercultural sensitivity have been developed to test and measure the levels of intercultural sensitivity of an individual. Four prominent models of intercultural sensitivity are: Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1986), Bhawuk and Brislin's Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (1992), Chen and Starosta's Five-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1997) and Tamam's Three-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2010) which modifies Chen and Starosta's model. A summary of these models is presented in Table 2 with the details of each model being discussed in the following sub-sections. Although each model has different elements and approaches to intercultural sensitivity, all the models aim to explore and measure the intercultural sensitivity levels of an individual.

Table 2: A comparison of Intercultural sensitivity models

Models	Factors	Participants	Comparison of models
Bennett's (1986) Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) Derived from DMIS: Intercultural Development Inventory	A developmental process which involves two stages along a continuum: 1 Ethnocentrism (denial, defence & minimisation) 2 Ethnorelativism (acceptance, adaptation & integration) 1st phase (preliminary): 60 items 2nd phase: 50 items	This theoretical study was based on intercultural communication training. Bennett proposed to explore intercultural sensitivity as a continuum of stages of intercultural sensitivity development. These stages helped the trainers identify the trainees' level of intercultural sensitivity and thus design appropriate materials for the intercultural training.	Bennett's ethnorelativism may be similar to Bhawuk & Brislin's flexibility and open-mindedness. • *Ethnorelative* refers to ways of seeking cultural difference by: accepting its importance, adapting perspectives to consider or integrate the whole concept into a definition of identity. • *Acceptance* is similar to open-mindedness; adaptation is similar to flexibility • Being flexible can mean that one accepts, able to adapt also integrates well with the host culture • *Flexibility* is the willingness to engage in different behaviours • *Open-mindedness* concerns one's observations of behaviour in other cultures. • Acceptance is the ability to: experience others as different from themselves but equally human, adapt at identifying how cultural differences operate in interactions; it does not mean agreement as some cultural difference may be judged negatively, but not from an ethnocentric perspective. • Adaptation means that one can express alternative cultural experiences in culturally appropriate feelings and behaviours: the state in which the experience of another culture yields perception and behaviour appropriate to that culture.
Bhawuk and Brislin's (1992) Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory	Constructs: 1 Individualism & collectivism 2 Flexibility 3 Open-mindedness	Graduate students from the University of Hawaii • 46 MBA students from the College of Business Administration • 93 students attached to the East–West Center from various departments Most students were mature professionals seeking a degree after working for some years. They came various countries: the US, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines & Thailand.	

Table 2 (cont.)

Models	Factors	Participants	Comparison of models
Chen and Starosta's (2000) Five-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity	Five factors: 1 Interaction engagement 2 Respect for cultural differences 3 Interaction confidence 4 Interaction enjoyment 5 Interaction attentiveness	Study 1 • 414 college students enrolled in communication basic courses (152 males, 262 females; average age 20.6) Study 2 (evaluate concurrent validity) • 162 college students enrolled in communication basic courses (66 males, 96 females; average age 19.5)	Chen & Starosta and Tamam both talk about interaction confidence, interaction attentiveness and respect. Tamam's model has the following differences: • Respect is explained as being the result of communication style practised by Malaysians—an indirect, non-confrontational communication style • Respect not only indicates respect for cultural differences but also is more specific on interaction aspects—the Malaysian communication style. • Tamam's analysis indicates that the value of attentiveness and respect for cultural differences which may fail in intercultural interaction. Thus labelled as *interaction attentiveness and respect* • adds *interaction openness* meaning the ability to be open towards other cultures
Tamam's (2010) Three-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity Derived from Chen and Starosta's five-factor model of intercultural sensitivity	Three factors: 1 Interaction attentiveness & respect 2 Interaction openness 3 Interaction confidence	• 447 Undergraduate university students of public university located close to the capital city of KL in Malaysia. • Ethnicity: 193 Malays, 165 Chinese, 89 Indians • Year-level of students: 29.5% 1st year, 35.1% 2nd year, 35.4% 3rd year • Religion: 44.3% Muslims, 31.3% Buddhists, 15.9% Hindus, 8.1% Christians	

2.5.1 Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1986) provides a continuum of intercultural sensitivity in which individuals can progress from an ethnocentric to ethnorelative stage. Individuals will gradually experience development in terms of their affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects. This model has identified orientations of intercultural sensitivity such that individuals moving towards cultural differences will enable people to become more effective interculturally competent communicators. This model has six levels grouped into the two stages along a continuum from ethnocentricism (denial, defence and minimisation) to ethnorelativism (acceptance, adaptation and integration). From the model, an Intercultural Development Inventory was created to measure the intercultural sensitivity of an individual.

In further explanations about the inventory, Bennett (1993) explains that people with an ethnocentric orientation who are in the denial phase prefer to ignore other cultures and totally deny their validity. People in the defence phase are described as being aware of the other culture but strongly believe that their own culture is superior. In the minimisation phase, differences between one's culture and others are disregarded with cultures being seen as similar and equal. In the second stage of the intercultural sensitivity model, the ethnorelative stage, individuals view their culture as inclusive of or compared to other cultures without differences perceived as threats to one's own culture. In the first phase, acceptance, one acknowledges that one's culture is just another different and a unique worldview and one is respectful towards other cultures. Adaptation, the second phase, means that one appreciates other cultures as highly as one's own. The final integration phase means individuals can live freely between their own cultures and the host culture.

According to Hammer et al. (2003, p. 423), Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) accounts for the changes in worldview structure according to which the stages represent the underlying worldview of the behaviour of the interlocutors and also their Developmental Model attitudes towards other cultures. A study by Christa and Kent (2001) that used Bennett's (1986, 1993) found that intercultural sensitivity can be increased by having experience of living abroad and learning foreign languages.

Another study that applies Bennett's model is by Straffon (2003) who was the first to use the model in the context of high school students in an international school in a large city in

Southeast Asia (the exact location was not disclosed). Straffon (2003) found that most students had a high level of intercultural sensitivity while only a small number of students purportedly held an ethnocentric worldview. Straffon (2003) concluded that attending international schools helped the students to understand, acknowledge and adapt more easily to people of different cultures. The setting of the international school is intercultural in nature with students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The results of the study support the assertion that international high school students tend to be more interculturally sensitive due to extensive exposure to people of culturally diverse backgrounds. It can be assumed from the findings of this study that, for the context of the present research, foreign academics who have had exposure to foreign cultures prior to their arrival to the host culture may understand, acknowledge and adapt to the host culture more easily as compared to foreign academics who have less intercultural experiences.

Yuen and Grossman (2009) conducted a study of student teachers in three Chinese cities using Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity. The findings showed that in understanding the cultural differences of the students, the teachers were at the ethnocentric stage and tended to minimise differences by focusing on similarities of their students and they treated everyone as equal in a sense that everyone was from a similar culture. It seems that most teachers tended to see the students as one community rather than multicultural communities. However, disregarding the students' different ethnicities, beliefs and cultural practices can have negative consequences as it homogenises experience and denies diversity. Yuen and Grossman (2009) also believed that for individuals to develop their intercultural sensitivity according to Bennett's Developmental Model, they need to have some experience in cultural differences. They also believed that the more intercultural experiences one has, the higher the level of intercultural sensitivity that can be achieved. This study by Yuen and Grossman (2009) identified the importance of having some experience in intercultural settings which indicates that intercultural sensitivity is constantly evolving in tandem with people's experiences over the life course or where they live and work. The study has similar findings to Straffon's (2003) study in that intercultural sensitivity needs to be experienced and felt. The more intercultural exposure, the more likely it is that someone will develop sensitivity and empathy towards alternative perspectives and worldviews. This finding suggests that foreign academics who have experience of travelling and working overseas may tend to be more interculturally sensitive as compared to those who have lesser experience. Such

findings underscore the need for qualitative research that attends to the biographies of individuals and the experiences of people over time and space.

Another study using Bennett's DMIS (Bayles 2009) to explore intercultural sensitivity of 233 elementary teachers teaching in five bilingual schools in urban Texas. The study aimed to find out whether demographics and backgrounds in intercultural experience could affect the teachers' intercultural sensitivity. The results showed that on the whole the teachers could be considered in the minimisation phase of the ethnocentric stage. This finding suggested that the teachers may have understandings and awareness of cultural difference, values, beliefs and communication styles but they minimised the differences and used more universalistic values and ideologies approaches in their educational practice. The results also found that teachers who had more than 10 years of experience were more likely to develop their intercultural sensitivity and were reportedly more ethnorelative than those who had lesser years of experience. This study is quite similar to the one by Yuen and Grossman (2009), where multicultural experiences were seen to affect the level of intercultural sensitivity of an individual despite the different context of both studies. The findings of these two studies mentioned show that intercultural experiences contribute to individuals being interculturally sensitive. It can also be anticipated that for this research study, foreign academics who have more intercultural experiences or who have been travelling and living overseas are more interculturally sensitive than those who have fewer intercultural experiences.

Bennett's DMIS tends towards understanding and identifying the level or phase of the intercultural sensitivity of an individual. The model focuses mainly on the categorisation of the progress by using different phases and stages along a continuum. This inventory or scale used could be suitable to measure the phase of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics from a specific time to a specific time. However, measuring intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics is not the main purpose of this research, which was rather to investigate and understand their intercultural sensitivity and how it can affect the intercultural interactions and experiences with people of the university and the neighbouring community. The current study also does not intend to investigate the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics at a different time and stage. Another drawback of using this inventory is that it is costly to use, as the researcher has to pay to take required certification, access to the manuals and the software.

2.5.2 Bhawuk and Brislin's Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory

Bhawuk and Brislin's Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (1992) is based on Hofstede's (1980) individualistic/collectivistic cultural dimension and how that dimension influences intercultural sensitivity. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) suggest that 'to be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and also be willing to modify their behaviour as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures' (p. 416). Their study also suggests that the ability to be bilingual or knowing more than one language affects intercultural sensitivity. To measure intercultural sensitivity, Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) developed an inventory which aimed to measure individuals' ability to adjust their behaviour accordingly when moving between different cultures. The inventory was tested on graduate students at the University of Hawaii who were either doing an MBA and were considering joining an international business or studying at the University business centre, the East–West Centre, a federally research-funded educational organisation sponsoring students. The inventory is divided into three sections as follows:

1 The US section—in which the respondents responded to 26 items that required them to picture themselves as living or intending to work in the United States
2 Living in Japan—the respondents had the same 26 items as in Section 1, but only to picture themselves as living in Japan. These two countries are used as they are perceived to have very distinct aspects of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede 1980).
3 Flex/Open section—has 30 items, with 11 items from the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, 10 items on open-mindedness (open) and nine items on flexibility (flex).

The study intended to examine: 1) the collectivistic or individualistic culture effect on people's understanding on how they should behave, 2) the participants' open-mindedness when they meet other cultures, and c) their ability to be flexible when behaving in unfamiliar ways in meeting the norms of other cultures. In developing the instrument, Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) believed that it is important to understand the specific behaviours of the groups which signify the dimensions of the group cultures. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) referred to Hofstede's (1980) four constructs to dimensionalise culture: 1) individualism/collectivism, 2) uncertainty avoidance, 3) power distance and 4) masculinity/femininity. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) chose individualism/collectivism as this construct was the most investigated

among researchers at that time. The selected construct then was combined with four other concepts which were: open-mindedness, flexibility, time and living arrangements.

The study found that the cultural dimension, individualistic vs. collectivistic, was the most significant factor among other factors in the test as the analysis of results shows that the concept of individualism and collectivism is applicable in measuring intercultural sensitivity. The results from the inventory also show that interculturally sensitive people are those who enjoyed extensive intercultural interaction environments, enjoyed intercultural activities like tasting various different ethnic cuisines, and had spent about three years or more living abroad. Recent studies (for example, Vargas & Kemmelmeier 2013; Taras et al. 2014) argue, however, that as the current world has become intercultural, it cannot be assumed that certain populations of a certain country to be individualistic or collectivistic. Individuals can be individualistic and collectivistic at the same time depending on the individuals' characteristics and also cultures (Coon & Kemmelmeier 2001; Vargas & Kemmelmeier 2013; Taras et al. 2014).

One study which has questioned the validity of this inventory is Kapoor and Comadena (2003). This study aimed to measure intercultural sensitivity of a group of undergraduate students from the United States and a group residing in Mexico to find out if the individualism and collectivism dimension could be used to measure intercultural sensitivity. The study found that statements from the students from both groups were found to be both individualist and collectivist which means that when the students, both Americans and Mexicans, were asked to rate their behaviour in their own country and in other countries, they tended towards both individualist and collectivist orientations. Kapoor and Comadena (2003) further emphasised that people can both be individualistic and collectivistic in different cultural settings. Kapoor and Comadena (2003) did not deny the statement made by Hofstede (1980) that classified Americans as being individualist and Mexicans collectivist in nature, however, their results from this study showed that the concept individualistic and collectivistic as a basis for intercultural sensitivity measurement is insufficient.

Bhawuk and Brislin's (1992) inventory is seen as unsuitable for the present research as the foreign academics in the public university are from various cultural backgrounds and from over 20 different countries such as Asian countries (for example, Japan, Myanmar), European countries (for example, Hungary, United Kingdom), African countries (for example, Ethiopia, Senegal) and Middle Eastern countries (for example, Egypt, Yemen). It would seem

reasonable not to proceed with the model proposed by Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) as the concept of individualism and collectivism is not applicable to the context of the present research. Even though the inventory also included other criteria of intercultural sensitivity like open-mindedness, sociability, positive self-image as well as initiative, the underpinning concept of categorising culture as individualistic/collectivistic is stereotypical and outdated to be implemented in the context of multicultural society in Malaysia and the multicultural backgrounds of the foreign academics. Furthermore, as mentioned by Gudykunst (2002), the personality of an individual may affect the interaction within people in an in-group and out-group.

Therefore, for this research study, the people of the host culture can be collectivistic and also individualistic depending on with whom they interact. Even with the foreign academics, it is not possible to stereotype them as to be individualistic or collectivistic based on their nationality. Their cultural dimensions might have been affected as some of the foreign academics have travelled to and lived in other foreign countries prior coming to Malaysia.

2.5.3 Chen and Starosta's Five-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Chen and Starosta's Five-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2000) indicates that interaction and respect for cultural differences influence individuals to behave appropriately in an intercultural setting. Chen (1997) argues that orientation does not determine the level of intercultural sensitivity and is the affective part of intercultural communication competence. He further proposed a model of intercultural sensitivity that consisted of six specific personal attributes namely: '1) self-esteem, 2) self-monitoring, 3) open-mindedness, 4) empathy, 5) interaction involvement, and 6) suspending judgment' (Chen 1997, p. 6). These six personal attributes of intercultural sensitivity relates to 'an individual's ability to develop positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication' (Chen 1997, p. 5). Accordingly, Chen and Starosta (2000) developed a five-factor model of intercultural sensitivity comprising: '1) respect for cultural differences, 2) interaction attentiveness, 3) interaction enjoyment, 4) interaction engagement and 5) interaction confidence' (p. 8). The construct for all five items for this model is quantitative and uses the Likert scale for all items.

Respect for cultural differences, the first factor in Chen and Starosta's model, means that a person respects the different behaviours of culturally different counterparts. It can be inferred from past studies on intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1993; Chen 1997) that interaction between dyads is not limited to only establishing social relationships with the people of the host culture but also showing respect towards other cultures. Some of the items in the construct of respect for cultural differences are: 'I respect the ways people from different cultures behave', 'I respect the values of people from different cultures' and also 'I can tell when I have upset my culturally-distinct counterpart during our interaction' (Chen & Starosta 2000, p. 8). A study on intercultural sensitivity indicates that respect, acceptance and tolerance for cultural differences are essential in an intercultural interaction (Shi-Yong 2006).

In Malaysia not just cultural differences need to be respected but also religious differences because respecting and tolerating cultural and religious differences are two elements that have been practised among multicultural Malaysian society (Shuhaimi 2009). Thus another aspect of respect for cultural differences in the current study on foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity in Kelantan would also need to include the religion of Islam. It can be implied that respect for cultural differences, encompasses respect for the different religions and beliefs in Kelantan. One's ability to respect differences, also indicate his/her ability to tolerate differences. Tolerance towards other religion and beliefs may suggest that one has to deliberately change the way he/she behaves, present themselves in public and also his/her everyday routine.

The second of the five factors in Chen and Starosta's model is interaction attentiveness. It occurs when a person is being observant in their intercultural interaction. The ability of an individual to be observant and sensitive portrays the individual's intercultural sensitivity. Being observant also indicates that individuals pay attention to their surroundings and also people around them. This behaviour will result in individuals having the awareness of the host culture and also the local community of the host culture.

Chen and Starosta suggest that a person who is interculturally sensitive probably also enjoys the experience of intercultural interactions. Interaction enjoyment, the third factor, indicates individuals appreciate their interaction with people of the host culture. It can be inferred that these individuals do not only enjoy verbal interactions but also any means of interaction with the people of the host culture which may include intercultural activities, events, festivals and also ceremonies. Interaction enjoyment in the inventory consists of items like: 'I often get

discouraged when I am with people from different cultures' and 'I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures (Chen & Starosta 2000, p. 8). The items indicate the positive or negative reactions of an individual during intercultural interactions.

The fourth factor, interaction engagement, describes a person being open-minded to people from different cultures. Although interaction engagement is almost similar to interaction enjoyment, it has some differences. Individuals who score high in interaction engagement demonstrate a positive value when giving responses towards interculturally different counterparts. People also make efforts to engage with the people of the host culture and demonstrate the ability of being open-minded and receptive to people of different cultures. Individuals also demonstrate their understanding of other cultures in interaction engagement. Interaction engagement consists of items like: 'I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction', 'I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or non-verbal cues' and 'I am open-minded to people from different cultures' (Chen & Starosta 2000, p.8). This understanding of other cultures may result from individuals' past experiences of interacting with or engaging with people of different cultures. Individuals' behaviour or actions is influenced by their experiences in life, society and also social structure (Bourdieu 1986). It can be anticipated that an individuals' ability to understand other cultures and behave accordingly is in relation to their past experiences interacting with culturally different counterparts.

When a person is confident in interacting with people from different cultures, he/she has the values of interaction confidence. Individuals who have a strong level of interaction confidence manage to interact well and confidently with people of different cultures. Interaction with culturally different counterparts, nevertheless, can be challenging especially when the first language of the dyads is different as the language aspect can influence the success in an intercultural interaction (Baker 2011).

Numerous studies have used Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity models in various ways with mixed results. For example, Fritz et al. (2000) tested the model by conducting a study in Germany with 400 university business administration students. The study produced similar results to Chen and Starosta's study in the US and confirmed the validity of the instruments. However, a more recent study done by the same researchers, Fritz et al. in 2005 with students in a Midwestern university in the US and a university in Germany did not produce similar results. This study found that the model did not fit the context of the study. It

was very technical and focused more on the testing of the instruments to check the validity and reliability of the model. The study merely focused on whether these five factors of intercultural sensitivity as mentioned by Chen and Starosta are valid and reliable or not. The studies did not discuss the results for each of the five factors in detail. The results from both studies show that this model is not a context-based model as it provides inconsistent results for both different contexts.

Nevertheless, Shi-Yong's (2006) study that used Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale shows that the model is applicable to be used in a different context of China. The study investigated intercultural sensitivity among three groups of participants: English major students, non-English major students and multinational employees in China. This study assessed all five factors of the scales and made comparisons between the three groups to find out which factors the participants were most sensitive to. The results found that interaction engagement and enjoyment affected the English major students' respect for cultural differences. However, multinational employees were only affected by interaction enjoyment. Interaction enjoyment, as described earlier in the section, deals with the interlocutors' reaction when interacting with people of different cultures and the reaction could be positive or negative. In the case of the multinational employees, English—the medium of communication used in the office—was the language they had to use and used mainly for work-related purposes only. Therefore, they had no enjoyment when interacting in English as it was compulsory for them. Thus the result for interaction engagement is higher than other factors in the scale as they had to engage in English at the workplace.

The results also showed that English major students felt interaction enjoyment more easily as compared to multinational employees and non-English major students. The two factors of respect and tolerance and interaction confidence were present in both groups of students. The findings indicate that the students in the study understood the processes of accepting, tolerating and respecting differences between cultures. It was also found that the English major students were high in interaction attentiveness as compared to non-English major students in that they were found to be more attentive and sensitive in understanding indirect meanings during interaction. It can be inferred that the students who majored in English did not have as many language difficulties in comprehending and responding to English messages as compared to other students. Due to that, the English major students obtained

more information during interactions and were more observant as they did not have language barriers.

This study shows that the model can be used in a context where English is not the native language. This study is similar to the context of the current research study in which English is not the native language but is widely used by the people of the host culture, particularly within the university. Shi-Yong (2006) suggests that further studies need to be undertaken to examine the influence of cultural differences on intercultural sensitivity among different group members. The study found that being fluent in English affects the participants' intercultural sensitivity. Therefore Shi-Yong questions whether being culturally fluent affects foreign language fluency and thus whether foreign language fluency affects intercultural sensitivity.

Chen and Starosta's scale was also used with undergraduate students in an introductory communication course at a north-eastern university in the US (Yu & Chen 2008) to determine the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and conflict management styles. The study found that intercultural sensitivity affected the way the participants manage conflict. Students who believed they were high in intercultural sensitivity tended to use integrating and compromising strategies in managing conflict and were unlikely to use avoiding and dominating styles. The study also confirmed the six characteristics of intercultural sensitivity as defined by Chen and Starosta. This study agreed with Chen and Starosta's definition of individual's intercultural sensitivity showing that Chen and Starosta’s intercultural sensitivity scale is suitable in that context. It can be anticipated that foreign academics in this research might use similar strategies when dealing with people of the host culture especially in their workplace, the university.

A study by Dong et al. (2008) also used Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity. The study was conducted with undergraduate college students from two universities in the US. The study explored how ethnocentrism can be overcome by examining the impact of intercultural sensitivity on ethnocentrism, finding out the impact of the multicultural context on ethnocentrism and proposing ways for educators, policy makers and researchers to overcome ethnocentrism. The results suggested that in overcoming ethnocentrism and to minimise conflicts in intergroup interactions, intercultural sensitivity and the elements of multicultural diversity need to be encouraged. The study also found that high levels of intercultural sensitivity and multicultural awareness can be significant agents in reducing an

individual's ethnocentrism. This finding resonates with most past studies of intercultural sensitivity, as discussed earlier in this section, which suggest that people who are interculturally sensitive, understand, respect and tolerate other cultures and display characteristics that are far from being ethnocentric. Due to the importance of intercultural sensitivity in multicultural interaction, the aim of this thesis is to explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a public university in a multicultural context, namely Malaysia.

Another study using Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale aimed to identify the relationship between multicultural encounters and the intercultural sensitivity of South Korean adolescents at three different high schools in Seoul (Park 2013). The study found that the students were interculturally sensitive and they respected people from other cultures, but were not confident to communicate in intercultural settings. These findings indicate some similarities with other studies that used Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale. The results also showed that the number of friends that the students had in their direct or indirect contacts in the mass media and friends from families of various cultural backgrounds had a significant influence on all factors in the intercultural sensitivity scale. It was also found that the experience of being abroad can positively influence interaction engagement and interaction confidence. This study also showed that engagement in an intercultural environment will help develop the intercultural sensitivity of an individual. This study showed that having contact with people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds influences intercultural views and behaviour of an individual.

In another US study, Coffey et al. (2013) used Chen and Starosta’s intercultural sensitivity scale with undergraduate students at a public university. The study aimed to identify which dimensions of a web environment versus a virtual environment might most influence intercultural sensitivity. The web environment is described as a two-dimensional space, while the virtual environment is described as having a ‘sense of being there’ in an actual space like being in the online games, for example, *World of Warcraft, Second Life* or *Sims*. The results showed that the most influential factor in the intercultural sensitivity scale was interaction attentiveness followed by interaction confidence and enjoyment as compared to the other two factors (interaction engagement and respect for cultural differences). However, the authors mentioned that these results might be different if the inventory were to be applied with different dimensions and subjects in different virtual and real environments. This study

reported that men scored higher in interaction enjoyment while women scored higher in interaction attentiveness as women invest more empathy and understanding in communication as compared to men. The authors suggest various dimensions in testing and studying this scale, identifying that gender is among an additional factor that contributes to a small extent in intercultural sensitivity.

Similar findings of gender and intercultural sensitivity were identified in a study by Roh (2014) that measured the intercultural sensitivity of Korean middle and high school students in Seoul and Kyungki provinces using the intercultural sensitivity model developed by Chen and Starosta (2000). The study examined the effects that gender, age, location and level of multicultural experience had on the students' intercultural sensitivity. The study reported that the students were high in interaction enjoyment and respect for cultural differences, less in interaction engagement and interaction confidence and very low in interaction attentiveness. Roh (2014) believed that the results reflected the current multicultural educational programmes conducted in Korean schools. These programmes promote respect and understanding of cultural differences but do not sufficiently provide diverse approaches that could promote intercultural engagement, which could increase the students' intercultural sensitivity. The findings also show that multicultural experiences showed a stronger effect on intercultural sensitivity. Thus this finding would support the implementation of this intercultural sensitivity scale in the Malaysian multicultural context. Other aspects like age and gender only moderately affected the intercultural sensitivity which is similar with Coffey's (2013) study in which that gender plays some role in intercultural sensitivity. Gender, however, was not given much attention in studying intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in Malaysia as the recruitment of foreign academics is not based on gender, rather the academic qualifications of the academics.

A Taiwanese study (Wu 2015) also used Chen and Starosta's scale to survey 292 participants from the three regions. Two-thirds of the participants were students and the rest were not. The model was not suitable in the Taiwanese cultural context. Instead, a four-factor model was created which maintained three of the original factors, namely: interaction confidence, respect for cultural differences and interaction enjoyment. The other two factors, interaction engagement and interaction attentiveness, were combined into one factor as interaction engagement and attentiveness. The result of this study is similar to a study conducted by

Tamam (2010) in the Malaysian context where not all factors were applicable in the respective context and therefore some factors were combined.

Wu's results (2015) showed that the Taiwanese believed that it is important for them to be confident when interacting in intercultural events. They also preferred an interaction that is more enjoyable and considered that they should be sensitive and observant in understanding verbal and non-verbal messages from culturally different counterparts. Interaction engagement and attentiveness were combined as two factors as they complement one another. Wu (2015) suggested that improvements need to be made to the items of the questionnaire instruments to really grasp the concepts measured. She believed that the implementation of an intercultural sensitivity scale in different cultural settings and populations could be influenced by cultural diversity and specificity.

In summary, although some studies found that this model is not context-based due to the inconsistency of results, other scholars found otherwise as Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale model has been successfully applied to different cultural contexts with different results (Shi-Yong 2006; Park 2013; Roh 2014). The applicability of Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale in various contexts and cultural settings provides a foundation for exploring the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a multicultural context of Malaysia. One initial study that pioneered in testing the applicability of Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity scale in the Malaysia context was conducted by Tamam (2010). The study is explained in the next sub-section.

2.5.4 Tamam's Three-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Tamam (2010) also used Chen and Starosta's 24-item intercultural sensitivity scale with 447 undergraduates at public universities in Malaysia. Similar to the previous findings, Tamam's confirmatory factor analysis of the survey found that Chen and Starosta's five factors are not appropriate for the Malaysian cultural context. In the context of Malaysian cultural values, factors in Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity like respect for cultural differences, interaction engagement, interaction confidence and interaction attentiveness were seen to be applicable, but not interaction enjoyment. Important Malaysian cultural values are more towards respect, harmony, tolerance and mutuality rather than enjoyment (Tamam 1996). Tamam's analysis identified not five factors but only three factors, namely: '1) interaction attentiveness and respect, 2) interaction openness and 3) interaction confidence'

(Tamam 2010, p. 181). These three factors appear to be a combination of a few factors from the original model, except for one added factor of interaction openness. Tamam's analysis combined respect for cultural differences and interaction attentiveness as one factor as the highest value as these two aspects are believed to be compatible with the communication style of Malaysians who prefer indirect and non-confrontational communication. Tamam questioned the usefulness and applicability of Chen and Starosta's theoretical measurement model in a multicultural setting (2000).

Tamam's first factor, interaction attentiveness and respect, is similar in description to Chen and Starosta's interaction attentiveness and respect for cultural differences (as explained in Section 2.4.3). It demonstrates that among Malaysians vital qualities for individuals to be interculturally sensitive are being observant of other cultures and respecting other cultures. Another factor that is similar to Chen and Starosta's model is interaction confidence in which individuals are confident to interact with culturally different counterparts. Tamam (2010) added a new factor of interaction openness. This factor describes individuals who accept other cultures and are open-minded towards difference in other cultures. Open-minded people are not judgemental or prejudiced towards culturally different counterparts regardless of ethnicities and country of origin. Individuals' openness towards other cultures indicates that individuals accept differences of other cultures. Acceptance of other cultures could indicate their sense of belonging towards the host culture.

Another study in the Malaysian context conducted by Tamam and Abdullah (2012) also used Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity. The aim of the study was to examine the influence of ethnic-related diversity experiences on the intercultural sensitivity of Malaysian students at a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual Malaysian public university. The results of the study show that the highest level of ethnic-related diversity experiences was from the Indian students who were the minority in the student population. The findings also showed that individuals with a high level of ethnic-related diversity experiences tended to also have a high level of intercultural sensitivity compared to those in the moderate or low level group who were more likely to have a low level of intercultural sensitivity. The study showed that the minority of the student population in that public university had more ethnic-related diversity experiences with people from different races and ethnicity as compared to those who were in a larger ethnic group.

Tamam did another study with Hashmi in 2015 (Tamam & Hashmi 2015) exploring the relationship between ethnic interactions, intercultural sensitivity and bridging social capital of Malaysian students of three major ethnics namely Malays, Chinese and Indians. The study used Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity to measure the students' intercultural sensitivity and constructed an eight-item scale to explore the social capital of the respondents. The study found a positive relationship between intercultural sensitivity and bridging social capital. The findings also showed that the students' ability to interact and understand culturally different counterparts impacted integrating social capital between students of different ethnic more than the number of interactions between them. The interaction and understanding indicated the students' intercultural sensitivity towards people of different ethnicities. The study concluded that individuals who were interculturally sensitive tended to interact and integrate better in an interculturally different environment and that intercultural sensitivity is needed to assist better social integration in a multi-ethnic country or setting.

The studies by Tamam used Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity and showed that not all factors of the model are applicable or suitable in the Malaysian context. Although Tamam argued that Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity is not suitable for the Malaysian context, this model might contribute to different insights in exploring and understanding intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a public university in Malaysia. These studies also called for more research into understanding factors that facilitate engagement in ethnic-diversity within Malaysian universities and other higher education institutions (Tamam 2010; Tamam & Hashmi 2015; Tamam & Krauss 2017).

In 2017, Tamam and Kraus conducted a study to analyse the engagement of students of different ethnicities by using Tamam three-factor model of intercultural sensitivity adapted from Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity model. The study was conducted at a public university with students from various ethnics and religions backgrounds. The study found that among the three factors of intercultural sensitivity (interaction confidence, interaction openness, and interaction attentiveness and respect), interaction confidence was highly correlated with inter-ethnic engagement as compared to other factors. The study also found that students who are actively engaged with people of various ethnicities tended to be high in interaction confidence whereas students who are less engaged were found to be less confident to interact with people of different cultures and ethnics. The findings also identified that

individuals need to be highly engaged in inter-ethnic interaction in order to be highly interculturally sensitive. The findings of this study could help universities to prepare an environment that promotes a better engagement between students of different ethnicities and cultural diversities. This conclusion ensures that all students receive equal support regardless of their cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The study found that the three factors proposed by Tamam adapted from Chen and Starosta are applicable in the Malaysian context.

In summary, Chen and Starosta's model and Tamam's adaptation of the model have both advantages and disadvantages. Chen and Starosta's model has been tested and applied in various multicultural contexts, but is not suitable for every context as in Malaysia. As an alternative to Chen and Starosta's model, Tamam's analysis led to a proposed three-factor model which is believed to be suitable in Malaysian context and which is starting to be validated for the Malaysian multi-ethnic and multicultural context (for example, Tamam & Abdullah 2012; Tamam & Krauss 2017). It, therefore, has become the interest of researchers to reconfirm the applicability of the models in the Malaysian context.

These models of intercultural sensitivity are mainly quantitative aiming to identify key factors influencing individuals' intercultural sensitivity. What is missing in these past studies on intercultural sensitivity is an in-depth understanding and exploration of the underlying meanings of the respondents. Therefore, other approaches to understanding intercultural sensitivity are also required such as this current study which takes a qualitative approach to explore in-depth the influences on intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and its effects on intercultural interaction within a public university. Despite taking a qualitative approach, this research has been informed by Chen and Starosta's models and Tamam's model for the Malaysian context. The details about how the factors in Tamam's and Chen and Starosta's work have shaped the domains of this qualitative inquiry and thus the interview questions are explained in Chapter Three.

2.6 Conclusion and research gap

Previous studies (Park 2013; Tamam & Abdullah 2012; Tamam 2010; Chen & Starosta 2000) on intercultural sensitivity have so far examined intercultural sensitivity from the perspective only of the subject—individuals who enter the new environment, without getting information from other people with whom they interact in the host culture and their perspectives of the subjects' intercultural sensitivity. This study, by contrast, intends to complement these studies

by understanding the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity also from the standpoint of the other individuals of the university—local academics, administrative staff and students. By getting views from other members of the university community, understanding the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity will be in-depth and multiperspectival—something that past researchers have not studied.

In addition, communication accommodation theory is useful in understanding the intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the changes in communication, interaction and behaviour of foreign academics in accommodating to the host culture. The intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture will portray not only the foreign academic accommodation strategies but also the people of the host culture—individuals who are involved in daily interactions with the foreign academics.

This review has explored the concept of intercultural sensitivity and argues that it needs to be examined more closely to understand the intercultural interactions of foreign academics teaching in a multicultural country. Previous studies of intercultural sensitivity that have so far only examined and explored intercultural sensitivity of mainly international students but not of foreign academics. This gap in knowledge in understanding intercultural sensitivity will be addressed in this research study, making a unique contribution to intercultural research. Another contribution to research is the use of Communication Accommodation Theory in exploring intercultural sensitivity which has not been done so far. It will provide an in-depth exploration of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in Malaysia and its effects on the intercultural setting of the public university, thereby possibly extending the application of the theory. As Communication Accommodation Theory focuses on the convergence and divergence in both verbal and non-verbal interaction, it can determine how sensitive foreign academics are to people of other cultures, how they accommodate, adjust and adapt to the host culture, especially to the intercultural setting of the public university.

The next chapter will detail the methodology used to address the aim of this research, which is to explore intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics within a Malaysian public university and to understand how foreign academics accommodate to the intercultural context of the public university. It will explain the research design and the analytical approaches used in this study as well as how CAT was used to inform and understand the data.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter explains the methodological approach taken in this study. To examine the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics within a public university in Malaysia, the study uses a case study approach to better understand the experiences of the foreign academics within a specific bounded context of one university. This approach ensures that the views of others who interact with the foreign academics within the university context are included.

This chapter first describes the research design of this research which is a qualitative case study. The second section provides details about the university context within the Malaysian state of Kelantan and provides a profile of the participants—the foreign academics and people they interact with at the university, namely local academics, administrative staff and students. Then the data generation method of using interviews and focus groups are detailed, providing an insight into the development of the interview protocol and procedures. Section 3.4 then discusses how the data was analysed using thematic analysis and applying Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). The final section describes the ethical codes governing research which were employed in this study.

3.1 Research design

This research study is a qualitative study because it examines a specific aspect of human behaviour and interaction, namely the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a public university in Malaysia. Qualitative research crosscuts the humanities, and the social and physical sciences. It is interdisciplinary in nature and does not have a distinct set of methods that it owns entirely. Qualitative research is important for gathering in-depth insights and understanding of the various topics raised by those involved in the study, for example through interviews (Denzin & Lincoln 2011). A qualitative approach is used in this research to allow the participants to express their opinions and feelings and to reflect upon and represent their experiences as foreign academics or with foreign academics within a public Malaysian university. Consequently, qualitative research allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of foreign academics' intercultural experiences and levels of sensitivity by attending to their individual perceptions, while also understanding the experiences of those interacting with the foreign academics.

This study uses a qualitative approach which is different from past studies on intercultural sensitivity (Tamam 2010; Tamam & Abdullah 2012; Coffey et al. 2013; Park 2013; Roh

2014; Wu 2015) which mostly adopted a quantitative approach in identifying and measuring individuals' levels of intercultural sensitivity by using Likert scales and analysed using AMOS to determine the factor analysis (EFA and CFA) between variables by using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

However, Likert scales and their analysis can only provide numerical data which may not capture the nuances of individuals' circumstances and the complexities of their social and cultural contexts in understanding of a phenomenon (Nemoto & Beglar 2014). By contrast, the current study while still investigating intercultural sensitivity also aims to explore the underlying meanings of items and constructs of intercultural sensitivity models. Therefore, this research needed an alternative approach to ascertain the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in interaction with others in the host culture. Qualitative approaches provide opportunities to understand processes and experiences of individuals or phenomena (Harper & Thompson 2011). Thus, a qualitative approach is used in this study to explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics framed by the work of quantitative studies which developed intercultural sensitivity scales, mainly the intercultural sensitivity models by Chen and Starosta, and Tamam. By adapting and applying elements of intercultural sensitivity from the two models to generate interview questions, an alternative in-depth and detailed understanding and exploration of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics can be investigated.

This case study uses qualitative research methods of collecting data. A case study is one of five prominent qualitative approaches (ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenological research and narrative research) which provide a detailed exploration by the researcher of ‘a programme, an event, an activity, a process of one or more individuals’ (Campbell 2014, p. 3). This type of research is believed to be greatly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres 2003). Furthermore, case study strategies provide an in-depth understanding of an aspect of a situation (Bell 2010). Therefore, the present research utilised a case study approach to investigate the intercultural interactions within a public university in Malaysia by analysing the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and their interlocutors.

A case study is a well-known method in studying data from one particular organisation or group. This study employs a case study method as it focuses on foreign academics within one organisation. Previous research on the use of case studies suggest that studying a small case

can provide in-depth and focused research which can also act as a path for future research (Stake 1995; Yin 1989). A case study is about studying a single case or a person or a family or an institution (Stake 2013). In this research, the perimeter of the study is bounded to only one specific organisation in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics. Stake (2013) further explains that a case study is also used in studying a relationship or a phenomenon. The main intention is to explore the phenomenon of intercultural sensitivity as represented by foreign academics in Universiti Malaysia Kelantan located on the east coast of Malaysia. The detail of the research context and the selected university is further discussed in Section 3.2.1.

This university may not be a representative of other public universities in Malaysia, neither may the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity be representative of other foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity in other public universities in Malaysia. Nevertheless, this case study will be able to provide an understanding on intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics within the one university. The case study method is not a biased method that only provides results that are only applicable to that one particular case; it can form a basis for a better understanding of a particular phenomenon in a particular context (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Case studies, however, have been critiqued based on five misconceptions (Flyvbjerg 2006, p. 221) namely:

1 theoretical knowledge is more important than practical knowledge
2 a single case study cannot be generalised thus does not contribute to scientific development
3 a case study is best used to generate hypotheses rather than testing or confirming hypotheses
4 a case study is biased in providing verification
5 a case study is difficult to summarise.

In refuting these misconceptions, Flyvbjerg (2001, 2006) explains that case studies can produce knowledge related to specific contexts which is needed to develop deeper insights. Also case studies are based on developing insights into human behaviour in a specific context and do not aim to construct theory.

The implementation of this research as a case study will provide a better understanding and perhaps provide an alternative qualitative foundation and baseline of intercultural sensitivity

of foreign academics in public universities in Malaysia that may inform future large-scale, cross-institutional research in Malaysia and transnationally. This focus is in response to my earlier observations motivating this research, namely that as an insider to this university (lecturer) sometimes foreign academics seem to encounter problems in the process of interacting and accommodating to the people of the host culture, both within the university and in the neighbouring community outside the university.

3.2 Research context and participants

The context of this research is a public university in Peninsular Malaysia, named Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). This university is located in Kelantan on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. The main research participants are foreign academics (n = 13) teaching in UMK with supporting participants being local academics (n = 6), administrative staff members (n = 4) and students (n = 15) from the same university. Detailed descriptions on the context and recruitment of the participants are explained in the following sections.

3.2.1 Context and location

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) was established in 2007 as the 19th public university in Malaysia. The first student enrolment was in July 2008. This university's main thrust is in entrepreneurship. Despite the fact that this university is relatively new, it has recruited approximately 50 foreign academics since 2008 until now. The 50 foreign academics come from various countries namely from Asia countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), the African continent (Ethiopia, Senegal) and also European countries (United Kingdom, Germany and Hungary).

During the data collection period in 2014 (April–August), 39 academics (7.9%) out of a total of approximately 495 academics (local and foreign) were foreigners. At the time of data collection, the university had five faculties and one academic centre, namely: 1) Veterinary Medicine, 2) Entrepreneurship and Business, 3) Creative Technology and Heritage, 4) Earth Sciences, 5) Agro-based Industry, and 6) Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development. Since then the university has established three new faculties which are faculty of: 1) Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, 2) Architecture and Ekistics and 3) Bioengineering and Technology. The recruitment of foreign academics is seen to help with the establishment and development of the faculties.

The procedure to recruit foreign academics is similar to the recruitment of local staff in the university. The majority of the foreign academics who are recruited are normally introduced or recommended by foreign academics who are already teaching in the university. The university does not advertise academic posts internationally. Then the foreign academic applicants are required to submit their résumé and other related documents to the dean of the respective faculty. Once their applications are approved, they will be called for an interview with the dean of the faculty via phone or Skype video call. If the foreign academics pass the interview at the faculty level, they will be recommended for the next interview with the top management of the university. The interview will be conducted by the human resource department. An interview with the top management of the university will be held via a Skype video call. Successful applicants will be informed by the university's human resource department via email. Later, the human resource department will be in contact with the foreign academics for working visa purposes. Once the working visa is completed, the foreign academics will report directly to the faculty. Foreign academics are given a minimum of a one-year contract or a maximum of a three-year contract. The duration for the contract is based on the faculty discretion and requirements. Foreign academics can apply to renew their contract six months before their contracts end. Contract renewal is based on the recommendation from the dean of the respective faculty and application to renew a contract is then forwarded to the human resource department and an interview with the top management of the university is conducted. The foreign academics can only work at a public university for a maximum of 10 years. After those 10 years, they can still work at other universities or institutions in Malaysia.

Prior to their arrival at the university, foreign academics have to do their own research about Malaysia and Kelantan. The respective faculty will arrange a pickup from the airport to their assigned accommodation. The university does not provide a specific orientation programme for the foreign academics upon their arrival. However, an orientation programme is a requirement for new local lecturers who are applying for job confirmation, yet this requirement is not applicable to contract staff. As for the new foreign academics, they could join in, yet they usually refuse to join that orientation programme since the programme is conducted in the Malay language. At the beginning, they may not so far have mastered the local language, since the foreign academics are new to the university and host culture. A separate equivalent orientation programme for the foreign academics is not provided. For the

majority of the foreign academics, the respective faculty will be the one who will assist with the finding and providing other basic requirements or information asked by the foreign academics.

3.2.2 Participants

The foreign academics in the university are the primary respondents for this research. A total of 13 foreign academics were recruited from the current 28 foreign academics employed by the university. Of the recruited foreign academics, three were native speakers of English while the other 10 participants were non-native speakers of English. They were from England (n = 3), India (n = 2), Indonesia (n = 2), and one each from Japan, Germany, Thailand, Hungary, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

Table 3: Participants nationalities

Countries	Foreign academics	Local academics	Administrative staff member	Students
Malaysian	-	6	4	15
England	3	-	-	-
India	2	-	-	-
Indonesia	2	-	-	-
Japan	1	-	-	-
Germany	1	-	-	-
Thailand	1	-	-	-
Hungary	1	-	-	-
Bangladesh	1	-	-	-
Myanmar	1	-	-	-
Total	**13**	**6**	**4**	**15**

Some of the foreign academics had some intercultural experience prior to their arrival in Kelantan. Some foreign academics had visited other countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and New Zealand. Other than gaining some intercultural experience through their visit to various countries, some foreign academics gained intercultural experiences as they married Asian spouses.

Meanwhile, in terms of the interaction with the people of the host culture, English is used as a lingua franca in the university context between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture, although in addition both the Malay language and also the local Kelantanese

dialect are used by the people of the host culture. The foreign academics gained information about the host culture from the tourism brochures prior to their arrival and then sometimes from the faculty members—local academics and administrative staff members. Some foreign academics learn about the host culture from their own mistakes or blunders that they make during their interaction with the people of the host culture. More information on the foreign academics' knowledge about the host culture and their cultural mistakes or blunders are further discussed in the data chapters (Chapter 4, 5, and 6).

To recruit foreign academics research participants, I contacted the human resource department of the university to obtain the list of foreign academics currently employed. Once the list was obtained, I approached these foreign academics via email and 13 foreign academics volunteered to participate in this research study. The selected participants were contacted via email beforehand to provide detailed information about the study and seek their consent to participate in this research. Once they stated their agreement to participate, they were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix 1) and letter of consent (see Appendix 3) relating to the present research. The information sheet and also letter of consent for all participants were all in English. Both the information sheet and letter of consent were in English, this was to ensure that the documents were able to be universally understood by foreign academics of various nationalities. As for local participants, most of them understood English and in cases of difficulty in understanding English, I would verbally translated and explained the content of the documents.

In protecting the confidentiality of the participants and their position in the university, the participants were given pseudonyms with no reference to neither their country of origin nor faculty affiliation. The 13 participants remained anonymous to the readers throughout the research. To further ensure confidentiality, the pseudonyms were 'Anglo' sounding names so as to not discern their nationality or country of origin.

At the time of the data collection period in 2014, 456 local academics were employed in UMK. To recruit local academics, the criteria were that they were in close contact with foreign academics and had quite a number of foreign academics in their respective faculties or centres. The six local academics interviewed were mostly from two different areas of the university which have a larger number of foreign academics. This was to ensure that the local academic had constant contact and interaction with the foreign academics. The participants worked in the Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development and the Faculty of

Agro-Based Industry, where the most number of foreign academics were located. The Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development has three departments and one of them is the department of Third Languages. The centre is determined to hire native speakers to teach foreign languages which are: Japanese, German, Thai, Spanish, French, Mandarin and Arabic. The language teachers of the mentioned languages are all native speakers of the language. As for the Faculty of Agro-Based Industry, a large number of foreign academics are from India and also Bangladesh and specialise in the field of agriculture. Therefore, local academics in these two areas deal with foreign academics more as compared to local academics in other faculties. The local academics were also given an information sheet relating to the present research (Appendix 1) and a consent form to sign (Appendix 3) once they agreed to participate in the research study.

Once I decided on the location of the foreign and local academics, then I selected six local academics to be interviewed—three from the Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development and three from the Faculty of Agro-based Industry. They were approached individually and personally by the researcher. The selection was based on the convenience of the local academics. Six local academics agreed to be interviewed. While a relatively small number, the richness of their responses was more important than the number of people interviewed. They provided supporting data in understanding foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity rather than being the primary target of the research.

As for administrative staff members, I approached some who were at that time holding the post as assistant registrars[2]. Of the 13 assistant registrars that I contacted, however, only one was willing to participate. Two other administrative staff members were recruited and they recommended another administrative staff member to be interviewed. The administrative staff that participated were from the Legal Unit in the Human Resources Department (n = 1), Centre for Language Studies and Generic Development (n = 2), and also from UMK International Office (n = 1). All four staff had vast experience of dealing with and having frequent contact with foreign academics at the university.

[2] An assistant registrar is in charge of administrative tasks of the faculty which involve academic affairs, human resources, finances and also infrastructure affairs. Assistant registrars delegate and oversee the tasks to their subordinates and will report all matters directly to the faculty dean and deputy deans.

The majority of the administrative staff members who were initially contacted refused to participate due to their perceived language barriers in English and some were afraid to speak about their experiences with foreign academics. Although they were informed beforehand that the interview would be conducted in both Malay and English and that the administrative staff members could answer in either language, some anticipated that the experience might be uncomfortable. Therefore, I decided to approach administrative staff member who were more willing to be interviewed. Once they agreed to participate, they too were given an information sheet (Appendix 1) and consent form to sign (Appendix 3). However, before I started the interview with participants, I made sure that they understood the whole interview process. If it appeared they that didn't understand what I was explaining I would switch to the use of Malay where appropriate. In giving explanation to the local participants, I would casually mix both English and Malay language. The mixing of these two languages is a norm among Malaysians. Therefore, as an insider, I used my intercultural sensitivity to ensure that local participants were comfortable to express their opinions in a language that they are comfortable in.

Students were also recruited as participants to get supporting information with regards to foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity since lecturers interact with the students more often than other staff at the university. The students participated in two focus groups. I decided on having focus groups due to time constraints to ensure I would be able to get many responses at one time. The groups consisted of seven and eight students respectively. In selecting and determining the students, I contacted a key contact who was a postgraduate student who also tutoring part-time in the university to randomly select three third-year students from all five faculties. However due to students' constraints—students' schedule that did not fit other students from other faculties to be in a focus group—the key contact could only manage to gather students from two sciences faculties who had the majority of foreign academics in the faculty. The key contact then randomly selected 15 students who volunteered to participate in this study. The 15 students were not identified and remained anonymous throughout the research. There is no reference to their identity, programme or their academic year at the university, ethnic background or religion. This anonymity was to protect the confidentiality of the students so they could be assured that this research would not affect their academic performance or standing. These student participants were informed

of the nature of the present research using an information sheet (Appendix 2) and asked to sign the letters of consent (Appendix 3).

Although this study mainly aimed to investigate and explore intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics, in doing so, it was deemed as necessary to include responses from other people involved in the university—local academics, administrative staff members and students who interacted with foreign academics regularly. However, the additional responses would be analysed and discussed as supporting information to the exploration of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity as this study did not intend to investigate the intercultural sensitivity of other members of the university. Therefore, in the following data chapters (chapter 4, 5, and 6) the primary voices of participants and the discussion of the findings is predominantly from the perspective of the foreign academics and responses from other members of the university are incorporated as supporting data and findings.

3.3 Data generation

In generating data, two qualitative techniques were employed, namely: 1) interviews with foreign academics, local academics and administrative staff members, and 2) focus group discussions with students. These two techniques are the most widely used techniques in qualitative inquiry research (Ritchie et al. 2013). The nature of qualitative research is to inquire for information, in other words, ask questions to understand an inquiry or phenomenon. These two techniques were chosen due to the breadth of information that could be gathered. Also these techniques allow the researcher and participants' flexibility in questioning and answering questions, and flexibility in terms of the time and venue for the interviews to be conducted. Further benefits and purposes of the two techniques are discussed in the following sections.

The interviews were conducted at the time agreed with the participants. I explained the nature of the research and the interview protocols to the participants as to avoid any misunderstandings. The interview protocols involved informing the participants that the interview will be voice recorded and transcribed. The participants were also informed that they can use both English and the Malay language during the interviews.

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews present researchers with an understanding of the 'lives of individuals'. 'Individual interviews provide the opportunity to examine how large-scale social transformations are

experienced, interpreted, and ultimately shaped by the responses of strategic social actors.' (Gerson & Horowitz 2003, p. 201). Interviews also create an opportunity for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' personal experiences and responses (Ritchie et al. 2013). They allow the space for detailed responses about the phenomenon under examination and provide a wide range of data and information (Puvenesvary et al. 2008; Qu & Dumay 2011). Three types of interview are: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews (Fontana & Frey 2000; Brinkmann 2017).

Structured interviews are mostly conducted in surveys in which interviewers are expected to read the questions word-by-word as scripted and responses are recorded without any further clarification. Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to follow up on the questions that they believe are important to the research or ask further questions if that could provide more information about the interviewee's experiences. For instance, 'what do you mean when you said that you were […]?' Unstructured interviews seeks a life story or extended narratives from the interviewee with the interview not restricted to specific questions as it is a story telling of an individual's narrative and the interviewer mainly facilitates the session (Brinkmann 2017). The interviewer may once in a while use prompt questions for further clarification of the story or ideas, for instance, 'what makes you want to join our company?'

This research study applied the semi-structured interview approach to allow the participants to further explain and describe their thoughts. The semi-structured interview was also used to make space for participants to offer additional information outside the questions that may be useful while also leaving space/flexibility to ask additional questions to clarify responses during the unfolding dialogue of the interview. This type of interview will also help the researcher to further extend the questions to gain more information providing in-depth understandings of participants' responses. Also by using this type of interview the researcher was able to ask questions with the intention to seek for further explanation or clarification. For instance, in one of the interviews with a foreign academic, I asked 'Has it been easy or difficult to work with people of different cultures?' He responded by saying that there were some clashes of work culture by giving a few examples like, time priority and the way conflicts were handled at the university. His answer made me think of whether he sought an explanation of such situations or perhaps had any of his colleagues described the work culture at the university to him. In order for me to get more information, I then asked a follow-up

question ‘Has anyone ever explained to you about the issues that you mentioned?’ He responded by saying that sometimes in meetings his superior explained briefly but most of the time, he gained insights from his spouse who is from an Asian background.

This type of interview provides opportunities for a better understanding and clarification of participant responses. Also, as I was analysing the data, on several occasions I went back to some of the foreign academics whose responses were not clear to me, to ask follow-up questions. For instance, I asked ‘In relation to the question on interacting with the locals (academic staff, administrative staff members, and students), do you have any specific strategies to ensure or to confirm that they—academic staff, administrative staff members and students—understand you? For example, do you look for certain gestures like nodding, confirmation words (yes, uhum, ok etc)?’ This follow-up question arose when I was analysing responses from foreign academics with regards to their challenges in interacting with the people of the host culture—within the university area and the neighbourhood. Some foreign academics believed that they did not have any problems interacting with the locals, however, responses from the students showed otherwise. Therefore, I decided to ask additional follow-up questions of the foreign academics in order to further understand their responses and interrogate issues further.

As I conducted the individual interviews, I gained a better understanding of the participants' intercultural experiences and insights on the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity from different views—local academics, administrative staff members and students. This is because obtaining multiple perspective data allows for exhaustive insights from various people involved in the dynamic system and setting (Vogl et al. 2018).

The interview questions were derived from items from the intercultural sensitivity scales (Chen & Starosta 2000; Tamam 2010). Chen and Starosta's intercultural sensitivity inventory has 24 items and Tamam's has 20 items. These questions as derived were validated by conducting pilot interviews with a group of foreign academics at the University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide. The piloting showed that the majority of foreign academics at the two universities were interculturally sensitive. The response and results of the pilot interviews showed that the interview questions that were adapted from Chen and Starosta’s and Tamam’s model of intercultural sensitivity were understood and suitable to be used for this research.

The questions for the interviews for all four groups of participants, including the focus groups with students, were guided by inventory items from and Chen and Starosta's, and Tamam's model of intercultural sensitivity scale. Apart from questions about intercultural sensitivity, all participants were asked some general questions about the recruitment policy of the university and their perception of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in general.

This context of a Malaysian public university has been used by Tamam (2010) to test Chen and Starosta's model of intercultural sensitivity. Hence, this research is based on both models. The present research thus uses Tamam's instruments and modifies the statement type questions into question types appropriate for the interview. A further set of questions was developed to enquire about the challenges and barriers that foreign academics faced in accommodating to the host culture to further understand/clarify the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics.

The interview questions for foreign academics consisted of Background information requesting demographic data and brief background of the participants which includes questions like their country of origin, academic qualification, mother tongue and also their intercultural experience. Then the next section of the interview protocol included questions about intercultural sensitivity and the final section asked about challenges and barriers the participants experienced in the host culture.

The interview questions for local academics and students consisted of only two parts: Background information that included the demographic questions and a part that included questions on their views of foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. As for administrative staff members, the interview questions were similar to that of local academics and students with additional questions on university policy and requirements in recruiting foreign academics.

In translating the items from the intercultural sensitivity inventories into interview questions, the linguistic aspects were modified to ensure that the questions were not straightforward and sensitive. This modification aimed to ensure that the participants would not feel offended with the interview questions. Hence these items were modified to sound inoffensive and non-threatening to the participants. The modified questions were intended to achieve a similar objective as the items from the inventories but with consideration of language aspects appropriate for interviews in this context of the university setting in Malaysia. Therefore, the

changes were done deliberately to ensure that direct questions such as 'I do not like to be with people from different culture' would be phrased to 'Do you socialise with the locals?' to cater to the local culture; less direct and hence less offensive.

Some examples of the interview questions that were modified from the items in the inventories are listed in Table 3. The detailed interview protocols are presented in Appendices 4–8 (Interview guidelines for foreign and local academics, administrative staff members and students).

Table 4: Interview questions

Original Items	Interview Questions
I don't like to be with people from different culture	• Do you socialise with the locals? How often?
I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures	• Do you find any difficulties in adapting to the cultures (Malays, Indians, Chinese etc.) in Malaysia? • Do you think that you have integrated well with the environment and the local community?
I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded	• Do you think that the locals are open to other or foreign cultures? • Do you feel accepted by the local community?
I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures	• Do you find any difficulties in interacting with the locals? (your students, administrative staff, academic staff; local and foreign) • Has it been easy or difficult to work with people of different cultures?
I find it is not easy for me to make friends with people from different cultures I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons	• Have you ever joined any cultural activities in Malaysia? If so, what were they? Do you enjoy the cultural activities? • Do you socialise with the locals? • How do you spend your free time?

Some additional questions were asked to all groups of participants to gain a better understanding of the intercultural sensitivity and also intercultural interactions between foreign academics and the people of the host culture. Some of the additional questions were on the intercultural experience of the participants (foreign academics, local academics, administrative staff members and students), foreign academics' knowledge of the host culture prior to their arrival, the local participants' views on the importance for foreign academics and also the university management to have intercultural sensitivity and also questions related

to any intercultural issues or concerns reported to the university management. Some of the additional questions for the participants are shown in Table 4.

Table 5: Additional interview questions

Participants		Additional Interview Questions
Foreign academics	1	Do you have any previous experience living/working /studying overseas? Where?
	2	Did you have any knowledge of Malaysian cultures before arriving?
Administrative staff members	1	Are there any cultural issues which have been mentioned as a case of concern ever since the recruitment of foreign academics? How do you handle the issues?
	2	Do you think that it is important for foreign academics and the university management to have some understanding on cultural differences and sensitivity? If so, why?
Local academics and students	1	Do you have any experience going overseas? Or have you made friends with people of different cultures?
	2	Has the foreign lecturer talked to the class about his/her own culture/beliefs? Has he/she helped the class reflect on cultural similarities or differences?

The additional questions for the participants were intended to gain more information on aspects like demographic background of the participants, and foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity and intercultural interactions from the perspective of the supporting participants. Also as for administrative staff members, additional questions revolved around the perspective from the management and recruitment protocols. These additional questions were included in the interview although they were not listed as items in the intercultural sensitivity inventories. This is because the questions served as supporting and additional information that could build a stronger and broader understanding of the background of the participants and the context of this research.

Most interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour for each of the participants. Some participants were generous in giving information in relation to the questions and some participants drifted from the original questions in the interview. During the interview, as the interviewer, I made sure that the questions were explained and translated clearly to the participants and ensured that the participants remain in the perimeter of the questions and not drift too far from the original path of the interview.

For example, some foreign academics were not very proficient in English, therefore, I had to paraphrase the interview questions several times. For instance, when I asked a foreign academic ‘Are you aware of any customs or practices that could lead to cultural misunderstandings?’ The academic took some time to reply to the question and then looked at me while tilting the head and smiled shyly. I then knew that the question was not understood. Then I paraphrased the question ‘Is there anything that you do, in your culture, okay, but here in Kelantan it is not okay?’ Then she responded to my question.

The local participants were encouraged to respond in the Malay language. Using Malay can ensure that the participants clearly express their opinions comfortably and confidently. Some people of the host culture are not proficient in English and some are shy and are not comfortable to speak in English. The responses in the Malay language were then translated into English. Since I am a native speaker of the Malay language, I had no problems to translate the response into English. The local participants had to be convinced that they were allowed to respond in the Malay language, so that they would be comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences.

It can be observed from the interview with the administrative staff and also with the students that I had to paraphrase and sometimes translate the interview questions so that the participants would be able to understand and respond to the interview questions effectively and clearly. For instance, when I asked one of the administrative staff ‘Have the foreign lecturers ever said or done something that has made you feel offended personally, or on behalf of your culture or beliefs?’ She smiled and asked me what offended means. Then I paraphrase it into ‘Something that hurt you or your religion or beliefs’. Then she was able to respond to the question. However, due to the fact that I am also an academic at that university, the administrative staff member was not shy to ask for the meaning of the word or to seek clarification.

As for the translation of the interview questions, it was done verbally only when needed by both the interviewer and interviewees. The questions were translated when it was deemed to be necessary. For example, if the interviewees seemed to have difficulty in understanding the questions or difficulty in expressing themselves in English. It is important to note that the translation process of the questions was not part of the analysis, rather a normal indication of common situation for Malaysians to comfortably switch or mix between English and Malay language and sometimes their own dialect. It was also apparent during the interview process

that some local participants would switch to Malay language and some to the Kelantanese dialect as they knew that I am a native speaker of Malay language and I speak the dialect too. It is important for me to allow such situations to unfold to ensure the comfort of the participants in expressing their thoughts and views. My position as part of the community helped create a comfortable and conducive environment for the interview process. It also helped in eliciting more information and responses.

3.3.2 Focus groups

> Focus groups are undoubtedly valuable when in-depth information is needed about how people think about an issue—their reasoning about why things are as they are, why they hold the views they do (Bell 2010).

The nature of focus group discussions is that the participants can explore how other participants responded to questions and explicitly discuss the differences in ideas or responses between the group members. The discussion is moderated by the researcher (Ritchie et al. 2013).

Two focus groups were conducted with 15 students. The groups were identified as Group A and B. Once the 15 students were selected, I arranged a group discussion with the participants with the help of the key contact was also tutoring part-time at the Faculty of Agro Industry. The selected university has four campuses therefore considering the distance between each campus was essential in determining the selected students in the group. This consideration was to ensure the selected students' feasibility in terms of time and place for the group discussion. However, it was challenging to arrange a suitable time and place that would suit everyone's needs (Harper & Thompson 2011). Therefore, I had to select students who were able to gather at the same time and same venue. In this research, the selected students were from the same campus. Once the key contact managed to gather the students, then I went to the campus and conducted the focus group. It was fortunate for the researcher that the students for both groups were having a club meeting on that day and thus were available.

A focus group is often regarded as a method that would allow the participants to share their opinions and experience in a conducive environment with others. However, often it is the more confident or extroverted individuals who speak so the moderator needs to be mindful of including all participants. Therefore to ensure that I gained responses from all students, prior to the group discussion, I briefly explained to students that everyone is encouraged to answer or discuss all questions. Fortunately all students in both groups responded to all questions and

participated well in the discussion. Although some students were dominant, other students also managed to actively participate in the discussion. The students were asked the same questions from the interviews but from a student perspective. For example questions like 'Do you think that the foreign lecturers understand your culture and beliefs?' 'Do you face any difficulties in interacting and understanding the foreign lecturers?' The responses from the students provided insights into the foreign academics' intercultural experiences. For instance, a student from the focus group discussion described a situation where a foreign academic stopped her lecture when she heard an *Adhan*[3] and resumed her lecture once the *Adhan* had finished. The foreign academic's behaviour indicates sensitivity towards the religious practice of the people of the host culture. The insights from the supporting participants provided a better understanding in exploring foreign academics intercultural sensitivity.

The students for the focus groups managed to respond fully in English despite their various levels of English language proficiency, although a similar incident happened in the two focus groups in which some students asked 'Miss, what is offended?'. It had assumed that the word 'offended' was easy to understand whereas that word had confused the participants.

The information derived from the focus group discussions helped to confirm the data gained from the interviews. This is because the questions asked in the focus group discussion acted as supporting information to understand foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity, yet from a student perspective. In this focus group discussion, I acted as the moderator for both group discussions.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed thematically and then further analysed in relation to Communication Accommodation Theory (Gallois et al. 2005). Further explanation and descriptions of the analysis is explained in the following sections.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely used analytical approach in qualitative research. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyse and report patterns within data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Themes in a data set represent some patterned responses in relation to the research

3 *Adhan* is the Muslim call for prayer five times a day.

questions. The results of a thematic analysis will give emphasis to the most important meanings present within the data (Joffe 2012).

In identifying the themes or the patterns of the data (Joffe 2012) from the data set, I first familiarised myself with the data through transcribing the interviews and the focus group discussions. The process of transcribing the interviews was time consuming, nevertheless, it also gave me the opportunity to re-listen to the interviews and gain a deeper understanding of the responses from all participants. For example, in response to questions about openness to practise one's belief and religion and also about challenges when interacting with the people of the host culture, I heard all the participants discuss the significance of the Kelantanese dialect in the host culture and the importance of Islam in the everyday life of the people of the host culture. The emphasis and similarity of stories allowed me to start the process of recognising the importance of the Kelantanese dialect and religion among the people of the host culture and that the new foreign academics needed to accommodate themselves to this situation.

Once the transcriptions were completed, by using Microsoft Excel, I then grouped the responses according to the interview questions then generated initial codes from the data. The next phase of the analysis was when I defined and named the themes. I listed data extracts that matched the codes and then identified the emerging themes and sub-themes. It is important to find the essence of each theme when defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke 2006). I then continued to check the themes as when doing thematic analysis, as researchers need to keep on going backward and forward to the data to reconfirm and also recheck the themes (Braun & Clarke 2006).

To reconfirm the themes and sub-themes, I revisited the data many times and checked the coding from time to time. I also reviewed and refined the themes by ensuring that the extracts and the codes for each theme have similar patterns and fit in the appropriate themes. For example, a few female foreign academics mentioned dress code as they explained that they wore less revealing clothes such a long skirts and long sleeve shirts despite the hot weather in Kelantan. When I did the coding, I placed these responses under the theme of cultural aspects—dress code. However, as I was writing the description of the data and discussion, I noticed that the reason the female foreign academics decided to wear this clothing was because of the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. Then I moved the responses into the 'religion' theme.

The first layer of the analysis provides the descriptions of the themes and the extracts that support the themes. After the description and interpretation stage, a more analytical narrative was needed to make the appropriate arguments in addressing the research questions. For instance, when the non-Muslim foreign academics were asked questions about their freedom to practise their religion and beliefs, they responded by saying that they could practise their beliefs freely. Although the influence of Islam is strong in the everyday life of the people of the host culture, they managed to find their own 'Western time' without disrespecting the people of the host culture. From their responses, I then described and interpreted the response from the foreign academics and revisited the data gained from the local academics, administrative staff members and students to continue and confirm arguments in exploring foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. The multiple perspectives of the data provided a breadth information and deeper understanding on the matter discussed (Vogl et al. 2018).

3.4.2 Use of Communication Accommodation Theory

This initial analysis of the data was then re-examined using the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory (as discussed in Section 2.3.2). For instance, when the non-Muslim foreign academics mentioned that they managed to find their own 'Western time', it shows that the foreign academics converged their behaviour to indicate their differences while at the same time respecting the people of the host culture and at the same time diverged by retaining their practice and lifestyle. This section explains how the data was further analysed by Communication Accommodation Theory.

Of importance in using CAT for data analysis is that it provides means to more closely examine interaction between people as some tend to accommodate their language and non-verbal behaviour to their interlocutors by changing or converging to their speech patterns or behaviours. For example, native speaker foreign academics converged their speech rate when they interacted with the people of the host culture to ease the interaction. Some individuals who diverge may do so to distinguish themselves from the recipient and to maintain and portray their own culture and identity. For instance, when the non-Muslim foreign academics resorted to 'Western time', this behaviour indicated their convergence in their daily routine due to being respectful to the people of the host culture. They were also being divergence when they portrayed their own culture by finding a means to maintain their own cultural practices.

It is important to also note that this study did not intend to measure the level of intercultural sensitivity among foreign academics but rather to explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and also to understand the influence of intercultural sensitivity to the intercultural interaction of the university. This theory; CAT, concerns mainly the changes of behaviour and the way people interact in achieving their goal, social approval and communication purposes and also the dyads or interlocutor's identity. In an instance where the foreign academic is a native speaker of English, the foreign academic consciously made sure to slower his pace when he interacted with the people of the host culture. By using CAT, his change of speech indicated his act of converging to ensure success in interaction and that the communication purpose was achieved.

The analysis of the data was further re-examined to develop an understanding on intergroup and interpersonal communication. As described in Chapter Two, CAT explains three dominant accommodation strategies, namely:

1 Convergence—the interlocutors adapt their speech styles and behaviour to their recipient for them to appear similar to the recipient or to gain approval from the host culture
2 Divergence—the interlocutors diverge from the recipient to distinguish themselves from the recipient also to portray their own culture
3 Approximant—the interlocutor makes his/her communication patterns either similar or different from the recipients.

This theory became the theoretical perspective of this study in which the understanding of the changes and the ways the foreign academics behave and interact with the people of the host culture further unfold the exploration of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and how it affects the intercultural interaction at the university. Due to the flexibility and wide usage of the theory in various field of knowledge (Guadagnolo & Guinn 2014; Hehl & McDonald 2014; Farzadnia and Giles 2015), it is useful to explore how the participants' experiences would extend the understanding of this theory and how this theory would align with or problematise the data from the present study.

Once the data was analysed thematically, by coding to obtain main themes and sub-themes, this theory further unpacked the exploration and understanding of the foreign academics' interaction and behaviour during their accommodation process. The foreign academics' interaction and behaviour with the people of the host culture portrayed their strategies in

accommodating with the people of the host culture; either by converging, diverging or maintaining their behaviour and interaction. The accommodation strategies demonstrated by the foreign academics would be able to indicate their intercultural sensitivity and would also reflect the intercultural interaction they experienced with the people of the host culture.

Therefore, in informing the analysis of the data, CAT provided a way to obtain a deeper insight into the foreign academics convergence or divergence in understanding the behaviour of and interaction between foreign academics and the people of the host culture during their accommodation to the host culture. By understanding the convergence and divergence aspects of the foreign academics, the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics can be explained more thoroughly.

3.5 Ethical considerations

The approval to conduct this research was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of South Australia (UniSA), Adelaide, the institution through which I was enrolled in my doctoral degree (Ethics protocol number: 0000031736). Once this approval was granted, I then sought approval to conduct the research in Malaysia from the university selected as the research site, which is the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). Once approval was granted from UMK, I contacted the human resource department of the University for the names of foreign academics. I then recruited participants with the approved information sheets and consent form and used the approved interview/focus group protocol in the conduct of the research (see Appendices for all approved protocols). In line with ethics approval, the participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions with regards to the study. Then, a formal written consent form was given to them to read and sign prior to the interview or focus group discussion. The respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any stage during and post-data collection if they disagreed with the conditions or declined to participate. All participants (the foreign academics, local academics, administrative staff and students) remained anonymous in the transcripts, resulting analysis and will continue to be in any future publications arising from this study. They will not be identified by name, faculty, country of origin, race, religion and ethnic background. This is to ensure the participants' anonymity.

In addition to the formal ethical protocols in conducting this research, I also considered ethical issues with regards my status as one of the staff at the university, holding the position

as an ‘insider’ to the participants. For example, given that I was one of the staff at the university, the participants might have felt a bit restricted to be fully transparent with what they had been experiencing and feeling. As a corollary though, as an insider too, I might have been able to elicit more information as the participants might have felt safe to share their views as we were long-term colleagues. Therefore, in ensuring the participants’ comfort before, during, and after the interview sessions, I explicitly explained the protocols involved in this research and the steps taken in ensuring the confidentiality of the participants, prior to each interview session. I made sure to explain to all participants that their responses would not be shared with the university community. Only the main findings of this research will be shared with the university without disclosing the details of the findings or data and in such a way that would indicate who the participants were.

In conducting the interview session, the interviews were undertaken in the participants’ office and I made sure that the no other individuals were present during the interview. However, if the participants indicated that they felt restricted to explicitly express their views, I did not further provoke or prolong their responses. It is important for the participants to feel comfortable and safe during the interview sessions.

The next chapters present the results of the data analysis. Three key themes emerged from the analysis of the data. The intercultural sensitivity of the foreign participants was evident in: intercultural interaction with the people of the host culture both within the university and in the local community (Chapter 4); accommodations to the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect (reported in Chapter 5); and, their respect and tolerance towards Islam (Chapter 6). Although these three themes are separated into three different chapters, they intersect with one another in understanding the overarching intercultural sensitivity of the foreign academics in a public university and I endeavour to draw attention to these intersections during the chapters and then in the final chapter.

Chapter 4: Interacting with people of the host culture

This chapter argues that the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity was influenced by interacting with the people within the university and in the neighbouring community. In this study the foreign academics interacted with the people of the host culture in a range of contexts (in their workplace and in the neighbouring community), where such interactions were central to developing their intercultural sensitivity. The foreign academics interactions within and outside of the university community influence/shape one another rather than being distinct domains. These interactions assisted the foreign academics in developing an understanding of the organisational culture in the university as well as an understanding of the broader social context.

The foreign academics developed an understanding of the host culture through several practices including: understanding the organisational culture in the university and how to behave accordingly; acknowledging the social structure of the host culture—within the university and also outside the university; social integration with the people of the host culture through participation in local festivals and activities organised by locals such as *aqiqah*, Eid celebration and attending Malay weddings; changing the ways they presented themselves in the local community through codes of dress; and, adapting to the local cuisine by trying the local foods and sometimes adjusting these foods to their personal preferences. This act of engaging with and socialising with the people of the host culture helped the foreign academics to understand the culture of the people and how to interact with people of different culture, status and hierarchy. I make the argument that social interactions in multiple contexts (work, community, socialising with colleagues, joining cultural festivals and activities) and adjustment of attire and to local cuisines develops the foreign academics' sense of belonging and knowledge of acceptable social and cultural practices in Kelantan. They adapted to the new cultural context whilst also retaining a distinct sense of identity that was consistent with their lives prior to living in Malaysia. Along the process of accommodating and adapting to the host culture, the foreign academics experienced some challenges which will be further elaborated in the coming sections.

This chapter is separated into four key sections. Firstly, I discuss the influence of intercultural experiences of foreign academics prior to their arrival in Kelantan, in assisting them to adjust and accommodate to the host culture (Section 4.1). I then examine how the foreign academics accommodated to the cultural differences in the host culture within and outside the university

context for instance the differences in terms of value of time, hierarchy and social status (Section 4.2). The next section (Section 4.3) discusses the foreign academics efforts to integrate socially with the people of the host culture and their perception of the local community's view on them. It was their ability to try and view themselves through the lens of those around them that assisted in developing their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture. The final section of this chapter (Section 4.4) discusses the aspects of foreign academics' engagement in the host culture beyond the university, which includes their involvement in local cultural activities/festivals, the way they present themselves in public (through clothing) and their adjustment to the local cuisines. Their engagement in the cultural activities despite of having some challenges and difficulties demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity.

The first section discusses the foreign academics' adjustment to the host culture and how their intercultural experiences prior to their resettlement in Malaysia, had helped them in their accommodation process and the development of their intercultural sensitivity.

4.1 Foreign academics' intercultural experience and knowledge

Initially the foreign academics needed to adjust and adapt to being in Kelantan. This adjustment meant preparing to come to Kelantan and work through their first experiences. They then continued to learn about the place after their arrival. The foreign academics experienced a degree of transition shock when they first arrived in Kelantan. They commented on the significant differences between Kelantan and other states in Malaysia. These initial experiences and impressions of Kelantan had led them to actively learn and become aware of the cultural differences so that they could understand the people of the host culture better, which assisted their process of resettlement and adjustment. This section first discusses foreign academics intercultural experiences/travel experiences prior to moving to Kelantan followed by their cultural awareness of the people and the host culture.

The foreign academics were asked about their knowledge of Malaysia and Kelantan and about other foreign countries that they had visited for academic and non-academic purposes. The responses show that as they gained more knowledge about Malaysia and Kelantan, they also made comparisons with their own country and culture and also their previous intercultural experiences. I argue that this process of comparison allowed them to assess their

intercultural experiences and enable them to develop strategies that might help them to adjust to their new cultural context.

The participants who had visited or lived in foreign countries prior to their arrival in Kelantan claimed that these experiences helped them to understand and learn about new cultures and to adapt themselves to Malaysia and its lifestyle. The following excerpts show the participants' vast experience of going abroad which helped them in understanding other cultures. A prominent characteristic of the foreign academic participant group involved in the study was that they all had prior experiences of living abroad. While this study cannot be used to generalise this characteristic to all foreign academics, it does suggest that experiences of mobility earlier in life, tend to support the desire or openness to further overseas opportunities. As well as suggest that the capacity to adjust to unfamiliar places is faster than people with no prior overseas experiences. These exposures to various cultures provide an understanding for them when dealing with a new culture, as the following excerpts suggest:

> John: I used to work in Kuala Lumpur, Bolivia and South America. I also used to travel quite a lot to Germany as my parents used to work there when I was in college ... I realise that after a while in a country, I understand the host culture better and was able to gauge some of the social interaction meaning.
>
> David: I do have vast intercultural experiences. I used to teach in a university in Japan in 1993–1994, stayed for a month in India for research. I was a visiting professor in Germany and I attended conferences in many different countries like South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Austria as well as Switzerland ... Yes, every country has its own culture and values, so it's important to have at least the basic knowledge of the culture, the country and the people.
>
> Amanda: I've travelled a lot and worked in different countries like France, North America, Europe, China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Caribbean and some other Asia countries. So I learned a lot with the vast experiences that I have, besides I am older. It's about adapting to the local culture. You must value yours but at the same time adapt to the culture as much as you can. You can bring the benefits of your own culture but then try to integrate with the current culture.

John, David and Amanda are foreign academics who have vast intercultural experience. Their statements indicated that they have experience living and working in a range of foreign locations over the course of their life. John, who is from the United Kingdom, had travelled and worked in various countries suggested that he was able to gauge meanings in social interactions because of the time he invested in understanding and accommodating to a new culture. Similarly, David who had been travelling extensively, in his case for academic purposes since 1993, the countries he visited had distinctive differences in terms of language, religion and cultural values. David, who is in his 50s, demonstrated his intercultural

understanding when he stated the importance of having a basic understanding and knowledge of the country, its culture and its people. Amanda too believed that factors like her age and also her experience of visiting foreign countries for both work and personal purposes had helped her in adapting to foreign cultures. She was aware of the importance of maintaining one's own culture and values while also integrating herself with the host culture.

The majority of the participants had some information and background knowledge about Malaysia and Kuala Lumpur prior to their arrival. They also acknowledged that Malaysia is a multicultural country inclusive of three major ethnicities—Malays, Chinese and Indians. They acquired this information mostly from tourism brochures and the internet. Therefore, they managed to acquire some basic knowledge and understanding about Malaysia and Malaysian culture prior to moving to Kelantan.

The state of Kelantan and its capital, Kota Bharu, seem to be less well known to the foreign academics. Although many of the participants had heard of Malaysia and a few major cities in Malaysia like Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Johor Bharu as well as West Malaysia—also known as Borneo Sabah and Sarawak, they had rarely heard of Kelantan. Some of them had no prior knowledge of Kelantan before they arrived. Given that Kota Bharu is a smaller city as compared to the aforementioned major cities, most participants were a bit sceptical and surprised of the differences and expressed some difficulties in adjusting to the place when they first arrived. The majority of the participants perceived the state as being quite remote and not westernised like many other major cities in Malaysia. Once they arrived in Kelantan, they were aware of the differences between the people in Malaysia in general and the locals in Kelantan. The participants acknowledged the differences between Kota Bharu and other major cities as shown in the following excerpts:

> Amanda: When I came here it's a bit shocking unlike in Kuala Lumpur. I think big cities are more user friendly, as many people speak in English and it's quite an easy place to live as compared to Kelantan.
>
> Susan: I was in Kuala Lumpur for few days before I came here. So it's different in Kuala Lumpur. I read the guideline/brochures about Malaysia, but not really much information about Kota Bharu. It's actually quite difficult to find information about Kota Bharu. It's not a hugely tourist place. It was a bit of a shock for me when I first arrived.
>
> Paul: I did go to Kuala Lumpur several times when I used to stay at a neighbouring country. Kuala Lumpur is a big city with a lot of facilities. But then when I arrived here in Kota Bharu, I was a bit shocked. I did make a survey about Kota Bharu, like what I can get here, the facilities and all. But of course when I first arrived here, it was not so simple to understand and get to know the system here.

Based on these comments, it can be argued that foreign academics needed to adjust their prior perceptions once they became acquainted with and began to understand the local community and the community at the university. They needed to develop their awareness of the differences between the localised context of Kelantan and other states in Malaysia. It can also be seen from all three quotes that they were shocked when they arrived in Kelantan. They made comparisons between Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur. They were overwhelmed with the differences between Kelantan and Kuala Lumpur. For instance, Paul mentioned that it was difficult to understand the way the people of the host culture organised and managed their everyday lives for instance, transportation or how the locals commuted daily, the transactions in the government offices, shops, banks and also eateries. The different language and dialect spoken in Kelantan would evidently be a barrier to foreign academics. Some differences that were obvious to foreign academics were the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect and the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. Due to the importance of these topics, they are examined in detail in the two subsequent data chapters—Language in Chapter 5 and Islam in Chapter 6.

It is common for people to have first impressions that might contradict their imagined or prior perceptions of a place or its people. This situation is also known as imaginative geographies in which the imagined ideas of a place or cultures challenge the reality that is experienced after arrival (Beech 2014). This preconception occurs as visitors commonly develop an image or expectations of a place, which may result from previous experiences, reports from the media, advertisements, common generalizations as well as word of mouth (Chon 1991, 1992; Baloglu & Brinberg 1997; Chen & Phou 2013; Kani et al. 2017).

Additionally, many of the foreign academics interviewed considered having exposure and experience with the host culture (e.g. through prior visits as tourists or previous work contracts in Malaysia). These previous experiences provided them with a better understanding and awareness of the people of the host culture. The previous statements from the foreign academics are supported by statements from Siti and Hawa who are local academics and Yusof an administrative staff member at the university.

> Siti: And I think some of them have worked in Malaysia or visit Malaysia before they came to work here. Maybe they have also read some information about Malaysia. However, I think that in Malaysia we don't have or provide enough information in the brochures, we left it to the goodwill of the individuals to assist foreigners.

> Hawa: I do encounter some people who came here who had no knowledge or did not even do any research, they just assume that Malaysian people are more or less like all the other Asian countries, so they have that kind of generalisations. I think we need to do research about the countries that we're visiting so that we will not offend the locals.
>
> Yusof: I personally think that maybe the foreign academics do understand about our country or at least they got information from readings, like what they are supposed to do and not to do. But then, those are from national perspectives not from specific state or according to the district. So perhaps their understanding of Malaysia and Kelantan is on the general perspectives.

Siti believed that some of the foreign academics had some information about Malaysia and Kelantan prior to their arrival. However, she also believed that the university did not provide sufficient information to prepare the foreign academics about cultural practices and expectations in Malaysia and Kelantan. Hawa, on the other hand, indicated that she encountered some foreign academics who did not have any knowledge about Malaysia and Kelantan prior to their arrival and made the assumption that all Asians share similar cultural values. Yusof believed that only reading information from the tourism brochures is not enough as the information might be a general overview of the cultures in Malaysia.

An Indonesian foreign academic, Steven, said that the Malaysian culture does not have many differences as compared to his culture. He noticed some similarities between the host culture and his culture, as the following excerpt shows:

> Steven: The culture here is almost similar to the culture back in my country. Just very slight differences like the Chinese only live with the Chinese and vice versa, unlike in my country where we are all just one big community.

Although Steven mentioned that the host culture has some similarities with his culture, he noticed that there were segregated communities by belief system/background in the host culture. This is due to the sense of belonging in every ethnicity and also it was perhaps that he had not encountered people of the host culture who lived with people of different ethnicities. Although this situation is uncommon in the context of Kelantan due to the strong influence of Islam in the host culture (which is discussed in Chapter 6), this practice is quite common in other parts of Malaysia like Kuala Lumpur, Johore and few other big cities.

Some of the foreign academics attained prior knowledge about a culture that is similar to the host culture through living in other Asian countries as well as having personal relationships with Asians. This opportunity provides the foreign academics with additional information and knowledge of the host culture. Whilst there is vast cultural diversity within and between national cultures in the Asian region that requires personal experience and deep engagement

with local cultures to understand, the participants who had prior experiences living in another Asian country indicated that the adjustment was easier, as the following excerpts suggest:

> John: I suppose there are some similarities between the host culture and my wife's culture. I try to think about things from time to time, reflect on things and discuss with my wife who is an Asian and also share experience with people. It helps me a lot because my wife is an Asian even though I come from a western country.

The findings show that prior knowledge or exposure to other cultures helped in developing the cultural awareness of an individual. Some foreign academics had a similar experience as John articulating that spouses played an important role in supporting their partner in understanding and acquiring the awareness of their cultural differences. This is because, in a family, understanding of a spouse's cultural background is important to ensure the happiness of the family. This is supported by a study that attests that the foundation of a harmonious family is built on understanding, negotiation and also awareness of differences (Baharudin & Juhari 2002). This might also indicate that migration and resettlement cannot be thought of as a process only related to individuals but also happens within family contexts, kinship systems (in other words, that the background of the partner contributes to the resettlement process).

Although official information sources like government websites and tourist information centres give one perspective on a country, it is rarely sufficient. Even local staff members at the university feel their institutional brochures need updating in terms of the information about Kelantan that might be helpful to tourists/foreigners—places of worship, eateries, help centres, accommodation options, attractions, health and safety and local activities and celebrations. They considered it is also the responsibility of foreign academics to do their own research and equip themselves with more knowledge than the dominant discourses. It can also be inferred from the findings that spouses with experience of similar cultures, enabled foreign academics to develop their cultural awareness of the host culture and intercultural sensitivity at a faster rate than foreign academics with no connections to similar cultures through kinship ties. Developing intercultural sensitivity is complex because it relies on so many different actors developing relationships and contributing to one another, for instance, the local community within the university and outside the university.

The prior experiences that most foreign academics in this study had of travelling overseas enabled them to further develop the importance of understanding the nuances of different cultural contexts in the resettlement process and in displaying cultural sensitivity towards the

host culture. As for Malaysia, a visitor does not only have to understand aspects of the Malaysian culture, but also Chinese and Indian cultures. In Kelantan, the Siamese are also a distinct ethnicity. Despite Malaysia being a multicultural country, people of various ethnicities tend to keep their own unique identity and culture while maintaining respect towards other cultures and are said to live in peace and harmony (Abdullah 1996). The anticipation of what foreign academics thought they would find were still met with a long period of learning the local ways of life and variations in culture in Kelantan.

The findings indicate that having prior intercultural exposure influences individuals' intercultural sensitivity and worldview. A study conducted by Park (2013), which investigated intercultural sensitivity of South Korean adolescents in three different high schools in Seoul concurred that having exposure and knowledge of the host country and culture as well as contacts with other foreign cultures can influence the intercultural views and behaviours of individuals. Another study that discusses the effects of exposure and knowledge of the host culture with individual's intercultural sensitivity is by Del Villar (2010) who explored intercultural sensitivity among Filipinos working in multinational companies in the Philippines. It was found that experiences and knowledge about foreigners and foreign cultures strongly influenced the intercultural sensitivity of the participants. Those foreign academics who had prior experiences abroad indicated that they could readily adapt to a new culture. They acknowledged differences of the new host culture with their own culture. The awareness and knowledge of the host culture and the country influence the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity towards the host culture and its people. The findings show that the more intercultural experience and exposures the foreign academics had, the more easily for them to develop awareness and understanding of the host culture and other cultures.

The foreign academics were also seen to be determined to keep on learning and improving their understanding of the host culture as the following statement shows:

> Jennifer: I think I understand 80% of the host culture. I keep on learning and observing the locals because I want to live here. So I think I have to really understand the culture and people here.
>
> David: I love to interact with them. In fact it's my hobby to interact with the locals and mingle with them

Most of the participants observed people around them, what they did and how they reacted to certain things and sometimes they would ask their local friends. They also invested some

effort for more opportunities to learn and practise the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. But most of the time, their developing understandings were based on their own observations and learning from their own *faux pas*. Chris suggested that the university prepare an orientation programme for new and current foreign academics in order to help them understand the host culture, the people and the language.

> Chris: I think so. Because I observe the people and try to understand. Even there are times where I don't understand it, I'll just do it. I think it would be nice if the orientation programme could explain the differences and similarities about the culture and all. Besides of having us to observe on our own and expect to understand.

Based on the responses, it is clear that Chris knows that knowledge and understanding of the host culture is essential for him and other foreign academics to be culturally aware of the differences between their culture and the host culture. Interestingly, Siti a local academic at the university also believed that the university should organise an orientation programme for the foreign academics so that they could assimilate and acculturate themselves better in the host culture.

> Siti: I think the university could probably have some kind of programme to help or introduce them about university, people, like an induction programme or written documents or instructions on what to do and things. The same goes not only to foreign lecturers but also to local lecturers. Some of us even have problem just to find their foot in the system. It's just that maybe for foreigners it will be a bit more difficult for them.

The foreign academics' showed their willingness to learn more about the host culture and that they were aware of the variety of the ethnicities and cultures present in Malaysia. Their willingness to learn may initially be out of necessity but it did assist them to establish social relationships and a sense of belonging amongst the people of the host culture.

As mobile academics these foreign academics explained that they could adapt to the host culture because of their familiarity with the experience of living abroad and occupying the position of being a foreigner. While the experiences and knowledge of the countries that they have travelled to might not be the same, these participants' responses show that they had some basic knowledge that they acquired throughout their travels, such as the importance of culture to the people as well as the importance of having some basic knowledge of how culture works in a particular country. This knowledge helps the foreign academics in adapting themselves to the host culture. Foreign academics, as a mobile profession, are perhaps more adept at demonstrating intercultural sensitivity because they move more frequently. The

mobility of the occupation itself demands this sensitivity on the part of foreign academics, if they are to be successful professionally and personally.

This section has argued that whilst academia is a mobile profession and participants often had prior experiences in other countries which helped them adjust, this did not fully prepare them for the lived realities and contextual aspects of difference in the new location of Kelantan. Additionally, the foreign academics portrayed their intercultural sensitivity when they demonstrated their understanding of the structure of the society of the host culture, as explained in the next section.

4.2 Adjusting to the host culture

Besides of having intercultural experience and knowledge of Kelantan and Malaysia prior to their arrival in Kelantan, the foreign academics also described their accommodation and their experience adjusting to the host culture within and outside the university. The foreign academics' adjustment to the people of the host culture was manifested and challenged through various circumstances such as: the different perception of time between foreign academics and the local community especially at their workplace; the interaction with someone who is of a higher position and status; indirect communication style between people in the university; and the hierarchy at the university which then reflected in the community in Malaysia.

The working environment or culture is a site where the foreign academics interact with people of the host culture on an everyday basis and often more than their interaction with the people in their neighbourhood. Therefore, the foreign academics needed to adjust to differences in the workplace in terms of aspects like the value of and orientation towards time between various cultures, as well as the nature of interaction between workers and people in higher positions of authority.

Although they experienced many differences between previous working cultures and the current one at the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) ―particularly in relation to time management, and the interaction between workers and leaders―the participants were aware of the differences and tried to learn more about how the people of the host culture work and interact with one another in the workplace. The participants respected the differences and tolerated certain aspects that they believed could not be changed. One foreign academic, Amanda, commented that:

> Amanda: In terms of the working culture, sometimes it's a challenge, but it's a positive thing. Like the western way is not necessarily the best way to do things. There are many other ways as well. I guess it depends on the individual. I guess it's about personality aspect. It's about people and how they work.

This excerpt shows that the Amanda was aware of the differences in terms of the way the host culture works as well as the perceptions in the workplace. Her statement is representative of other foreign academics, especially foreign academics from western countries. Some foreign academics, including Amanda, described that the process of managing things was relaxed and slow moving.

> Amanda: I think Malaysians are much more relaxed about things. I think that perhaps, sometimes that's the better way to approach things rather than be stressful about it.
>
> John: As for the working culture here, I personally think that efficiency and time seem to be not a priority here, not being the focus.

The participants mentioned that the working culture in the university did not seem to prioritise time as much as they did. They described that the working environment in the university to be a bit relaxed and slow moving, as suggested in the following extracts:

> John: I think time is not really valued so much as compared to relationship. It can be a challenge as I think that time is valuable and to expect people to value time, it can get me frustrated sometimes. So I have to realise about that too. So I have to manage the frustration and deal with it.
>
> In terms of the working style here, it is a bit difficult, like the work efficiency and time. These two are seem to be not a priority here, not being the focus.

The foreign academics seemed to converge their communication style or behaviour as to appear similar to the host culture as well as to gain the host culture approval. Nevertheless, the foreign academic's intention in converging can be questioned, because although John converged his verbal and non-verbal communication style and showed respect, the foreign academics still felt a sense of frustration but knew this would not be helpful and so adjusted anyway. As John converged his communication strategy, it reflected his intercultural sensitivity. While John converged his behaviour to accommodate and work well with the community of the host culture, nevertheless he was frustrated. He mentioned that from their perspective, the working culture in Malaysia had a different approach to time and that time was not the priority at work. It could perceive that some Malaysians lack punctuality and the value of time.

The foreign academics' adjustment to time and other practices in the host culture were also commented on by local academics and administrative staff members. They concurred with the statements of the foreign academics. Hawa, a local academic and also Zainab, an administrative staff member, said:

> Hawa: Like Malaysians, we have the real time and the Malaysian time. Like UK and US, they are very punctual. Like 3 o'clock on the dot. Like Malaysian if it's 3 it can be 3.15 or 3.30 and we tend to be OK with that.
>
> Zainab: Working culture—like the Europeans, they want things to go perfectly, and sometimes his way can be a bit of burden to us so we normally will try to negotiate with him and make him understand. And so far it is OK in a sense that, we understand his needs and he understands our shortcomings here. Then it'll work as usual. We always try to negotiate, understand and be tolerant with each other.

Hawa agreed with the fact that time was perceived differently and was not considered as an important aspect in work ethic. Some important aspects prioritised in the Malaysian work context are hierarchy and bureaucracy. Her statement also indicated that it was a shared understanding among the locals that time was not followed punctually, but people will eventually be present. Zainab acknowledged the need to negotiate adjustments to the local work culture.

People's perception of time differs from one culture to another. Levine (1997) describes that each culture has its own sense of time. He further explains that fast 'pace of life cultures' like Japan and countries in Western Europe tend to put more value on the importance of punctuality as compared to slower 'pace of life' cultures like Brazil, which tend to be more flexible with time and focus on human interactions rather than rigidly following the schedule (Levine & Norenzayan 1999; Garcia-Gavilanes et al. 2013). Although Malaysia was not listed in the countries mentioned in the research by Levine and Norenzayan (1999), two neighbouring countries were mentioned which were Indonesia and Singapore in which these two countries may have some similarities with the setting of this study, Malaysia.

This concept of time as described by the scholars responded to the foreign academics' description of how the people of the host culture did not perceive time as they do. The foreign academics noticed and acknowledged the differences in terms of the way the local perceived and appreciated time as well as the way the people at the community work.

Apart from differences in perceptions of time, the foreign academics also needed to adjust to the different forms of appropriate communication with the local academics, students and

administrative staff. John, for example, commented on the communication style of the people in the workplace which he described as being indirect.

> John: Another thing is people here are not so direct. So I have to work hard to understand what they need. They won't insist on me doing something, but they will get offended if I didn't do it ... As for me, sometimes it is easy, and sometimes it is difficult dealing with professionals here. I think it's the values. Like how conflicts are dealt with. I think things often get unsaid here, unspoken. Sometimes tensions don't get resolved as they just not get spoken about there. And conflicts often arise.

John described unresolved conflicts in the workplace due to the way conflicts were addressed. The 'unsaid' issue that John described indicates the indirect communication style of the people of the host culture. This indirect communication style is also known as a high context communication. A high context communication is when the message is conveyed through non-verbal language like, reference to the situation, behaviour, and paraverbal cues (Würtz 2006). It can be inferred from John's comments that the people of the host culture were not direct when interacting, and non-verbal interaction was sometimes evident during interaction. For example, issues were to be handled with the intention that no one will get offended and messages were to be delivered indirectly and subtly. Therefore, foreign academics may need to be really sensitive to non-verbal communication styles as otherwise they may be missing the intended meaning.

In the host culture, individuals were careful with the way they spoke to one another and especially with people who are older or hold higher positions. Therefore, foreigners need to understand the ethnic communities in Malaysia in order to understand the leadership styles in Malaysia (Selvarajah & Meyer 2008). Another aspect of the structure of the host culture that the participants found apparent was that the people are addressed according to their title. This tradition shows respect for that person and respect towards the title that he/she has attained. This concurs with Hofstede's description of a high context society in which interaction in the society is emphasised based on protocols and that it follows a certain bureaucracy, for instance, everything is to follow specific procedures. In reference to Hofstede's cultural dimension, Abdullah (1996) described Malaysia as a society of low individualism and moderate masculinist as compared to other countries. She further explains that in Malay-based organisations, the organisational structure is hierarchical and status-based in nature which is an example of the leadership model of a village headman (*ketua kampung)*. This notion is apparent in the data when a participant commented that:

> Amanda: My boss in Kuala Lumpur used to tell me to remember to call people with the correct title. It's more formal here.

The statement shows that Amanda converged her communication style to accommodate to the host culture as she had been informed of the host culture's formality and hierarchy. Since titles and positions are equally important in the host culture, it demonstrates the hierarchy process in everyday lives. This exposure through experience and guidance from colleagues helped the foreign academics in understanding and attaining awareness of the differences between cultures in terms of the social hierarchy in the host culture.

This situation was also evident in the university context. The community in the university consists of academics who are Professors, Associate Professors, hold doctorates, senior lecturers, junior lecturers and also administrative staff. Individuals with titles expect to be addressed by their titles, which is typical in Malaysia. However, some individuals do not mind being called just by their names and not their titles. The majority, however, would prefer to be called by their titles. This situation suggests that formality and hierarchy are very important in Malaysia. The foreign academics explained the situation and one of them explained that she had to be a bit more careful when she spoke with people of higher academic status, as the following extract suggests:

> Amanda: In my country it's more casual and you call your boss with his first name. I try to speak more respectful, but I'm a bit more careful when I speak with people of higher hierarchy.

Amanda converged the way she addressed people of the host culture and the university so that she would not be considered as being ignorant and disrespectful towards the locals. Her convergence also showed that she was interculturally sensitive towards the host culture by being mindful of the way she interacted and addressed people, especially those of higher positions. She respected the differences and she tolerated variances. This convergence is in line with the convergence strategy explained by Communication Accommodation Theory in which individuals converge their communication styles and behaviour in order to appear similar or even to gain approval from the society.

Their awareness and understanding of the different ways the local community communicate show their intercultural sensitivity towards the host culture. For instance Siti, Aminah and Yusof made the following comments:

> Siti: I think they do not understand the system, more than the culture. The regulations are not being handled properly ... Also in Asian countries we record attendance for coming to work and all but for westerners to clock in might be a bit troublesome.
>
> Aminah: I have this one experience with one foreign academics who was very strict with following his own work ethics but as I observe, as time goes by he has assimilated with the Malaysian culture so, he's quite good now, he's not as strict as before.
>
> Yusof: In terms of the interaction at the office, because of hierarchy in our system, communication among the people can be a challenge or barrier. Due to that, when we are the government officer and you are sitting at the top management, they thought that they are not supposed to communicate with us.

Siti and Aminah suggest that the foreign academics might face some difficulties in adapting to the way the people of the host culture operate in the workplace. However, they also observed that the foreign academics had managed to assimilate with the culture at the workplace. Yusof, an administrative staff member, commented on the interaction level at the workplace that might be a barrier to foreign academics.

The findings from the study show that differences at the workplace in terms of the opinions, the way work was performed as well as the expected interaction between workers, were influenced by cultural differences. However, the foreign academics were being tolerant to abide to the cultural norms at the workplace and avoid conflicts. Conflicts can be less destructive, and work can be more productive, when the workers are high on convergence communicative behaviour (Ayoko et al. 2002). The respect and tolerance showed that the foreign academics were sensitive towards the differences in the host culture. The findings are supported by a study done with undergraduate students who enrolled in an introductory communication course at a medium-sized north-eastern university in the United States (Yu & Chen 2008). The study found that intercultural sensitivity affected the way the participants managed conflict. Students who believed they were high in intercultural sensitivity tended to use integrating and compromising strategies in managing conflicts and were very unlikely to use avoiding and dominating styles. This situation is similar to the present study in which the foreign academics negotiated their ways by following the ways the community in the university handled conflicts. The foreign academics also implied that they did not use confrontation as confrontation was not being practised in the workplace.

The findings in this section have demonstrated how the participants were aware of the differences in the interaction between people of different positions in the workplace. People in the positions of a high authority need to be addressed more formally with respect.

Participants were aware that in Malaysia cultural aspects affect the communication style and sought to adapt their behaviour accordingly.

The hierarchy in the community portrays the importance of the society as one organisation. This aspect of the community as one big organisation indicates the togetherness of the people of the host culture. The participants acknowledged the differences in terms of the structure of the local community, as the following excerpts suggest:

> John: When it comes to the way I work, there are some things that I have to be moderate so that it won't be offensive to others. For example, I couldn't be very individualistic like how we are back in my country because here it's a community and everyone works together and live as one big community.

John further commented that:

> John: The individualistic and collectivistic society. Like here it's important to do things together, should include everybody. Well, if we don't have to wait for everybody like in the meetings and all, things can be done quicker more easily. And if you always have to stop to think about involving people and make sure everybody there, that can slow things down.

The extracts indicate that through John's observation, the host community portrayed the elements of a collectivistic society which he described as being different than the society in his native country; England, which was more individualistic. Another participant, Paul commented that the local community seemed to be very close with one another. He further explained that the community would normally know everyone in the family and they looked after one another.

> Paul: I think here, in Kelantan, it is a very close-knit community. Like you guys know everyone in your community.

The responses showed that the foreign academics believed that the people of the host culture had a good rapport with one another and were collectivistic in orientation. This situation was noticeable among the participants as one of them mentioned that he could not be individualistic as how he was in his country, England, as that would contradict the community of the host culture. This element of collectivistic and individualistic behaviours is traced back to Hofstede's cultural dimension. As discussed in Chapter 2, as the current world has become more global and intercultural, it cannot be assumed that a certain population of a certain country is either individualistic or collectivistic. This finding can be supported by several critiques of Hofstede's cultural dimension. For instance, Coon and Kemmelmeier (2001) argues that individuals can be individualistic and collectivistic at the same time. Their

argument was further supported by Kapoor and Comadena (2003) in their study which found that in an intercultural setting, individuals can be both individualistic and collectivistic.

However, as mentioned by the foreign academics in this study, the local community of the host culture did appear to be largely collectivistic and close-knit. The foreign academics were aware of the cultural differences and how people in the local neighbourhood and at the university work and communicate with one another. The foreign academics were reflexively voicing that they were used to a different way of working (individualistic) but that this awareness provided them the ability to then adapt their behaviour to fit into this context. An understanding of the culture and of the whole community helped the foreign academics in adapting themselves to the host culture and showed their intercultural sensitivity.

This section has argued that people can be both individualistic and collectivistic at the same time and it cannot be generalised that a society can only be individualistic or collectivistic. In this study, foreign academics from more individualistic societies can still adapt their behaviour to suit more collectivist contexts (like the foreign academics adjusting to the workplace in Kelantan). An individual can show both individualist and collectivist orientations depending on the context.

While the data presented in this section has shown how the differences in workplace cultures were sometimes frustrating for foreign academics, they knew that they could not change how the system at the university works. The realization that foreign academics had with regards to themselves being individualistic and their understanding of the local community as being collectivistic, shows the foreign academics' awareness of the host culture and its people. The foreign academics converged their understanding of how they used to work in an individualistic society to the collectivistic society so that conflict could be avoided and communication more effective. This response reflects their cultural awareness, in other words, the foreign academics acknowledged that the host culture is often (although not always) collectivistic and high context in nature. Therefore, it is important in a collectivistic and high context society that the goals when working are geared towards the company as one rather than individual goals. It is important for everyone to fit in the company or community and the concept of 'we' is given more weight than 'I'. Individuals are also expected not to confront or question their superior or the elder (Del Villar 2010).

Although the foreign academics' intercultural experience, knowledge and prior knowledge of the host culture had contributed to their accommodation and intercultural sensitivity quite positively, their intercultural experience and knowledge were challenged once they entered the university and made acquainted with the local community. Once they entered the local community within and outside the university, they became familiar with and accommodated to the way the locals perceived time, the way they should address their superior at work and those with higher status and positions, the indirect ways people of the host culture managed conflicts and communicated with one another, and the hierarchy of the host culture which was also evident at the workplace.

Intercultural interactions are cumulative over time in developing intercultural sensitivity and these interactions happen in formal and informal contexts and everyday interactions inside and outside of the university. The next section examines the foreign academics' efforts in integrating with the people of the host culture outside the university and their perception on the people of the host culture openness towards them.

4.3 Social interaction and openness towards culturally different counterparts

In addition to the interaction and engagement within the university context, the foreign academics were also interacting on a daily basis with the people of the host culture outside the university. The foreign academics were asked about their social interaction with the people of the host culture and whether the local community was open to cultural differences. This section argues that the continuous effort to interact and build relationships with the people of the host culture would assist the foreign academics' accommodation process and develop their intercultural sensitivity. This argument is discussed in two separate sub-sections, which include: the foreign academics' efforts to integrate with the people of the host culture; and the foreign academics' perception of the local community's openness towards culturally different people.

4.3.1 'I continuously try to integrate better': Socialising outside the university context

The foreign academics attempted to socialise with the people of the host culture to develop their relationships and a sense of belonging to the host community. The majority of the respondents enjoyed the company of the locals, however, the foreign academics stated that the locals seldom spend time with them during the weekends.

> Nancy: I don’t go out often with the locals. Normally I'll spend time with other foreign lecturers. Because most local staff they have family. I think usually they normally spend time with the family.
>
> Amanda: I normally spend my free time with other foreign academics, sometimes I go to Kuala Lumpur, or friends came over and we went to Perhentian Island. I agree that I don’t socialise much with the locals as compared to when I was in Kuala Lumpur.
>
> Susan: If I don’t have any activities on campus with the students, I’ll go to Kuala Lumpur, for ‘Western time’ for myself.

From the excerpts, it can be seen that the locals may have preferred to spend their weekends with their family or local friends. As Kelantan is not a big state and English language is not used extensively, the locals seldom asked the foreign academics out on the weekends. The language barrier might make conversation challenging and to a certain extent, might hinder the intended message in a conversation. Most foreign academics who were single or did not have family members with them, normally spent their leisure time with other foreign lecturers or they would go to Kuala Lumpur or Perhentian Island with their international friends. Kuala Lumpur and Perhentian Island seem to be well known among foreign academics. It was indicated that these two places make the foreign academics feel less restricted as compared to Kelantan. Since Kelantan is an Islamic state, not many places can offer them opportunities to socialise in ways they may have in their home country, which resulted in them searching for alternatives to enjoy themselves in their own way. The foreign academics indicated that they needed some 'Western time' and they managed to find ways for it.

The responses given by the foreign academics show that they managed to allocate some 'Western time' for themselves with their international friends especially foreign academics who were single. It can also be inferred that the foreign academics converged and diverged at the same time. They converged by seeking alternatives where they could spend leisure time in ways that were consistent with their previous lives in other countries. They also diverged by maintaining their lifestyle as to sustain their own identity. The foreign academics respected the different lifestyle of the host culture and tolerated the differences by finding alternatives for themselves.

The foreign academics, who came with their family, spent most of the time outside of work with their family members.

> Steven: I normally go out and spend time with my family during the weekends.
>
> Paul: Normally in the weekend, I’ll go out with my wife and our friends for lunch or dinner. I do enjoy the company of the close friends of mine.

> John: I have neighbours, we socialise with them at a fair amount. Normally the weekends and in the evenings, I would spend time with my family and occasionally with the locals if I'm not so busy.

The foreign academics not only spent time with their family members and their foreign friends, but also with local friends and people from the university community.

> Edward: I mostly socialise with the locals at the mosque and also with my neighbours. And with staff and students in the university.
>
> Jacob: I do go out for dinner with my local friends. I do go out with Malaysian friends, staff and other foreign staff as well. But I prefer the Malaysians better.

They also mentioned that they occasionally spent some time with the locals in their neighbourhood outside of the university area other than the community of the university. This situation implied that the foreign academics deliberately tried to establish social relationships with people of the host culture.

When they were asked whether they have integrated with the host culture, all of the foreign academics believed that they integrated well and they mentioned that they keep on learning to improve their understanding of the host culture. The foreign academics believed they kept on integrating by attempting to socialise with the local community in the university and the host culture, in general. The following extracts show the foreign academics' efforts in integrating with the host culture:

> Nancy: In the beginning I found it quite difficult but now I feel more relaxed. It took me 3 years to make myself really ok and comfortable here.
>
> John: I continuously try to integrate better and I try to understand people as people.
>
> Amanda: I try to integrate better. I think it’s very important to do that and to make sure that everybody gets along.
>
> Susan: Yes. It’s just I think I need to go out more and find more stuff to do other than the activities with the students and clubs.

The responses show that the foreign academics continually made an effort to socialise and interact with people from the host culture. The foreign academics realised the importance of acceptance by the local community and the need to feel they belonged in the host culture. It also shows that the foreign academics will feel more comfortable with their stay if they are able to integrate better. Some respondents took several months or longer to integrate and blend well with the host culture and some respondents took several years to finally feel comfortable. Several factors may contribute to the length of time that foreign academics took to feel comfortable living in the host culture. For example, foreign academics with many

previous overseas experiences might feel a sense of belonging faster than those with little overseas experience. Another factor may be that foreign academics with family in Kelantan find it easier to accommodate (e.g. because they socialised as a family with other local families) as compared to foreign academics who were single. Perhaps having children who can play might be a commonality that can bring locals and foreigners together, thus assisting the accommodation process.

The foreign academics accommodate to the people of the host culture by making the attempt to socialise with the locals. The local academics in the university were aware of and approved of the foreign academics' efforts to integrate with the people of the host culture. Siti and Aisyah commented that:

> Siti: We tried in our faculty to encourage them to blend in with the community inside and outside the university. We do have community engagement projects. Besides, some of them have conducted some projects with the locals, with the farmers, goat rearers, lab technicians from other schools, departments. So, they did go to the field and get involved with the community. We also visited schools. And they are encouraged to accompany the students for field trips. In a way, it is a free sightseeing for them. Some took the students to the farms, factories and all. So they have expanded their contacts with the local community.
>
> Aisyah: One of my friends, he's really good integrating himself with the locals, he always brings his family together with him to the university events and sometimes his wife wears the headscarf as to show respect to the ceremony, which is very good.

Siti indicated that her faculty initiated a few programmes and opportunities for the foreign academics to interact and integrate better with the people of the host culture. The initiatives from the faculty demonstrate the university's efforts to ensure that the foreign academics would be able to pass their knowledge and expertise to the local community and also to make them feel part of the community. Aisyah added an example of a foreign academic who not only joined the activity on his own, but also brought his wife and children so that the whole family would be able to integrate better with the people of the host culture. It is evident from the findings that foreign academics with family tended to socialise and spend more time with their family members and sometimes with the local families as compared to foreign academics who were single who mostly spent their free time with other single foreign academics or their foreign friends from other parts of Malaysia. The findings also indicate the foreign academics' efforts to integrate better with the people of the host culture within and also outside the university as well as some efforts from the university to link foreign academics with the community.

The next sub-section explores the perceptions of foreign academics about the perceived 'openness' of the local community to foreign academics.

4.3.2 Openness of the local community to foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity

To further understand the outcome of foreign academics' interactions and socialisation with the people of the host culture on their intercultural sensitivity, the foreign academics were asked about the openness of the people of the host culture towards foreigners. The findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that not all locals were open to other cultures, as the following extracts show:

> Nancy: I think it depends. Some are quite open and interested in other cultures. I think people here are quite friendly and I don't have problems with the locals.
>
> Amanda: They are neither open nor closed towards other cultures and I think they are a bit reserved.
>
> Michael: I think the locals here in Kelantan, they are more reserved. Not really open like people in Jakarta or Indonesia. It is easy to get more friends in Indonesia.

The extracts show that the foreign academics believed that the people of the host culture are neither open nor closed to people of other cultures, but rather reserved. Even when some foreign academics stated that the locals were open to other cultures, some of the respondents feel that the locals were quite closed in terms of socialising with foreigners, as indicated by the following interview extracts:

> John: I think people are very friendly towards foreign cultures in many ways, they like foreigners to be amongst them, they like to invite them, to experience some of their cultures. In that sense, they are open. In other sense, they don't want their culture change by foreigners. Foreigners coming in to disturb things they value. There's openness, but they are also maybe in some areas and aspects of life is not such openness.
>
> William: I like it here. As compared to my country, all class of people mix with one another. I respect this situation. People here are down to earth. Sometimes I feel that the locals, they don't really want to mix with the foreigners. Because sometimes I invite them for lunch and all, most of the time they declined the offer, perhaps they are busy.
>
> Amanda: Well, people here might say hello and have a little chat with you but I feel there's a little bit more distance here than in any other places, maybe. I think in terms of openness it's 50–50, some are open minded, but maybe others regard us in a distrustful way because we don't conform to, maybe the local customs. I also think that people here are shyer but they are delightful. Maybe mainly because the dominant of Malays and it's quite far from Kuala Lumpur, so it's less international. I also think that the people here took couple of months to talk to me even.

The extracts show that the foreign academics believed that the people of the host culture were friendly but a bit shy and reserved. They also believed that the locals were open in a sense that the locals acknowledged the foreign academics but it was noted that it often took time to mingle with the foreign academics. For instance, John stated that the locals were open and that they were pleased to get to know the foreign academics but he also sensed that there were some locals who were not open to foreign academics. He believed that it is one of the ways the locals protect their own culture from the influence of foreign cultures. William also suggested that the locals were reluctant to mingle with foreign academics. He made several attempts to gain acceptance from the locals by inviting some locals that he knows for dinner and the invitations were declined, perhaps due to language barriers (discussed in Chapter 5). Amanda stated that the locals were shyer as compared to people in Kuala Lumpur. She could also sense some distance between the local community and herself. She further commented that it might be because she did not conform to the cultural values of the host culture. Amanda, who came to the university due to a teaching assistant programme, did not plan to stay in the host culture as the nature of her job is to travel from one place to another.

However, when the foreign academics were asked about acceptance from the host culture, all of the participants mentioned that they feel accepted by the local community. The majority said that the longer they stayed in a place, the more people will get to know them and will accept them.

> John: Yes I feel accepted by the locals, generally with the neighbour and friends and all. Most places take times. When you first get to a new place regardless of a culture, there'll be a bit of barrier. Once people get to know you then it'll be a lot smoother.
>
> Amanda: I feel kind of accepted in Kuala Lumpur because people don't even notice and there so many nationalities been living in that city. So there are foreign workers, visitors and all. People don't really care. It's like you're anonymous to them. In terms here, within the university compound with the staff, we work very well together. I think we are accepted, warmly regarded. The local community, some part yes, like the laundry people where I often go, they are very friendly and sometimes we have little chat. Some shops, they will fight among them not to serve me, maybe because they have to use English with me. In that sense I feel a bit more conspicuous compared to Kuala Lumpur. Not in malicious way. I think in general people allow me to go about my business, though it will be very nice to have a few more local friends.

The excerpts suggest that the foreign academics believed that they were accepted by the people of the host culture. John mentioned that he felt accepted by the host culture and he also acknowledged the aspect of time in which the longer the stay, the better people will get to know him and accept him. Amanda, on the other hand, stated that she felt accepted in

Kuala Lumpur. She further commented that the reason is because in Kuala Lumpur, a city with people of various nationalities and cultural backgrounds, she felt less noticed by the local community. She also stated that she felt accepted in Kelantan and warmly regarded but not to the same extent as in Kuala Lumpur. It can be inferred from the comment that she most probably felt less visible to the people in Kuala Lumpur, in such a way that she would not attract people's attention as compared to being in Kelantan.

Another foreign academic, named Jacob, mentioned that he felt accepted by the local community mainly because he did not feel restricted from behaving in the way that he wanted and did not receive any negative reactions.

> Jacob: I think I'm accepted by the local community because I can do whatever I want to do. There are no restrictions, no judgement or negative reactions from the community. So I don't feel alienated.

Jacob felt that he was accepted mainly because he was not disturbed in his everyday life by the people of the host culture. However, this situation can also be understood as the foreign academics being warmly welcomed by the host culture, but not fully accepted by the host culture. This is in relation to previous statements made by foreign academics in which they felt that there is a barrier between them and the host culture. There seems to be a difference between feeling welcomed or accepted and feeling engaged in the community. When the foreign academics felt they were able to practise and engage in their own activities and were not judged by the community, they felt welcomed by the people of the host culture. However, establishing friendships with the people of the host culture required much more time thus resulting in foreign academics feeling not fully accepted.

However, their efforts to interact and integrate were not always successful as they believed that the people of the host culture were still distant with them. Some of the foreign academics mentioned that they will always be considered as foreigners/outsiders.

> Chris: We are still be looked as foreigners, our physical appearance and all. It's generalization from the people. I will always be viewed as foreigners, as 'white people' even after several years of living here.

> Paul: Like here, it's a very closed community, so it's difficult to fit in. I think like in here, it's not about you being foreigner and all. But I think here in Kelantan, if you are not a Kelantanese, you are considered as an outsider. Even if you are from Johor Bharu or Kuala Lumpur, you are still considered as outsider. Because here is a much close community. Like you guys know everyone in your community. They accept you fully but you are still an outsider.

The statements show that the foreign academics felt that the people of the host culture were a closed community. They further mentioned that they will always be viewed and considered as foreigners/outsiders even after being in Kelantan for several years. For instance, Chris stated that he will always be considered as 'white people' even after several years living in Kelantan. For some foreign academics, their physical appearance made them feel very distinctive to the local community. However, physical appearance is not something that can be changed. This implies that physical appearance influence acceptance. Paul mentioned that in Kelantan, people who are not from Kelantan are considered as outsiders. He gave examples of Malaysians from Johor Bharu are also considered as outsiders in Kelantan. His statement is in reference not only towards himself, but also towards Malaysians who are not Kelantanese. It can be inferred from the statements that foreign academics believed that the sense of value and community spirit among the people of the host culture are strong and that the foreign academics could not penetrate into the host culture. A strong sense of values is essential in any culture as a core part of national or regional identity. There is often a desire to protect the originality of the culture as well as preserving it for future generations (Renzaho et al. 2011). The foreign academics were aware of this matter that concerns the local culture but they also hoped that they will not be perceived as change agents to the host culture.

Despite feeling outsiders, the foreign academics made positive remarks about the generosity of the people of the host culture in which they were provided moral support and encouragement by the community, in understanding the host culture as well as the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. The following excerpts demonstrate this point:

> John: Most of my thoughts and when there are clashes in cultures, I will try to get better understanding by reading books or discuss with my Asian wife.
>
> David: Sometimes the students explain about their cultures in class and I do the same. Because I think it’s the interaction process.
>
> Jennifer: At first, it was a bit difficult because it's different from how we work in my country. The working culture in my country is very systematic and punctual unlike here in Malaysia and here, everything, every instruction or involvement in any activities is written black and white, not only on spoken instructions. So I had to adjust everything, luckily my colleagues were always open minded and kept on encouraging me and now I have no problem.

The extracts show that the foreign academics made further efforts by seeking extra information with regards to the host culture and the people by reading as well as asking help from the locals. John mentioned that he sometimes discussed these with his Asian wife. Other

foreign academics stated that sometimes students and colleagues helped them by explaining the cultural differences and kept on giving moral support.

Some foreign academics with family mostly spent their free time with their family members and occasionally with other local families. And for single foreign academics, they would normally spend their free time with other single foreign academics or with their foreign friends who were working in other parts in Malaysia. Although there were different ways of spending their free time, the foreign academics tried to engage and interact with the locals in their everyday lives activities. The findings indicate that the foreign academics had invested their efforts to socially integrate and interact with the people of the host culture. In addition, the university initiated some activities that would encourage foreign academics integration in the host culture such as the Eid festivals, local cultural performance like traditional Malay dances, Chinese and Indian dances. Despite the effort to integrate better with the people of the host culture, the foreign academics believed that they had not been fully accepted in the host culture. They had come to the realisation that being welcomed was not synonymous with engagement with the host culture.

Whilst they felt less accepted, the foreign academics continued to demonstrate their intercultural sensitivity by engaging in local cultural events and activities so that they could accommodate better to the host culture. The following section discusses the foreign academics intercultural engagement in the host culture.

4.4 Engaging in cultural events and activities/practices

Another effort of the foreign academics to socialise with the people of the host culture was to participate in various local and traditional activities. Every year Malaysians celebrate various festivals and cultural events with ethno-specific games, food and religious activities. The variety of celebrations created many opportunities for foreign academics to learn, understand and experience the host culture better. The majority of the foreign academic had experienced many cultural and traditional activities like local weddings, traditional games, eating cuisine of the host culture and joining major cultural festivals like the Eid festivals celebrated by Muslims, the Chinese New Year celebrated by Buddhists, Deepavali celebrated by Hindus, Christmas celebrated by Christians and numerous other religious and cultural festivals and events. In the following excerpts, John and William, both foreign academics, describe their participation in local cultural activities and ceremonies.

> John: I've done and attended lots of different things and activities. I attended funerals and *tahlil*[4]*;* the after the deaths events for the Muslims, the blessing of newborn ceremony—*aqiqah* [5] for the Muslims and also weddings, mainly Malays weddings. I even go to events held in the mosques. I attended the Muslim Eid festivals and as for the Indian cultural activities, since I don't have Indian friends here in Kelantan, so the activities that I attended were mostly done by the students at the campus and that would be my insights, like their harvest festivals and Deepavali.
>
> William: Yes, I attended many events like the Eid celebrations and in Ramadhan, we break the fast with the locals. I also attended weddings, and community programmes organised by the university as well. I like the weddings here because it's very simple and economical as compared to my country. I like it that all class of people, mix with one another. I respect this situation. People are all down to earth.

The findings show that the foreign academics were able to attend festivals and celebrations of the different ethnicities present in the host culture and that this contributed to the cultural awareness of the foreign academics. The foreign academics participated in various cultural activities. The frequency of them joining the activities shows their initiative to understand the host culture better.

The findings show that the foreign academics respected and sought to be actively engaged in the various cultural celebrations and activities. The foreign academics converged their behaviour by getting involved with the cultural festivals and activities organised by the people of the host culture in order to learn about the host culture as well as to provide opportunities for developing relationships between them and the people of the host culture. The findings show that the foreign academics were interculturally sensitive towards the host culture by wanting to engage with the locals.

Other than cultural festivals and celebrations, the foreign academics had also joined numerous other local cultural activities in Kelantan like cultural performances. The traditional local performances are common in any events or ceremonies in Kelantan. This is because the Kelantan state government encourages cultural activities so as to ensure that the local heritage, cultures and arts are maintained, preserved and appreciated not only by the locals, but also international visitors. The foreign academics managed to gain more knowledge and understanding of the host culture by participating in numerous activities

[4] *Tahlil* is the Malay after-ceremony hosted by the deceased family members where the relatives and neighbours come and do the religious recitation.

[5] *Aqiqah* is an event where the Muslims sacrifice an animal on the occasion of a child's birth. The performance of *aqiqah* is highly recommended and is performed by the parents or the guardians of the child. It is widely performed by Muslims and it is considered a common practice in Islam to slaughter a sheep for the baby and distribute the meat to the poor.

throughout their tenure at the university as shown in these comments from Susan and Jennifer:

> Susan: I witnessed cultural performances and talks about cultural performances. I also went to dance studio to learn some dances.
>
> Jennifer: Yes, I like the local and the traditional activities. I personally like the traditional dances like *mak yong*[6] dance and *dikir barat*[7].

The findings show that Susan took the initiative to obtain more knowledge and understanding of the cultural events and activities of the host culture. The foreign academics learnt and attained more insights into the host culture festivals, celebrations and local activities to increase their awareness of the uniqueness of the Kelantanese culture and thus increase their intercultural sensitivity. The foreign academics' involvement in the activities with the people of the host culture helped their accommodation process with a sense of interaction enjoyment when the foreign academics participated in the cultural activities. This sense of interaction enjoyment is evident in intercultural sensitivity, as stated by Chen and Starosta (2000).

However, William, a Muslim foreign academic, believed in distinguishing himself from the host culture activity as the following extract shows:

> William: Sometimes the activities don't match with my religion Islam, so I try to avoid from joining that kind of activities.

The response from William suggests that he would diverge by not participating in any activities that did not match with his religion of Islam. This is because, although Kelantan is an Islamic state, the people of the host culture consist of people of different races and who practise religions other than Islam. Some activities in the university are not in line with the Islamic values, especially activities that involve non-Muslims. William was being divergent in the sense of particular activities as to make a clear distinction between himself and the non-Muslim people of the host culture. He did this to maintain his own cultural identity and his Islamic beliefs.

The foreign academics' involvement in local activities was noticed by local academics, administrative staff and also students from the focus group discussion, as stated in the following extracts.

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[6] *Mak yong* is a traditional dance in Kelantan.

[7] *Dikir Barat* is traditional local performance in Kelantan.

> Siti: I see that they enjoy the cultural shows and performances.
>
> Aisyah: A friend from Vietnam, he told me about what they normally do in the marriages, during the weddings, and he compared similarities and differences to what we have here in Malaysia.
>
> Aminah: Like celebrations, they don't really talk about it, but they like to know about ours and the differences of our major celebrations and how peninsular and Sabah and Sarawak different.
>
> Noor: Like they join with our activity then incidentally they told us about their culture.
>
> Zainab: Like in this faculty we have language day, then that day, they will explain about their cultures, their foods, traditional clothes and all. So we learn a lot from there.
>
> Students: For example, events such as Indian cultural night, so we invite them to come to that event so they can know very well about the Indian culture. [Focus Group Discussion 2]

Siti, Aisyah and Aminah who are all local academics stated that the foreign academics joined local activities and also local cultural shows. Their statements are also supported by Noor and Zainab who are the administrative staff at the university and also a statement from a student focus group discussion. Their statements indicated that the foreign academics tried to understand the host culture better by participating in activities and at the same time, attempted to explain about their own culture. The foreign academics' interest in the host culture and their eagerness to also explain about their culture to the local community indicated their willingness to understand the host culture better and also for the people of the host culture to understand them. This situation shows a reciprocal act between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture.

By joining the local cultural activities, the foreign academics demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity thus indicating the elements of interaction engagement in which they invested their effort to engage with the people of the host culture and interaction enjoyment that they enjoyed the time spent participating in the cultural activities. Their convergence of behaviour was evident when they voluntarily participated in the local cultural activities in which such behaviour was to gain approval and to blend in with the local community and hence would assist their accommodation process.

Other than voluntarily joining the local cultural activities and festivals organised by the university and also by the local neighbourhood, the foreign academics also expressed their intercultural sensitivity in their accommodation process by embracing the uniqueness of the local attire and adjusting to the local cuisine as discussed in the following two sub-sections.

4.4.1 Presenting oneself in the host culture

Another aspect of a culture that is quite distinct for the foreign academics is the clothing or the attire of the various groups within the host culture. Since Malaysia is a multiracial country, many styles of clothing represent the various cultures. For example, the *baju kurung*[8] is the traditional clothing for female Malays and is well known among all Malaysians. It is also quite a normal scenario to see a female Chinese or a female Indian wearing a *baju kurung* to go to work or school. Another traditional piece of clothing of the Malays is *batik*[9]. For government sectors in Malaysia, it is compulsory for all workers to wear batik every Thursday to work. The implementation of wearing batik for government sectors is an act to preserve the batik heritage among Malaysians.

The dress code for any formal events in Malaysia requires the attendees to wear the national clothing. This means that the attendees, including during university functions, are expected to wear *batik* or black *baju melayu*[10] or suits for males, and *baju kurung* or *batik* for females. The foreign academics were never forced to wear something that they were not comfortable with, which shows that they and the people of the host culture respected each other's preferences and cultures, as the following excerpts suggest:

> Nancy: People did ask me to wear *baju kurung* and eat with hand. That is fine with me. I'm happy to do that.
>
> John: People haven't really asked me, but I volunteer to wear them. I feel fun with that. Someone offered me a *sarong*[11]. After several attempts, I wore it. It's quite fun to wear something different.
>
> Jennifer: The locals here said to me once, "if you wear *baju kurung* you'll look very nice". Somehow I like it because it really covers our bodies so it's safe and decent. Besides, I think it's also an example to the students that we wear something decent. At first it was a bit uncomfortable because I think I couldn't walk fast in it but now very comfortable.
>
> David: I wear *batik* a lot as it is compulsory to wear it once a week. I normally wear my traditional clothes for some events organised by the university.

[8] *Baju kurung* is the traditional Malay clothing worn by the ladies.

[9] *Batik* is a technique of wax resist dyeing applied to whole cloth, or cloth made using this technique. It is worn by men and women. In Malaysia, it is compulsory for all workers at all government agencies/institutions to wear *batik* every Thursday.

[10] *Baju melayu* is the traditional Malay clothing for men.

[11] *Sarong* is a large tube or length of fabric, often wrapped around the waist and worn by men and women. In this context, it is a normal everyday at home clothing for guys in Kelantan.

> Jacob: Nobody has asked me that except for the batik because it is compulsory. But not *baju melayu*, no one has asked me to wear one so far.

The extracts show that the foreign academics enjoyed wearing local clothing and accepted the differences in terms of the clothing/attire. It can be seen that for clothing/attire, foreign academics both converged and diverged their behaviour. The participants mentioned that they were invited by the locals to try the traditional or local clothing/attire. Nancy suggested that she was asked to wear *baju kurung* and she seemed happy to try it. Her response suggests that she has the motivation to wear the *baju kurung*. Her willingness shows the positive tolerance she has in converging her behaviour to wear the *baju kurung*. John voluntarily converged his behaviour to wear *baju melayu* though was not asked to wear it. His behaviour shows his tolerance towards the host culture. The foreign academics had the motivation to converge to the host culture by wearing the traditional clothing. This convergence strategy shows the willingness and motivation of the foreign academics to appear similar and perhaps to gain approval from the people of the host culture.

Jennifer suggested that she was a bit uncomfortable the first time she wore *baju kurung* but after several attempts she began to feel comfortable and admitted that she liked *baju kurung* as it seems to be an appropriate clothing choice to wear to work due to the decent design of the *baju kurung* since the design covers the whole body of the wearers. She further commented that it is an appropriate image for her to portray to her students as a role model. Her convergence implied her intention to portray a good image to the students and the community as well as to appear similar with the host culture.

However, David and Jacob converged when they wore batik as it is compulsory for them to wear it once a week and they diverged as they normally prefer to wear their traditional clothes instead. David and Jacob also converged as to accommodate themselves with the host culture. The findings also show that the foreign academics were interculturally sensitive when they tolerated the differences by wearing the attire required for them on a specific day, yet also maintained their own identity by wearing their traditional clothes on some occasions.

Another aspect of the clothing/attire that is apparent from the findings especially among the female foreign academics is the aspect of decency as defined by the host culture. For example:

> Nancy: Since I started working in Malaysia, I don't wear skirts. I don't want to look a lot different from other people. People here in Kelantan they normally wear long pants

> and long skirts unlike people in Kuala Lumpur. Besides, I don't feel comfortable to look different than the others.
>
> Amanda: I think more carefully what to wear here. I don't wear shorts or anything, or sleeveless or crop tops.

The findings show that the female foreign academics deliberately changed the way they presented themselves when they went to work and also in their everyday lives. They did not wear skirts or shorts or sleeveless or crop tops. It can be inferred from the statements that the foreign academics tolerated the differences because they did not want to appear different from the other people. This is further supported by statements from Noor and Kamal who are administrative staff members in the university:

> Noor: There was once, but it happened when she first arrived here. She wore quite provocative clothes and the head department told her politely of the dress code and such. She was at first a bit angry but after that she began to dress appropriately.
>
> Kamal: When they attend the Malay weddings, they asked what to wear and all, so it shows that they have the effort to understand us and a sign of respect.

Noor and Kamal stated that the foreign academics initially were not aware of the appropriate ways to present themselves in public. Noor explained about a female foreign academic who wore quite provocative clothing to the local community. When she was explaining about the provocative clothing she was signalling that a short skirts and sleeveless blouse were inappropriate. This code of dress is not something common in the government sector especially in Kelantan where the influence of Islam is very strong among the people of the host culture (as described in Chapter 6). However, the foreign academic was then informed of the appropriate dress code and other foreign academics also showed concern and were conscious of what to wear for certain events and occasions. The foreign academics, especially female foreign academics, did not want to wear clothes that would seem inappropriate to the people of the host culture. Clothing might be a bit tricky to the female foreign academics as the way they define decency of clothing might be different from the people of the host culture due to the different cultures and values. Due to that awareness, the foreign academics would seek for clarification of dress code for any event/occasion/ activity and some would wear *baju kurung* for work and formal occasions as it is the traditional and acceptable attire among people of the host culture.

The findings show that the participants were aware of the differences in clothing and they were also aware of the type of traditional clothing worn by the locals. During the interview, the researcher did not lead the participants with the word *baju kurung, baju melayu* and *batik.*

These words came from the participants during the interview. This situation suggests that the participants had knowledge and were aware of the traditional and national clothing of Malaysia and were aware of the type of attire for certain occasions, and this has contributed to their cultural awareness towards the host culture.

The foreign academics converged their non-verbal communication when they chose to wear something that was similar with the locals so that they would not appear different from the people of the host culture. Their convergence strategy aimed to gain approval of the host culture and the feeling of belonging to the host culture. This sense of tolerance by converging their behaviour and respecting the differences shows that the foreign academics were interculturally sensitive towards the host culture. Their cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity were reflected when they were able to converge their communication style by using the local terms and also when they were able to understand the importance of wearing appropriate clothes.

From the findings, the element of respect for cultural difference in intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 2000) was evident when the foreign academics converged their behaviour by being cautious and mindful of the way they presented themselves in the host culture due to respect for the host culture. Other than the distinct types of clothing, another apparent difference is the food.

4.4.2 Local cuisine

Food also played an important role in foreign academics interaction with people of the host culture. Food is considered as representative of one's culture and also an element that binds the relationship between people with food consumption/production being one example of cultural practices (Duruz 2005). The Kelantanese have always been associated with a sweet cuisine and their preferences to consume rice at all three meals—breakfast, lunch and dinner. This situation can be observed in Kelantan by the locals and also by foreign visitors. This practice may appear unusual to non-locals in Kelantan, not only to foreign visitors, but also to other Malaysians, as shown in the following excerpts:

> Paul: Like here, there are foods that I like and I don't like. But it's more to my personal taste and preferences.
>
> William: Due to the different cooking style. Like the fish here it still got the smell especially the anchovies. The desserts here are okay because we like sweets too. It's just that back in my country we use more milk products, like here a lot of rice-based.

> And like here, they use spices in cooking but they also put sugar. Like the dhal here, it's like they don't really know how to do it, it's a bit sweet.
>
> Chris: Sometimes, like the food, it's quite different than my own. But it's not a big deal because I can cook at home. There are always alternatives to that.
>
> Amanda: My hobby is cooking, so I like food. I genuinely like to try new things ... I don't always eat local Kelantanese food, due to health reasons, because of too much sugar in the food so most of the time I eat salads at home ... There are varieties of foods here. If I have to eat rice everyday then it would be quite hard for me, but we can always choose what to eat. It's just that some ingredients are quite hard to be found here, but I can always go to Tesco. They have more options of western products.
>
> Susan: I've never eaten Malay food before. This is the first time. In Kelantan, it's very much rice, like rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner. So for me, it is kind of heavy. And I would say that people here have sweet tooth. They like sweet food. But I always try everything, all kinds of food.

The findings suggest that the foreign academics were aware of the differences in cuisine in Kelantan. In Malaysia many types of food are available, with foods in Kelantan being distinctive and different to that normally experienced by the foreign academics. Even though the majority of them said that the local foods in Kelantan are different from theirs, they were able to find alternatives when they cooked their own meals. They were aware of the differences between the local cuisine and their own.

However, when they mentioned the differences and cooked their own meals as alternatives, this behaviour shows the divergence strategy in which they want to maintain their own preferences. This situation strengthened the participants' tolerance towards the host culture and the people. The findings show that the foreign academics respected the host culture and tolerated the difference by converging and diverging their preferences and this also shows that they were interculturally sensitive towards the host culture. Although the foreign academics were aware and interculturally sensitive, they also chose to retain their own identity and preferences. This aspect of the foreign academics is known as an approximant strategy in which they did not change anything and neither appeared different than the people of the host culture.

The local academics and students from focus group discussion also commented about foreign academics and their response to the local foods.

> Siti: in terms of food, perhaps they would say the only thing about the Kelantanese is the food too sweet ... like in my faculty there's a foreign lecturer who is diabetic. So it's quite difficult for him to get food that he wanted. When he just started working here he tried to find a place to eat and we also helped him. Now it's fine because he has his family with him, so the wife can cook. But before the family came, it's quite difficult

> for him. Also, some foreign academics in my faculty, they cooked once, and invite everyone to come, and if they went home they will bring some local foods, they tried to introduce their countries.
>
> Abu: In terms of food, like we also do have local Indian foods here like what they have in their country. Like, curry, naan and all however especially in Kelantan the foods are a bit sweet here. Like when I talk about food with them, this is the thing that we talk about. Like how the food in their country different than ours here, the taste ... One foreign academic, he cooked and invited us to his house.
>
> Aminah: Sometimes they invite us for dinner or lunch.
>
> Students: I went my lecturer's house the other day and he cooked some rice, mostly almost the same with Malay culture ... like my lecturer, he really doesn't like Kelantanese food because it is sweet and he likes spicy food, so he doesn't like most of the food here ... and one funny part is, they cannot really adapt to our food but we on the other hand would be like, owh what is this, very nice, even though it's something new like something that we have no idea what it is like, sweet and sour milk they dip with bread, then we tried it and we're like, it's nice, we think it's nice for us ... even though it looks a bit weird, we still tried it. I guess we as Malaysians are a bit more open to other culture, we can tolerate other culture more. [Focus Group Discussion 1]

Siti, Abu and Aminah, local academics at the university stated that some foreign academics showed their effort to introduce their local cuisine to the people of the host culture by inviting them to their house. It is evident from the statements that they acknowledged the fact that most local cuisine is sweet in nature. Students believed that they as Malaysians were more open to different types of foods as compared to the foreign academics. Their statement implied that Malaysians are more flexible in terms of cuisine which can be due to the various types of foods available in Malaysia.

The culinary practices in Malaysia are described as being intercultural in which the integration of various spices and ingredients are present in all types of foods like Indian spices in Chinese food and more *halal* versions of Chinese and Indian foods and also Malay spices in Indian foods (Ling et al. 2010). This expansion of the culinary world in Malaysia indicates that the Malaysians are flexible with the variety of foods available in the country. The findings suggest that both parties despite the differences in terms of their local cuisines, both foreign academics and the locals respected one another and managed to find ways to maintain their local cuisines.

In summary, engaging in local cultural events and eating local foods helped the foreign academics to develop their cultural awareness and be interculturally sensitive. The foreign academics obtained extensive intercultural experiences with the host culture as they converged their non-verbal interaction by wearing local clothes/attire, attending local

weddings, joining local activities and festivals, and eating local foods. These findings are similar to a study which aimed to measure intercultural sensitivity of middle and high school students in Korea, in Seoul and Kyungki province (Roh 2012). The study found that multicultural activities and programmes showed a strong effect on the intercultural sensitivity of individuals. People who want to be accepted tend to facilitate and attune their behaviour to the host culture (Richman & Leary 2009). As in the context of this study, the foreign academics demonstrated their effort to accommodate to the people and the host culture by joining cultural festivals and activities organised by the local community also within the university. These activities provided intercultural exposure to the foreign academics.

The findings are also in agreement with a study with international high school students in a large city in the Southeast Asian—however the name of the city and the country was not mentioned in the study (Straffon 2003). The study suggests that intercultural sensitivity needs to be experienced and felt. The longer the students attended the international school, the higher their intercultural sensitivity. The students experience in socialising with other students who were from various cultures, helped them to develop their intercultural sensitivity. The study also found that the more intercultural exposure one has, the more sensitive one will be. The foreign academics willingness to engage with the people of the host culture within the university and outside the university indicated that they had worked on their awareness of the people of the host culture and the culture, thus developing their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the more intercultural experiences one has, the higher the level of intercultural sensitivity can be achieved. This chapter has examined the nature of the interactions that the foreign academics had with the host culture in a range of contexts (i.e. inside and outside of the university) and related to a range of practices (e.g. socialising and engaging in cultural activities as well as clothing practices and eating local food). The more intercultural experiences, the more likely participants were to develop their intercultural sensitivity (a similar finding was present in a study by Yuen and Grossman 2009).

The foreign academics managed to behave accordingly and were able to find their way in the organisation despite some obvious work culture differences for example different perception of time, issues of hierarchy. The foreign academics found that they had to address their

superiors according to their title and also had to handle conflicts in ways in which the locals tended to save face rather than confront conflict. These understandings helped in strengthening their interaction and relationship with the local community not only in the university context but also in the neighbourhood area, thus increasing their intercultural sensitivity. This behaviour also showed their effort in establishing their relationship and intercultural interaction skills with the community in the organisation, indicating a degree of intercultural sensitivity.

The foreign academics' accommodation and intercultural sensitivity were also apparent when they invested in efforts to integrate with the people of the host culture although they commented that they were fully accepted by the locals. It is argued that interaction engagement is not synonymous with being accepted in the host culture; it does indicate intercultural sensitivity.

The foreign academics also showed many efforts to integrate and interact with the people of the host culture by socialising and joining local activities and events. Besides establishing social relationship with the people of the host culture, foreign academics also described their intercultural interaction and engagement at the university. The findings also show that the foreign academics respected and tolerated the cultural differences, indicating their intercultural sensitivity towards the host culture.

In assisting the foreign academics during their engagement activities with the people of the host culture and to further develop their intercultural sensitivity, the foreign academics also had to learn the Malay language and the local Kelantanese dialect. The interview data indicates that issues of language were fundamental to the resettlement experiences of foreign academics. The next chapter analyses the strategies that foreign academics used in adapting to the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect as an accommodation strategy to develop intercultural sensitivity.

Chapter 5: Accommodating to the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect

This chapter argues that the foreign academics accommodate the need to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect due to its extensive use within the university and the neighbouring community. Despite the challenges involved, they make an effort to learn both languages as that way they feel more accepted in the host culture. The communication strategies which they developed and practised enabled them to negotiate the language challenges encountered. Their situation can compare to the ways in which the Chinese minority born and living in Kelantan also speak the Kelantanese dialect fluently as a strategy for them to develop and retain an identity as a local (Sathian & Ngeow 2014). This insight shows that the Kelantanese dialect represents the identity of a Kelantanese person regardless of their ethnicity. By contrast, a lack of proficiency in the language of the host culture can often result in cultural alienation for new immigrants. For participants involved in this study, their level of familiarity with the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect had a significant impact on their experiences of 'fitting in'.

This chapter focuses on the foreign academics' acceptance and effort to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect as a pathway towards feeling a sense of belonging. The chapter also examines the foreign academics' communicative strategies as ways to accommodate with the people of the host culture. It is argued that the foreign academics change themselves (in terms of developing language skills) in order to adapt to their new environment. Similarly those around the foreign academics, who are fluent in Malay and Kelantanese, also change to accommodate the level of language proficiency of the foreign academics.

The local community normally interacts in standard Malay and in the Kelantanese dialect. Malay is the national language of Malaysia and the Kelantanese dialect is used extensively by the local Kelantanese as part of their identity (Don 2003). The Kelantanese dialect has distinct linguistics features as compared to the standard Malay language, and therefore might be a challenge for the foreign academics to learn. However, the medium of interaction between the foreign academics with the students and the community within the university is generally, but not always, English. This unique language environment requires the foreign academics, to not only learn the Malay language, but also the Kelantanese dialect. The language environment in Kelantan does not leave an option for the foreign academics but to

choose to learn Kelantanese, as it is a requirement (although informal) to acquire if the foreign academics are to interact with and accommodate to the people of the host culture. Their level of familiarity with Malay and the Kelantanese dialect had a significant impact on their experiences of 'fitting in' or developing a sense of belonging to the host culture. The foreign academics all demonstrated their developing intercultural sensitivity through their accommodation of the two languages spoken locally. Both languages were frequently mentioned by the foreign academics.

Past studies indicate that individuals' intercultural sensitivity and accommodation processes can be increased if the individuals learn the language of the host culture (Hokanson 2000; Peltokorpi 2010; Peltokorpi & Clausen 2011; Peltokorpi & Vaara 2014; Starks & Willoughby 2015). This argument is also supported by Baker (2011) who states that the language aspect contributes to the success of an intercultural interaction. Language research is inclusive of form, meaning and culture (Wong 2010). In other words, in understanding a language, one has to also understand the different maxims of forms and meaning in the context of that particular culture. The relationship between language and culture cannot be separated (Ahmad 2011). Ahmad believes that the language of the host culture expresses a society and one has to be culturally and linguistically intelligent to perform well in the target host culture.

In the context of this research, the Malay language is used mostly in the university setting for official purposes, whereas the Kelantanese dialect is used every day and during casual interactions among the locals in the neighbourhood, which can also include the university context. In the university context, the use of English is encouraged during lectures and tutorials, although it is not compulsory. However for some foreign academics, English would be the only medium of interaction with the students, staff and other people of the host culture. Only three of the foreign academics interviewed, out of a total of 13, were native English speakers. The rest of the foreign academics were non-native English speakers. The non-native English speaking foreign academics were therefore learning and operating across a complex translingual space with a minimum of four languages spoken in their daily lives (English, Malay, Kelantanese, and their home language).

Studies on intercultural sensitivity embed the aspect of language when discussing and defining intercultural sensitivity. Thus, the foreign academics' willingness to learn and their ability to interact in Malay—as a lingua franca in Malaysia—is a sign of being interculturally sensitive. The foreign academics could choose to 'get by' speaking in English but they did

not. They chose to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. This shows a degree of engagement and willingness to adapt even though it is not required. Learning the language of the host culture will assist the accommodation process and also contribute to one's intercultural sensitivity (Hokanson 2000; Peltokorpi 2010; Starks & Willoughby 2015).

This chapter examines the role of language in the communicative strategies of the foreign academics and how this affects the feeling of acceptance and belonging when interacting with the host culture. Individuals converge their speech patterns to accommodate to the host culture and want to feel a sense of belonging or want to appear similar to the people of the host culture. Individuals diverge when they want to distinguish themselves, portray their own cultures or maintain their own cultures (Chuang 2014; Guadagnolo & Guinn 2014; Beebe & Giles 1984). Since the foreign academics are from various nationalities, the language differences between them and the people of the host culture are diverse. They use various speaking and listening strategies to understand and interact with the people of the host culture and vice versa. The interaction process is not only applicable to the foreign academics but also the recipients of the interaction—the people of the host culture within and outside the university. The people of the host culture also accommodate the foreign academics in learning Malay and the local dialect.

In order to understand the foreign academics' feelings of acceptance and belonging and also the communicative strategies that the foreign academics used when interacting with the Kelantanese, this analysis also will be informed by Communication Accommodation Theory. Individuals converge their behaviour or speech patterns to accommodate to the host culture and feel a sense of belonging or appear similar to the people of the host culture. As a sign of maintaining their individual cultures, they will diverge from the host culture as a sign to differentiate themselves from the host culture (Chuang 2014; Guadagnolo & Guinn 2014; Beebe & Giles 1984). Communicative strategies that are used by the participants in this research are based on Kirkpatrick's communicative strategies which consist of speaker strategies and listener strategies (Kirkpatrick 2007). Since foreign academics come from various nationalities, the language differences between them and the people of the host culture are diverse and communicative strategies provide a means of understanding the ways that the foreign academics navigate interactions with the people of the host culture.

Section 5.1 explores the foreign academics' feelings towards language acquisition as a key component of developing a sense of acceptance and belonging in their new environment. This

process was not a seamless process. Instead, participants described a range of challenges related to language use in both professional and personal contexts. Section 5.2 identifies the communication strategies developed by the foreign academics in seeking to mediate the challenges of learning two languages (e.g. by using strategies including paraphrasing, repetition and avoidance).

5.1 Accepting language challenges

The foreign academics from the Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) in Kelantan experience a unique language environment which requires them to not only learn the Malay language, but also the Kelantanese dialect. The Kelantanese dialect has distinct linguistic features as compared to the standard Malay language, which may be a challenge for the foreign academics to learn. For instance, the pronunciation is different than the standard Malay language—'people' is pronounced as '*oghe*' in the Kelantanese dialect and '*orang*' in the standard Malay language. The language environment in Kelantan does not leave an option for the foreign academics to choose, but rather it demands the acquisition of both Malay and the dialect.

The foreign academics in this study accepted the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect by actively responding to the people of the host culture by learning and acquiring a new language and a new dialect. The foreign academics responses indicate their active engagement with the people of the host culture. This process of foreign academics developing and learning the language contributes to the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity and their evolving sense of belonging.

The following sub-sections discuss the foreign academics accommodation to the extensive use of Malay and the Kelantanese dialect among the people of the host culture and the use of the Malay language in formal transactions, especially at the workplace. This sub-section is followed by examining foreign academics language development and the importance of the Kelantanese dialect for the identity of the people of the host culture. All these points demonstrated the foreign academics accommodation processes and their intercultural sensitivity.

5.1.1 The extensive use of Malay and the Kelantanese dialect

The foreign academics' acknowledged that the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect is widely used among the people of the local community, and so they aimed to learn Malay and

the Kelantanese dialect. Even when the foreign academics used English with the locals, they encountered some problems as English is not actively used among the locals in Kelantan.

Given the extensive use of Malay and the local dialect in the formal interactions and everyday lives in the host culture, all 13 foreign academic participants experienced challenges in terms of language. The extensive use of Malay and the local dialect in the host culture is evident in the following statement from Edward:

> Edward: I think in terms of language, Kelantan is a bit difficult, due to their local dialect and Kelantan does not have much exposure towards the foreigners unlike in Penang, Kuala Lumpur and other big cities. In Penang I can just use English. But here, we are more exposed to the local language and dialect.

Edward, a non-native speaker of English, acknowledged the use of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect as the main medium of interaction in Kelantan, particularly as English is not used extensively in Kelantan as compared to other Malaysian states. He explained his struggle in interacting with the locals in Kelantan. This interview was conducted during his second year of teaching in the university in Kelantan. Prior to this he had also spent a few years in Penang. Due to his experience of staying in Penang, he made comparisons between Penang and Kelantan in terms of the usage of English language and also the influence of the Malay language and dialect among the locals in both states. In relation to his difficulty in interacting in the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect, he mentioned that he spent most of his free time with his family and that he had less time for interaction with the local community within and outside the university. He tried to learn the Malay language and the local dialect with the staff at the university as the following extract suggests:

> Edward: I do spend some time with the locals, especially when I go to the mosque and sometimes with the neighbours. I don't really have time to chill or hangout. However with the staff at the campus, mostly I try to learn Malay language and dialect. But most of my free time I spend with my family.

He did not seek many situations to improve and test his language skills. However, when asked if he wanted to remain in Kelantan, he replied by saying that he would want to, but he acknowledged that it might be a bit difficult and that he had to be competitive to get a place in the university. As stated in Chapter 3, a foreign academic could only stay for a maximum of 10 years in a public university in Malaysia. The foreign academics have to secure their position in the university so that they could renew their contract before they reach the maximum number of years. It is clear that his motive to stay in Kelantan would be because of his career. It is also possible that the uncertainty of his employment future in Kelantan also

means that he may not have felt compelled to invest too much time in learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect as he may move again.

Even foreign academics who could speak some Malay suggested that they also encountered some difficulties when it came to using or understanding the language as stated in the following extracts by John and Jennifer:

> John: The dialect in Kelantan makes it a bit hard. It can be challenging. It's hard to join in. If I use Malay language, I may not be able to express it well so I have to double check to ensure the message is correct. Sometimes there's lack of clarity in terms of the response from them.
>
> Jennifer: My Malay language and English are not good. Sometimes people here laugh at me but there're also people who keep on encouraging me to keep on using the language and I keep on practising. I go to the mall and interact with the locals. Like when I am in the university, with Malays I will use Malay language and with the Chinese or Indians or other foreigners I use English.

Both John and Jennifer, who could speak some Malay, mentioned that the Kelantanese dialect was a bit difficult to them. Their statements indicated that learning the Malay language might not be sufficient for them to blend well with the neighbouring community since the local community mostly used the Kelantanese dialect. As mentioned by John, he would be wary with his Malay language when he interacted with the people of the host culture so that his message could be conveyed clearly; hence he was concerned about the lack of clarity from the responses that he received. He also felt socially isolated because of his lack of proficiency in the Kelantanese dialect. This experience can be explained with Communication Accommodation Theory in which people converge their speech styles for various reasons namely when one wants to stress particular topics or issues, to establish rapport or solidarity with people or certain groups, to talk about a third party, to achieve certain speech acts and also to accommodate to the interlocutor and bridge the gap between the interactants (David & McLellan 2011). This finding indicates the importance of learning not only the Malay language but also the Kelantanese dialect to accommodate well, both in the workplace and the neighbouring community.

Jennifer, a non-native speaker of English, rated her English and Malay language proficiency as intermediate. Despite her lack of proficiency in both languages and people laughing at her, she continued to practise. At the university she used her limited language skills and people were understanding of her linguistic capacity as she mentioned that she received constant encouragement from the locals within and outside the university. The university context is

more academic as compared to the social context outside the university. In the university's academic context, the community priorities are knowledge and learning before socialising. Jennifer experienced different situations with different groups of interlocutors in which both situations and social locations demand Jennifer's ability to accommodate and to be sensitive interculturally, so that she would feel she belonged in the host culture. Besides, people in the university are familiar with interacting with foreign academics, as compared to the local community which may not have had extensive exposure to people of different languages and cultures where the Malay language and Kelantanese are more dominant among the people of the host culture. The incidents where Jennifer was laughed at when she used the Malay language in public might indicate people's amusement at her accent. While support strategies may be adopted in the university setting, these are harder to develop in the community as the university is more academic and adaptation to differences is more common as compared to the local community.

As part of the local community, I could relate to her experience in which there were a few incidents where some people that I know, commented on someone's accent as being funny. Remarks and laughter were not taken as anything negative and did not discourage her as she was constantly encouraged by her friends to continuously use and practise the languages. Jennifer's effort to keep on practising the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect demonstrates her intercultural sensitivity in which she demonstrate the quality of interaction engagement and interaction confidence (see Section 2.4.3). Jennifer was being open-minded despite of the negative remarks she received and she continued to have the confidence to interact with the people of the host culture.

Jennifer's experience indicates the influence and use of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect among the local community to the extent that people who do not speak the dialect are perceived quite differently and humorously. The next sub-section further discusses the use of the Malay language in the host culture especially in formal transactions.

5.1.2 Using Malay in formal transactions

In Malaysia all transactions and forms of communication in the government sectors, including the university, are in Malay. All formal letters, instructions and notices are written and announced in Malay. Therefore, some foreign academics found it beneficial to learn

Malay so that they would not feel disregarded by the community in the university and government people of the neighbouring community.

> Jacob: It's just that here, official letters are in Malay language, so I have to translate them myself I use Google translate, but it's not accurate, so I ask help from the admin staff, but sometimes they don't have time as well. So I spend a lot of time to translate the letters which is very time consuming. Like my dean, he uses English for internal letters, but letters from other departments are in Malay language. So when this happened, I tend to get frustrated.
>
> Nancy: As for me, when the letters, notices and all are in Malay language, I thought it's not very efficient. I had to spend time to translate or ask colleagues to explain. So, I always disturbed colleagues a lot with asking questions. In the beginning, I even could not recognise which email is important and which one is related to me. I threw out some of appointment letters because I did not know that they are important, and later I was asked to submit the copies of the letter that I already thrown, for annual job appraisal. So, like now, I share information with foreign colleagues. If there was something important, we remind each other and I also learn Malay language as well.

While learning the language of any country or local context is a key factor in developing a sense of belonging, there are challenges associated with this. Only some official letters or announcements were made in English. This situation left the foreign academics feeling frustrated and concerned as they would have to translate the letter or emails or ask someone to translate them. In either case, both options are time consuming and tedious for them. It can be inferred that most foreign academics faced the same problem since majority of the foreign academics neither spoke nor wrote in Malay fluently. Although the foreign academics experienced difficulties in understanding the written form of Malay, the responses demonstrate their acceptance of the importance of the Malay language among the university community.

Although the foreign academics used English during lectures and also when interacting with the locals, the foreign academics accepted and acknowledged that the Malay language is the main medium of interaction for formal and informal transactions in Malaysia and Kelantan and also as the language for formal transactions in government agencies in Malaysia. While this was a challenging process for all of them, their acceptance of the situation was necessary to develop a sense of belonging in the host culture and to gain approval and belong in their local contexts. Participants attempted to ‘fit in’ to their local context by learning both Malay and Kelantanese.

When foreign academics received Malay communications, often local university staff helped to translate them into English. However, they understood that they could not keep on asking

for help from these people. Although informal assistance was offered, this assistance was dependent on the goodwill of people. Jacob and Nancy indicated that they understood that everyone had their own work to accomplish and it would be tedious for foreign academics to keep on asking staff to translate for them. The excerpts also suggest that the foreign academics believed that they had to be independent and professional in executing their work. Therefore, this need for foreign academics to translate official documents from Malay into English might indicate that the host culture and the management at the university are not being sensitive enough towards the needs of the foreign academics. The circulations of information to all academics come from various departments depending on the type of information—academic-related matters, student affairs related matter and others. However, departments that are closely in contact with the foreign academics could be more interculturally sensitive when transferring and sharing information that involve foreign academics.

This situation is supported by statements from local staff who explained that both the administrative staff and local academics had given help and assistance to foreign academics in their respective faculties and departments in understanding spoken and written instructions, emails, notices as well as meeting minutes. Noor an administrative staff member and Abu a local academic in the university commented as follows:

> Noor: Of course given the fact that it's a new university everything is dealt with in Malay language like the letters and emails. All the foreign academics have problems to understand but we always help them with that. And some foreign lecturers, they try to learn. We always help them like, to fill in forms and all.
>
> Abu: There was a time where a foreign lecturer sat next to me in a faculty meeting and I had to translate in English to that lecturer about what's happening and all.

The statements from Noor and Abu show that they were aware of the usage of Malay in formal interaction in the university and due to that awareness, they offered help and assistance to the foreign academics. Noor's comment indicates that because the university is relatively new, the form of communication and documentation is yet to be internationalised and prepared in dual languages. Most documents and forms of communication are in Malay, and it is also common for the university community to also speak in the Kelantanese dialect since the majority of the community within the university consists of local Kelantanese. Since the establishment of the university, there has been gradual progress in terms of documentation preparation in English, however, the language issue is not being given

sufficient attention. As a relatively new institution, the university is focusing on developing and improving the university administration and also teaching and learning which might explain the lack of attention to the language issues involving foreign academics.

Although the university might not address the language issues, some of the foreign academics took the initiative to develop their Malay language and Kelantanese dialect skills to assist their accommodation process thus indicating their intercultural sensitivity. The following sub-section discusses the foreign academics' development of their Malay language and Kelantanese dialect.

5.1.3 Foreign academics' language development in the host culture

The majority of foreign academics deliberately learned Malay and the Kelantanese dialect to facilitate their communication and interaction with the people of the host culture. Although foreign academics faced some difficulties understanding Malay and the local dialect, they believed that learning the local language and dialect would bridge the language gap between them and the local community. Hence they would interact better with the local community within and outside the university. Their interaction would be more meaningful and the purpose of interaction could be achieved. The challenges that foreign academics faced in learning both Malay and the local dialect have meant that language development is likely to be an ongoing issue that takes a large amount of effort, personal investment and time.

The following extract from Amanda identifies a benefit of learning Malay and the local dialect.

> Amanda: Yes, I think language and dialect are very big points. I think if I could speak Malay language and the local dialect it would make things easier. Learning the language and the dialect here will help a lot. I'm learning but still I have very limited vocabularies.

Amanda believed that she would benefit a lot from learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect. Her statement indicated that she was in the process of learning the language. It shows her effort to belong to the local community and that she accepted the Malay language and the local dialect. Despite her limited vocabulary she had acquired, she could notice the difference it would make if she could interact well in Malay and the Kelantanese dialect. She could have been imagining a better 'easier' interaction and accommodation with the people of the host culture if she could speak Malay and the local dialect better. When asked about her Malay proficiency, she commented:

> Amanda: I lived in Malaysia for over two years, so in my case it was laziness to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect seriously. The university offered us Malay language classes and I attended for a few weeks though.

Despite being in Malaysia for over two years it was her own 'laziness' that resulted to her low proficiency in Malay. It can be argued that learning the language of the dominant culture increases the likelihood of being accepted and the sense of belonging in the local community thus indicates the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

Another foreign academic, William, also discussed the benefit of learning Malay and the local dialect.

> William: The barrier would be the language. I'm learning the language now because I always thought that I should be familiar and be friends with the people where I live at. My neighbourhood, many locals know me and I know them, but due to language barriers, we couldn't communicate much. I also join an Islamic group, we socialise and we travel form one place to another. So it's a good thing for me.

William said he spent most of his time at home with his family and occasionally went to the nearby mosque and joined a few religious activities at the mosque. William felt that learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect could assist his socialisation and facilitate his interaction with the locals. In this context, it can be inferred that he acknowledged the importance of language to the people of the host culture which resulted in his effort to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect. His statement also indicates his desire to feel a sense of belonging to his local community, which resulted in him converging his interaction by learning Malay and the local dialect. This convergence shows that he was interculturally sensitive. His participation in local Islamic activities shows his efforts to accommodate to the local community. It can also be inferred that his willingness to participate in these activities could be due to his strong beliefs in his religion. He joined the activity despite his little knowledge of the language as he said that he could not communicate much with the locals. William portrays himself as a devout practitioner of his religion and did not see language as an obstacle for him to continuously participate in the activities organised by the local mosques. His action also indicates his effort to acquire Malay and the Kelantanese dialect by communicating with the people of the host culture. Other participants such as the local academics and the students also believed that it would benefit the foreign academics to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect as mentioned in the following extracts.

> Siti: I think some of them are quite good, in a sense that they have the initiatives to learn our language to communicate and maybe they understand our language more than we think they do.

> Aminah: I think if they get involved with the locals and speak the local language, it'll be better.
>
> Student: In terms of language, we also have some kind of what we call as *rojak* language (colloquial mixed language). So if you have mixed well with the locals and understand our Malaysia culture, so maybe they could get closer with the students, with the language that we use. [Focus Group Discussion 2]

These insights show that the local academics and the students acknowledge that it is important for foreign academics to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect. Both groups of participants also mentioned how the people of the host culture normally use a mix of the standard Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. This statement indicates that it is insufficient for foreign academics to only learn the Malay language for them to interact and engage with the people of the host culture. They also acknowledge that learning the local language may help the foreign academics to get local acceptance and feel as though they belong to the society. Siti's commented that maybe the foreign academics understand the Malay language better than she thought indicated that the foreign academics might not interact much in Malay with her or other staff in the university. However, she acknowledged the initiative of the foreign academics to learn Malay. Similarly Aminah believed that it is better for the foreign academics to mingle with the locals and speak the Kelantanese dialect. Responses from Aminah and the student in a focus group indicate that speaking a similar language and the dialect of the locals would help the foreign academics to blend with the local community and facilitate a level of acceptance. To be accepted and to feel a sense of belonging, these local participants believed that the foreign academics should learn the Malay language and also the Kelantanese dialect. Although the majority of the foreign academics learned the Malay language, not all of them could communicate well in the Kelantanese dialect as stated by David.

> David: I can communicate in Malay language and a bit in the Kelantanese dialect ... when I go shopping at the shopping mall, I got to mingle with the locals and I love to interact with them. In fact it's my hobby to interact with the locals and mingle with them.

David communicated in Malay and a small amount in the local dialect. He enjoyed going to the shopping mall to interact with the locals and it had become his hobby to interact with the locals. This explains his ability to communicate and learn Malay as well as the local dialect. His statement suggests that he had the motivation to learn the local language and dialect. This also demonstrates his sense of acceptance of Malay and the Kelantanese dialect and his desire to belong to the host culture. He might also possess a high motivation to be accepted by the local community. Starks and Willoughby (2015) suggest that one's proficiency levels of the

host culture's language should be given some exceptions where English (the language of the host culture of where the research was conducted) is not the mother tongue of the migrants. Therefore, the migrants' language proficiency may improve as they continue to socialise with the people of the host culture. It is interesting to note that, even if one foreign academic is more proficient in Malay or the Kelantanese dialect compared to another, the one who is not as proficient may have a higher motivation to learn. Intercultural sensitivity is not merely on achieving native-like language proficiency, it is about the mindset, the disposition towards openness and willingness to learn and get involved in the host culture which inclusive of learning the language of the host culture.

Another factor motivating the foreign academics to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect is their length of stay in the host country, as the following extract suggests:

> John: I have been in Malaysia for almost 9 to 10 years ... I mainly try to use Malay language with the administrative and support staff ... most people when I start to use Malay, they will switch to Malay themselves.

John who has been in Malaysia for almost 10 years can communicate in Malay better as compared to other foreign academics who have lived in Malaysia for a shorter period of time. His statement also indicated that the people in the university were comfortable to use the Malay language with him as he mentioned that most people would switch to Malay when he used Malay with them. It can be inferred that John's acceptance of Malay indicates his sense of belonging to the host culture as he put an effort to interact in Malay with the people of the host culture. This finding is supported by a study which concluded that the length of the stay influences the development of the cultural understanding, intercultural sensitivity and also intercultural communicative competence of an individual (Engle & Engle 2004). An individual progressed more as a result of their length of stay.

New foreign academics, however, had difficulties in learning the Malay language. Susan, for example, who had only been in Malaysia for three months, described her difficulties:

> Susan: I have only been here, almost 3 months now ... The language aspect is quite difficult. The locals will try to use English with me since I'm a native speaker ... As with the administrative staff; I rarely have anything to deal with them. Even so, normally it'll go through our boss first. Or I will just interact with our tutor or other locals who teach English.

Susan's Malay language proficiency was beginning and she still mostly used English with the locals. Her time duration in learning the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect was short,

explaining her low proficiency level in Malay. This extract implies that length of stay in a new country could influence motivation and willingness to learn the local language and dialect. By contrast, Amanda despite having had a longer time in Malaysia had not mastered Malay. She considered herself ‘lazy’ to learn the language even though she knew learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect would help in accommodating to the host culture. It is apparent that the foreign academics deliberately learned the Malay language and also the Kelantanese dialect to be accepted and to belong in the host culture because they knew that the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect are important among the people of the host culture. These findings are similar to a recent study on acceptance and belonging of migrants in Australia which found that learning the English language and the Australian accent and dialect would help one's adaptation process (Starks & Willoughby 2015).

The foreign academics' length of stay might influence the time they spend socialising with the people of the host culture. Foreign academics might not want to invest their time and emotion by establishing personal relationships or rapport with the people of the host culture if they know that they will not be staying for long in Kelantan. The same may be said of locals as they might not feel the need to invest too much time as they know that the foreign academics will eventually leave Kelantan and new foreigners will come.

Foreign academics’ involvement in social activities and events influence the foreign academics length of stay. Although it is rather obvious, all of the participants also claimed that the longer they stay in foreign countries, the more people will get to know them and vice versa as the following excerpt shows:

> Chris: Yes of course. The longer you stay at one place then you’ll get comfortable and the better it becomes. I believe that long process produces positive results.

Chris claimed that a longer process of living in one place would produce positive results. His response reflects the influence of time and duration in the accommodation process of an individual. In the context of this research, the foreign academics reached the comfort of staying in Kelantan by integrating and accommodating themselves well with the people of the host culture. Their involvement with the people of the host culture within the university and outside of the university would influence their language development and progress.

Another initiative for some foreign academics to learn Malay came from their spouses. Three foreign academic participants—John, Paul and Chris—had spouses from neighbouring

countries and could speak Malay fluently like the native speakers. They portrayed their ability to use Malay more confidently with the assistance of their spouses in comparison to other foreign academics. However the Kelantanese dialect caused them some difficulties. For example, John commented that:

> John: Most of my thoughts about the local culture, language and such, I got from reading books or with my Asian wife, we discuss about cultures and all ... The dialect in Kelantan makes it kind of hard. It can be challenging. It's hard to join in.

Paul further commented:

> Paul: I intentionally use Malay language as much as I can as my wife is Indonesian.

Although Chris did not mention explicitly about his spouse, his wife is Indonesian and he interacts with his spouse mostly in Malay.

> Chris: I can speak a little bit of Malay language, so with the locals I use Malay language. But with the staff, students, I use English. It's just that I don't speak Kelantanese dialect. I can understand some of them but I can't speak the dialect. Sometimes I don't understand the dialect as well.

The extracts show that the foreign academics received constant input of Malay from their spouses. It can be inferred that having spouses who can speak similar language with the host culture would assist the learning of the host culture language and would increase the motivation to learn the language of the host culture. John, whose spouse is a Singaporean, stated that he constantly discussed language and culture with his wife. Although he could speak Malay, due to his lack of proficiency of the Kelantanese dialect, he too found it a bit difficult to blend in with the society. While John and Chris whose wives are Indonesian used mostly the Indonesian Malay language with their respective spouses. Although the language varieties of Indonesian Malay language vary somewhat from Malaysian Malay language, the vocabulary and sentence structure are similar, except for some phonetics and phonological aspects. However, their spouses could not assist them in learning the Kelantanese dialect.

Foreign academics whose spouses can speak Malay had better grasp of the Malay language as compared to other foreign academics. Constant input from their spouses assisted in their mastery of the Malay language. The three foreign academics were at liberty to practise Malay as they did not have the time constraints or limited access to practise the language as they could use Malay with the local community, in the university and also at home with their spouses and children. The finding is similar to that of a study conducted by Peltokorpi (2010) which was carried out in Japan by interviewing 46 Nordic expatriates and 12 Japanese

expatriates in the Osaka and Tokyo regions of Japan. The results show that language and culture are both significant in international management and western expatriates may face some difficulties in mastering the language of the host culture in countries that are linguistically distant. Japan, for example, is different from Nordic languages in terms of handwriting, alphabet and others linguistic elements. The result also shows that expatriates who were educated in Japan and also those who were married to locals were more fluent as compared to other expatriates.

A local academic, Hawa, supported the statement that having an Asian spouse would facilitate Malay language learning as the following extract suggests:

> Hawa: Like one person who is married to a Singaporean … he seems to be picking up the language very well. He's also been picking up the Kelantanese dialect too. When you learn something and you put your heart in it, it will be very easy.

The extracts demonstrate that foreign academics whose wives are Asians and speak a similar language with the people of the host culture converged in learning the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect more easily. This convergence is due to the constant input and assistance from their wives. It can be inferred that foreign academics had accepted the language differences which were due to their sense of belonging to their wives cultures which are similar to the host culture, the length of time that they spent in the host culture and the possibility of staying long-term or not.

The findings resonate with the findings in Chapter 4 in that foreign academics who had spouses from Asian countries and had vast intercultural experiences found resettlement easier as compared to single foreign academics and foreign academics with less intercultural experience. These findings infer that support networks/human capital through family and kinship ties was important to the interculturality experience. Intercultural sensitivity should not be seen as practised by individuals in isolation but as part of family-based funds of knowledge. One spouse may not have language skills but the other might, which assists foreign academics resettlement and access to the local culture perhaps faster than those who do not have access to prior and/or relevant cultural experiences/languages in ways that might be more difficult to solo foreign academics or those with no prior experiences of similar cultures/religions.

Although having a spouse who speaks a similar language helps foreign academics' accommodation to the language, it is also important to note that the host culture in this

research context has its own dialect, the Kelantanese dialect, which caused some challenges to foreign academics. The following sub-section discusses the importance of the Kelantanese dialect to the people of the host culture and its implications for the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

5.1.4 Identifying with local people through the local dialect

The findings show that being able to speak the Malay language does not help to understand the Kelantanese dialect and to feel a sense of belonging to the local culture. Foreign academics, therefore, also have to know the Kelantanese dialect. This dialect is considered central to the identity of the people in Kelantan (Don 2003; Yusuff & Zakaria 2018), unlike the Malay language that is used by all Malaysians. Foreign academics also considered the Kelantanese dialect as being the identity of the people of Kelantan and that they learnt the dialect to belong to the community and the people of the neighbouring community. They knew that speaking Malay only would still make them outsiders to the local community. It does not mean that the community ignores or opposes to their presence and existence in Kelantan, rather the foreign academics could feel a distance between them and the local community. The Kelantanese refer to other Kelantanese as *oghei kito* (our people) and to non-Kelantanese as *oghei luwa* (outsiders), in which it shows their strong sense of identity (Don 2003). It can be inferred that the ability to understand and communicate in the Kelantanese dialect would ease the accommodation process of the foreign academics. Also, the foreign academics' understanding of the importance of the dialect and their effort to learn the dialect portray that they were interculturally sensitive.

The local dialect is important to the identity of the people of the host culture. It is a way for people to show their identity with their sociocultural group (Cleveland et al. 2015). The difficulty that outsiders, in this case the foreign academics, face in interacting and understanding the local dialect has been explained that as people are attached to their own mother tongue, it will take some time for the individuals to adapt to other people's language (Rosnon 2015). Furthermore, the Kelantanese dialect is the basis of their culture and also the identity of their group membership and loyalty and they use the dialect everywhere they go (Don 2003; Bakar & Harun 2015; Yusuff & Zakaria 2018). For example, Paul, who is a non-native speaker of English, was quick to associate the connection of the Kelantanese dialect to the identity of the people of the host culture.

> Paul: I intentionally use Malay language as much as I can as I used to live in Indonesia for quite some time, so I mix them up. But like here, the local dialect is the identity of the people, like people can easily recognise you whether you are a Kelantanese or not. It's their identity.

This statement shows that the dialect and national language are an integral part of the cultural identity of the people of the local host culture. Paul felt significantly different and foreign as he is visibly different—physically and linguistically—to the people of the host culture. His response also indicates that he acknowledged that the Kelantanese dialect created a sense of belonging with the people of the host culture. Similarly, Michael who could speak Indonesian Malay but not in the Kelantanese dialect felt distant from the local community.

> Michael: Interactions with students who are Chinese and Indians who don't speak Malay language well, I'll just use English. But with Malays, it is more comfortable for me because I can just use Malay language, since I speak Indonesian language. It's just that sometimes people don't understand my accent because I speak too fast. They will let me know and I will slow down the pace and talk slowly.

The extracts indicate that despite the foreign academics acquiring knowledge of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect, they experienced some problems due to their accent that makes intelligibility of the language difficult to the host culture. These extracts suggest that the foreign academics and also people of the host culture were negotiating with one another by slowing down the pace and speak more slowly in achieving intercultural understanding for both interlocutors.

The foreign academics considered that it was helpful for them to learn the Malay language and the local dialect. Being unable to communicate and interact with the local community can lead to a gap between the foreign academics and the host culture. Since the interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture is culturally different, each dyad will tend to convey messages in their own cultural perspective so the meaning received by the listeners might not be the same as the intended meaning by the speaker. This miscommunication is because intercultural understanding is based on the cultural views of an interlocutor (Short 2009). Intercultural understanding can be both cognitive which comprises one's knowledge about other people's similarities and differences in cultures and affective which deals with positive attitudes such as having empathy, curiosity and also respect towards other cultures (Hill 2006).

Given the fact that I am a part of the host culture, I could comprehend foreign academics difficulty, that the Kelantanese dialect is different than the Malay language. Although the

Kelantanese dialect uses some similar words to the Malay language, phonetically and phonologically, the Kelantanese dialect is hard to follow. For instance, the use of the double consonant in most of the Kelantanese dialect would leave the non-native speaker of the dialect bewildered and could cause miscommunication. The linguistic varieties of the Kelantanese dialect have distinctive features as compared to the standard Malay language that it can cause significant difficulty and unintelligibility for the non-Kelantanese to understand the dialect (Don 2003). I have experienced a few circumstances where I translated some sentences for foreign academics and sometimes I occasionally taught them basic daily expressions in the Kelantanese dialect. Most of the situations would be in a professional context such as explaining the content of a meeting or sometimes in a restaurant, explaining the local cuisine, which includes the ingredients and the way the food was prepared. Personally, I enjoy explaining and describing the linguistics differences between the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect to the foreign academics as I could help them adapt to the host culture better.

To learn the local languages the foreign academics did not only attend formal classes to learn Malay but also made contact with people of the host culture by joining the activities organised by the local mosques, frequently visiting local shops with the intention to interact with the people of the host culture and learn both the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. Their participation with the local communities and activities demonstrate their motivation and effort to learn the language and the dialect.

The foreign academics in this study demonstrated different ways of engaging in language which were employed inside and outside of the university, between colleagues, friends and family and also through various institutional documentation. The findings indicate the foreign academics willingness to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect despite challenges which shows a sign to be included in the local society. Foreign academics also admitted that they would be able to interact better with the people of the host culture if they learnt the language and the dialect. The knowledge of the language and the ability to interpret the meaning of the language results to solidarity and also inclusion towards the host culture, while ignorance may create a division between the interlocutors (Scott 2011). Understanding and using the local language and dialect brought the foreign academics closer to the circle of the people of the host culture. This finding also concurs with another study by Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) that language proficiency, intercultural sensitivity level and previous

experience abroad at the beginning of a program will influence choices about such things as length and location of the program, housing arrangements, and amount of contact with hosts and target language friends.

In summary, this section has identified the level of acceptance and willingness to engage with the host culture and indicates the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity as they managed their ways around the challenges of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect for them to accommodate with the host culture. The foreign academics' efforts in interacting with the people of the host culture were influenced by a range of factors including: their level of personal engagement with the local culture, and their proficiency level of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. It was found that foreign academics who married an Asian spouse who speak a similar language to the people of the host culture tended to acquire the language of the host culture more easily as compared to other foreign academics due the knowledge of their partners which assisted them. This section indicates that a support system plays important role in foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

The following section examines the specific strategies the foreign academics developed to communicate and manage challenging communication situations.

5.2 Implementing communicative strategies to accommodate people of the host culture

Apart from being accepting of the languages used locally and working to acquire them, the foreign academics also developed and implemented additional ways of communicating with the people of the host culture. Another key theme in the foreign academics accommodating the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect is the foreign academics' communicative strategies. The foreign academics employed a range of communicative strategies—both speaker and listener strategies—when they interacted with the people of the host culture including the community in the university. Some speaker strategies are obvious strategies such as repeat the phrase, paraphrase, avoid local/idiomatic vocabulary and some listener strategies of request repetition and clarification, and let it pass. Other strategies are foreigner talk and also body language or non-verbal language.

The foreign academics used a range of communicative strategies in communicating with people of the host community. Foreign academics enjoyed interacting with the local community and in these situations tried various ways of communicating such as modifying

their English by paraphrasing or speaking more slowly. When they experienced difficulties in communicating clearly, they tried to explain and if that failed then they tended to avoid situations where they found it difficult for them to explain or express themselves. Such situations could eventually lead to frustration and unsuccessful communication.

> John: I would try to adapt my English with them and slower the pace when I talk. I do not use idioms and try to use simple English ... And like the foreign academics who are non-native speaker of English, not all of them are fluent in English. When people don't understand me, I will explain more and sometimes I'll just let it go.
>
> Susan: There are times when people don't understand you. But there are always different ways to explain something. So I just have to try different ways. Some people at the local shops are nervous and shy to interact with me. At first I was a bit paranoid too. So I look in their eyes and smile, some form of encouragement that it's OK to talk to me. So, it requires some sort of techniques.

The extracts suggest the foreign academics used various techniques to communicate. If, however, communication still failed they first persisted but then finally 'let it go'. John, a native speaker of English, indicated that sometimes he experienced difficulties interacting with foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English and are not fluent in the language. He modified his use of English aware that his fellow foreign academics might not understand. Accordingly, he adapted his English, used simpler English and spoke more slowly and paraphrased or 'explained more'. When the listeners did not understand John avoided idiomatic vocabulary that would cause miscommunication and sometimes let the topics pass. His strategies indicated his desire for a smooth and peaceful interaction with the people of the host culture. This approach implied that he was being interculturally sensitive as he was aware of various proficiency levels in English when communicating with other non-native foreign academics and the locals. John's strategies can imply that interaction with the people of the host culture might not include serious issues or topics that would require a higher level of thinking and analysis thus higher level of vocabularies. His conversation with the local community might include basic everyday simple vocabulary.

Susan who is also a native speaker seemed to apply a friendlier technique of approaching a nervous interlocutor by smiling and engaging in eye contact. She portrayed a positive understanding showing that there is no one way of interacting with people of different languages. Although she did not clearly state the techniques that she used when interacting with people of the host culture, she used several techniques or strategies available to get a message across to the interlocutors.

John and Susan's statements demonstrate that as native speakers of English they converged their speech styles. This convergence strategy can be referred to as the foreigner talk. Foreigner talk is the type of communication strategy that native speakers of English use with non-native speakers of English (Long & Porter 1985; Yule 2004). For example, English teachers would slow the pace, simplify their sentence structure and use simple and common vocabulary with second language learners. Similarly, the native speaker foreign academics applied similar technique when interacting with the people of the host culture.

Besides applying a few strategies to assist their use of English language with the locals, their inability to communicate in Malay and the Kelantanese dialect fluently could potentially hinder the foreign academics interaction with the people of the host culture. To resolve this problem some foreign academics resorted to the use of body language, as discussed in the following extracts:

> Jacob: Sometimes at restaurants or shops, they don't understand English so I have to use body language or sign language. I don't know Malay language.
>
> William: Sometimes I use sign language. With the locals, a few can speak English so … that person will be … most of the time the translator. And some people they know the Hindi language, because they watch Hindi movies, so, sometimes I use some Hindi words too. So it's easier. Barrier would be the language. I'm learning the language now.

These statements show that the foreign academics also resorted to non-verbal interaction when they were not able to communicate the intended messages. Jacob did not speak the Malay language neither the Kelantanese dialect so he would resort to non-verbal language when he was in a situation where the locals did not understand English. Despite of his lack of proficiency in the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect, he actively participated in religious activities organised by the local mosques. He would use body language to convey his message if words resulted in confusion and misunderstanding. The local community also showed the ability to speak a little Hindi with William due to the influence of Hindi movies. It can be inferred that the local community's ability to interact a little in Hindi, could indirectly lessen William's language gaps. William was also left with many communication options when interacting with the local community as compared to other foreign academics. They tolerated language differences and tried to deliver their message in a different way for instance using body language, so that the message could be conveyed successfully.

The foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English believed that they did not face any problems in communicating in English with the local academics, administrative staff and

students and believed that they only experienced some difficulties in using English with the locals in the neighbourhood who are not very proficient in English.

> David: The main difficulties when interacting with the locals would be the language. My Malay language and Kelantanese dialect may not be perfect but I can communicate in Malay language and a bit in the local dialect.
>
> William: With the locals, a few can speak English so that person will be most of the time the translator.
>
> Edward: In Kelantan, the interaction it's a bit difficult in term of the dialect ... When I was in Penang I can just use English.

In the above statements, David, William and Edward who are non-native speakers of English believed that they only experienced difficulties in understanding Malay and the Kelantanese dialect. They did not find any problem interacting in English with the community in the university and the people of the host culture.

Some foreign academics also paid attention to their listeners or accommodated their responses. The native speaker foreign academics seemed to accommodate their speech when interacting with non-native interlocutors more effectively than the non-native foreign academics. This accommodation could be due to several factors as articulated by Ellis in discussing how foreigners accommodate their speech.

1) regression—the native speaker adjusts his language level that is appropriate for the listeners by unconsciously retracing his own language level when he was in the process of acquiring the language

2) matching—the native speaker assesses the listener's language system and then imitates the language forms he identifies in it

3) negotiation—the native speaker's clarification and simplification of the language based on the response given by the listener (Ellis 2009, p. 137).

The foreign academics when asked if they look for any confirmation words or gestures from the listeners as to ensure that the listeners understand them, they replied:

> Jacob: Yes—I do look for the response such as the words "yes, sure, OK, uhum and/or simultaneous nodding" to ensure their understanding.
>
> Chris: In order to understand whether the locals understand me I simply look whether they nod or whether their facial expressions indicate that they understood it. If the

> students don't understand me then they look at each other and start to ask questions. On the other side, if they understand me then they nod in a confident way.
>
> Nancy: I confirm whether my students, admin staff, academic staff understood what I said or nod from their gestures like "looking at my eyes and nod a few times", "looking at my eyes and say uhum" or from their confirmation words like "ok sensei, hai [= yes] sensei, wakarimasu [= I understand], OK no problem, alright" etc.

The foreign academics observed confirmation words and gestures, and other participants (local academics, administrative staff and students) mentioned that they asked for clarification when interacting with the foreign academics be it native or non-native speakers of English.

However, the responses gained from the interlocutors— local academics, administrative staff and students in the two focus groups—refute some of these statements made by the foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English. Some local academics (Siti, Abu and Aminah) agreed with the foreign academics who are native speakers of English but disagreed with those who are non-native speakers of English. This tension is highlighted below:

> Siti: Well, our students have been complaining about their accents, the way they speak. The accents, some of our students have difficulties understanding their accents. Then they came and talk to us. Some students are shy to directly let the foreign academics know.
>
> Abu: I think when it comes to communicating with the foreign academics, it depends on their command of English language. Meaning that, whether they have very good clarity or not. Like the way they speak, the way they pronounce things can be difficult to understand especially if they come from India or Bangladesh. Most of the thing is the accent issue. Of course at first there will be a short awkward moment where you stop and just stare at each other, but eventually I'll try to ask them to explain again, or they will give examples, describe things, the items, like describe the colour or even the taste. So I ask for clarification because it'll be awkward if I don't respond to their conversation.
>
> Aminah: I think in terms of the language, the accents, I always ask for clarification after they say something and I always try to understand their way of speaking.

These excerpts indicated that they experienced difficulties in understanding the English of the foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English. They believed that it can be due to the influence of their mother tongue that affects the accent of the foreign academics. As a result, the community in the university applied listener strategies of communicative strategies, such as requesting clarification, listening attentively, requesting information to be repeated and paraphrasing information.

Similarly, the majority of the students in both focus groups stated that they had difficulties in understanding the pronunciation of English by or accents of the non-native speaking foreign

academics. By contrast, they somehow did not have any problem understanding the English of the native speaking foreign academics.

> Students: The accent is the main problem. If they use the accent like the Indian accent, we are not used with the Indian accent right, so we were like, owh my god, what did she say? The whole class like, I don't understand what he said and one of students would ask him to speak slowly then finally we could understand what she was trying to say ... maybe their pronunciation is a bit different because from where they are, for example, maybe from Bangladesh, maybe the pronunciation of English is a bit different compared to how we pronounce it here in Malaysia ... Sometimes the terms in the subject will be different; they way that you pronounce and they pronounce are different. As for foreign lecturers who speak with American or British accent, we could understand them better. [Focus Group Discussion 1]

> Students: Sometimes their pronunciation in certain words is different than the way we pronounce it. So it's very difficult for us to understand what they are trying to say, what they are trying to mean … that's the difficulty that we face here … yes, we do seek for clarification, but it will take like, much longer time for us to understand because they still pronounce it the same way so, we will like, maybe ask them to write down, maybe show us some examples ... I think we have this problem when we are in our first year. Because it's the first time we're exposed to this kind of foreign lecturers like Bangladeshi lecturers where they have this strong accent but after that we feel a lot better when we get other lecturers, when we are exposed to them, automatically we can grasp what they are saying. So it's like adaptation to their accent. So we don't think the accent really difficult but we try to understand what they're trying to say ... Sometimes it helps us to memorise whatever they said because the accent is different it becomes easier for us to remember and we can actually interpret in our papers like, OK this is the way he said it. [Focus Group Discussion 2]

These statements refute the statements by foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English. While foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English mentioned that they did not have any problem communicating in English with the people of the host culture, they were not aware of the influence of their accent when they spoke in English. Their accents were due to the interference of their mother tongue. The non-native foreign academics might not be aware of the interference for the students.

The majority of the students believed it was easier for them to understand the English of the native speaker and that they were accustomed to the American/British accent. This familiarity might be due to exposure of movies and songs. The students' ability to easily understand the English of the native speakers might also be due to the fact that the foreign academics who are native speakers of English were more cautious and careful when interacting with the students as the students might have difficulty in understanding their English, so they adapted the communicative strategies when interacting with the people of the host culture.

Nevertheless, the local academics and administrative staff stated that they experienced some difficulties in understanding the foreign academics who are native speakers of English as the following extracts suggest:

> Ali: Couple of time, we have lecturers from UK, like when I first knew him, I have problems in understanding his accent and the way he thinks, like when I make jokes, it's not funny to them, the context is different. As time goes by, now I'm OK and have no problem. Different accent it was difficult at first, but now, no problem.
>
> Aisyah: Sometimes it's quite hard to understand when they speak and the intended meaning of their speech. It's more to the linguistic aspects. For instance, the intonation that they use. Because different countries sometimes they use different intonation, it's not like Malay language we do have certain intonations to show politeness, but most of my friends from different cultures they don't have that.
>
> Zainab: Sometimes there's a misunderstanding in terms of the phrases or words that they use. Normally I'll refer to other English lecturers or other local lecturers who are more proficient in the language. I'll ask for clarifications.
>
> Kamal: Sometimes, when they have strong accent and I couldn't guess the meaning of the words especially foreign academics who are from the European countries.

The statements by the local academics (Ali and Aisyah) and administrative staff (Zainab and Kamal) demonstrated that the accent and the cultural context contribute to misunderstandings when they communicate with the foreign academics who are native speakers. Some statements by the students seemed to contradict those of the local academics and administrative staff. These contradicting comments can imply that the native English foreign academics were not as linguistically cautious with the local staff as when they interacted with the students.

Foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English believed that they did not have to apply any communicative strategies when interacting with the locals in the university community as their English is comprehensible and that they did not have problems interacting in English with the locals. The interview comments from the students suggest otherwise. The students found it difficult to understand the English of the non-native foreign academics mainly due to their accent. It can be argued that the non-native foreign academics might not realise the interference of their mother tongue on their use of English. This different perception could be interpreted as foreign academics not acknowledging their accents or limited proficiency in English although to a certain extent their use of English has caused comprehension problems for the listeners. Perhaps these foreign academics did not want to discuss the problems locals had in understanding their English due to their foreign accent in the interview as they were academically senior to the interviewer/researcher.

These responses indicate that in the context of interacting with the people of the host culture and the awareness of communicating in English, foreign academics who are native speakers of English were more cautious with their language when interacting in an intercultural situation as compared to foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English.

Overall, the communicative strategies used by the participants are not one sided because both foreign academics and the people of the host culture used communicative strategies when interacting with each other. The foreign academics' communicative strategies can be categorised as speaker strategies and also listener strategies. These strategies were also used by the other participants—local academics, administrative staff and students. All participants played both roles as speakers and also listeners when interacting with one another. When the foreign academics converged their speech styles to the people of the host culture, they were attempting to accommodate to the people of the host culture. This shows that they were interculturally sensitive towards their interlocutors as they could adjust to the needs of the host culture despite their linguistic struggles. In addition to slowing the pace of interaction, the foreign academics also avoided idiomatic and difficult vocabulary, let the conversation pass if they could not understand the interlocutor or vice versa and used body language. Such strategies demonstrate one aspect of the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity towards the host culture. This finding is in agreement with Bennett (2003) that individuals who are more proficient in the target language are more interculturally sensitive and those who are less proficient are less interculturally sensitive. The foreign academics change their communication style so that they could accommodate with the people of the host culture.

Seemingly the non-native foreign academics were oblivious to the matter that their accent which was found to be quite difficult for the students to understand. This matter, however, did not indicate the lack of proficiency in English among the non-native foreign academics as the non-native foreign academics were quite proficient in English as stated in their academic qualifications. However, due to their accent and influence from their mother tongue, their pronunciation and discourse were not successfully understood.

5.3 Conclusion

In sum, it was found that foreign academics were interculturally sensitive as they were able to identify and accept the importance of and benefits of learning the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect to the people of the host culture. Instead of trying to change the medium

of interaction with the people of the host culture to English, they tried to learn the local language so that they would be able to engage with the community and its people. They also commented that learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect would ease their interaction with the local community in their everyday lives. It was found that the foreign academics identified the Kelantanese dialect as the identity of the people of the host culture. The foreign academics were interculturally sensitive when they converged as they initiated ways to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. Their willingness to learn Malay and the Kelantanese dialect also indicated their acceptance of the host culture language and dialect due to their need to belong to the local community.

The findings also show that foreign academics' language learning process can be influenced by two important factors, namely: constant input from spouse who speaks a similar language to the host culture and also foreign academics' length of stay in the host country. Also, in order for the foreign academics to interact better with the people of the host culture, they applied several communicative strategies including request repetition, request clarification, let the topic pass, repeat the phrase, paraphrase, avoidance of local/idiomatic vocabulary, foreigner talk and also body language or non-verbal language to assist explanations.

The foreign academics were sensitive to the cultural and linguistic differences that they experienced. In this intercultural context, foreign academics who are native speakers of English seemed to be easier to understand linguistically by the local community as compared to foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English. The non-native foreign academics believed that they were understood, however, the students refuted this claim. The students were confused by the pronunciation caused by the interference of these academics' mother tongue. The students claimed that they often requested clarification or information to be repeated and paraphrased information from the non-native foreign academics. The non-native foreign academics seemed unaware of their accent contributing these difficulties compared to the native speakers of English. It would be useful for the foreign academics who are non-native speakers of English to apply some communicative strategies for example, foreigner talk, repeat the phrase, paraphrase and request clarification. These communicative strategies had shown success for foreign academics who are native speakers of English in interacting with the people of the host culture.

As shown in Chapter 4, the foreign academics demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity by engaging with the people of the host culture by joining local festivals and activities. This

chapter shows that the foreign academics learnt the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect which assisted their accommodation process. They engaged actively with the local community within and outside the university context and learned the language and dialect. The foreign academics also had to converge their behaviour to the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. The following chapter will discuss the influence of Islam in the everyday life of the host culture and how it affects the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics.

Chapter 6: Adjusting to the dominant influence of Islam

The everyday lives of the people in Kelantan, including the foreign academics, are strongly influenced by the teaching of Islam as the state reflects the Islamic 'face' of the governing political party of Kelantan. Kelantan practises Islamic democracy and has an Islamic government which is led by *Ulama*[12] (Stark 2004). In Malaysia, the culture is heavily influenced by Islam, the official religion of the Malays which is integrated visibly among them (Mastor et al. 2000). Hence, another way in which the foreign academics demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity was through developing their awareness of the influence of Islam in the everyday life of the host culture. The foreign academics became aware of this influence in the lives of the people of the host culture and thus developed their respect and tolerance towards the differences in religion. The ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences and behave effectively and appropriately in an intercultural setting demonstrates an individual's intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 1997). This chapter analyses how this occurred for the foreign academics in terms of religious differences. I show how they modified and adjusted their behaviours which demonstrated respect and tolerance towards Islam and the people of the host culture. The terms ‘respect’ and ‘tolerance’ refer to the foreign academics' ability to be aware and show respect towards the different religious and cultural practices in Kelantan and thus deliberately change their behaviour so that they could live and co-exist with the people of the host culture in a polite manner.

Despite of the dominance of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture, it is important to note that in any given context of intercultural sensitivity, the host culture will be dominant in most aspects as compared to the cultures of the foreigners so as the major religion of the people of the host culture. The findings also indicate that the foreign academics were able to freely practice their religion and beliefs in the host culture. Further discussion in this chapter will demonstrate the foreign academics comfort in practicing their beliefs and religion and that they felt safe to perform such acts. It was also apparent that despite the dominant influence of Islam in Kelantan, the non-Muslim participants did not feel threatened or questioned of their own beliefs and religions. Therefore, the religious dominance did not prevail nor overshadow any less dominant religion or beliefs In the context of this study, the non-Muslim participants neither feel judged nor harmed to practise

12 Ulama is Muslim scholar

their beliefs thus indicating their sense of intercultural sensitivity. This situation showed that the environment or the host culture was not hostile towards the foreigners despite of the dominant influence of Islam in Kelantan.

In Kelantan, despite being an Islamic state, the state government provides sufficient infrastructure and support to other ethnicities and religions to practise their beliefs such as supporting religious activities and celebrations. Other major religions are Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism evident through a variety of places of worship like churches, Buddhist and Hindu temples. These religions are present due to the diversity of ethnicities in Kelantan, namely Malays, Chinese, Indians and also Siamese. The presence of various religious buildings indicates that the state government of Kelantan embraces the differences and uniqueness of religions, which demonstrates a tolerance for religious diversity. Buddhism in particular is practised strongly in Kelantan with three big temples namely Machimmaram temple of the sitting Buddha, Photivihan temple of the sleeping Buddha which are both in Tumpat and also Phothikyan temple of the standing Buddha in Bachok.

Respect for the different religions and beliefs is part of respect for cultural differences identified in Chen and Starosta's (2000) intercultural sensitivity model. Tolerance towards other religions and beliefs can be demonstrated by people deliberately changing the way they behave, present themselves in public and enact their everyday routines. The aspect of religious tolerance in Malaysia has been a subject of constant debate among scholars in Malaysia (Fadzil 2012; Bakar 2011; Nor 2011). Religious tolerance had been explained as either passive or active. Passive tolerance is when an individual accepts the different practices of other religions, while active tolerance is when an individual involves themselves with people of other religions despite their differences (Rahman & Khambali 2013).

Despite physical evidence of various religions being practised in Kelantan and Malaysia, based on past studies, some tensions and challenges (e.g. religious conversion, racial incidents of 13 May 1969 between the Chinese and the Malays after the 1969 election) revolve around the different ethnicities in Malaysia. Among Malaysians, religion is a sensitive topic (Nor 2011). Religion is not usually a topic that is openly discussed among different believers. Despite differences in ideologies and practices, it is important for Malaysians to practise respect and tolerance (Nor 2011). These two elements are practised among Malaysians living in a multicultural country (Shuhaimi 2009). Cultural and religious tensions among the Malaysians date back to decades (Majid 1985; Yousif 2011; Talib & Gill

2012; Mior Jamaluddin 2016; Ghani & Awang 2017). Talib and Gill (2012) discuss religious tolerance in Malaysia by giving examples of events of tolerance and intolerance among people of different religions in Malaysia. Talib and Gill conclude that the situation of religious tolerance in Malaysia is rather uncertain which may be due to social situations and that despite harmonious religious tolerance some tensions exist among people of different religions in Malaysia. One of the tensions that they mentioned was the case of a female Muslim who converted from Islam to Christianity. In her case, she was denied from changing her name to a Christian name and she could not remove the title Islam in her National Registration Identity Card. Although Malaysia practises freedom of religion, for Muslims by the age of 18 converting to other religion is a very sensitive issue. On account of freedom of religion and human rights, few non-governmental organisations supported the abovementioned case. Due to that, the Malay Muslims in Malaysia believed that Islam as the official religion in Malaysia was being threatened in this case.

A more recent study by Ghani and Awang (2017) also acknowledged the cultural and religious tensions in Malaysia. Some tensions include special privilege given to the Malays under the Federal Constitutions of Malaysia, the incidents of 13 May 1969 which called for the declaration of national emergency by the King of Malaysia. Ghani and Awang emphasise the importance of religious tolerance in order to sustain a healthy and good relationship among people of different religious beliefs and ethnicities.

This chapter argues that foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity was apparent when they tolerated religion in their everyday lives and modified their behaviour during their stay in Kelantan. The foreign academics deliberately changed their behaviour as a sign of respect to the people of the host culture. This sign of deliberate convergence due to respect for the dominant religion of the host culture indicates the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity which would assist their accommodation process in the host culture.

The first section of this chapter examines how foreign academics showed their awareness of Islamic influences in the everyday lives of Malay Kelantanese people, which for some, started prior to their arrival in Kelantan. Section 2 analyses how foreign academics demonstrated respect and tolerance for Islam by adjusting and accommodating their behaviour and everyday lifestyle. Four elements were explored in relation to demonstrating respect and tolerance. These are fasting and daily prayers, body contact, alcohol consumption and modification of clothing/attire. Analysis of these four elements will be used to argue that

the foreign academics' convergence or divergence behaviour in accommodating to the host culture demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity.

6.1 Becoming aware of the influence of Islam within the host culture

When the foreign academics were asked about Kelantan and its capital city Kota Bharu, they acknowledged that the daily life of the people in Kelantan is strongly influenced by the teachings of Islam. The foreign academics who had been to other states in Malaysia experienced the differences in the role of Islam in other states compared to Kelantan. The role of Islam is more pronounced in Kelantan than other states mainly because Kelantan is a state in Malaysia that practises the Islamic way of living of their people (Stark 2004). They were aware of the influence of Islam in the daily life of the people of the host culture in Kelantan.

> Susan: Like here in Kelantan, religion plays such a large part in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. Therefore, when you're not a Muslim like I am—I am Christian, it's very difficult to completely understand how much that part will play in your lives. Before I arrived here, I did my own research and found out that Kelantan is a very Islamic area of Malaysia. But until I got here, I didn't really understand because I've never been to an Islamic country before.

Some foreign academics new to Malaysia prepared themselves prior to their arrival by finding out about Kelantan or by comparing to their experiences in another Islamic country. One foreign academic said that:

> Michael: I grew up in a country where there are many Muslims, so not different. But Kelantan is stricter than in my country. The way the community in Kelantan lives is a bit different and stricter in which that different ethnics or people of different religions do not live together. This situation is just like in Aceh.

Susan, a non-Muslim foreign academic, mentioned that she had prepared herself with some information about Malaysia and Kelantan prior to her arrival and found out that Kelantan is an Islamic state. Due to her lack of experience with a Muslim-dominated country or area, she was somewhat surprised by the strong influence of Islam on the people in Kelantan. Her response indicates that it is important for foreign academics to prepare themselves with some information with regards to the host country and its culture prior to their arrival. Although Susan prepared herself, she was still surprised and she required some time to understand the importance of Islam in the host culture as she had never been to an Islam-dominated country. Susan also mentioned the important distinction between knowledge through second-hand information (researching, other people's experiences, government and tourism information) and knowledge through personal experience. Her statement implies that preparedness is

important in gaining more information and awareness about the host culture and also, that adjusting to the differences takes time. Although Islam and Christianity are different, the idea of a believer practicing and implementing the teachings of religion in his/her everyday life may have some similarity regardless of religion. However, she discussed that she could not relate to the impact of religion in one's life due to the fact that she is a Christian but not a practicing one.

Michael, a non-Muslim foreign academic from a neighbouring country, also acknowledged the influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people in Kelantan. He was quick to make a comparison to the state of Aceh in his country. Aceh is an Islamic state in Indonesia which also has implemented strict Islamic Law among its local community since the beginning of 1999 (Feener 2012). He could compare the practice of living with people of a similar religion. It is a taboo for people of different religions to live in the same house, especially for Muslims. However, there are people who live in the same house with people of different religions (provided that they are of similar gender), although it is not a common practice among the Kelantanese. Perhaps Michael had not encountered this situation during his stay in Kelantan which hence resulted to his statement. In comparison to Susan's statement, Michael seemed to be more relaxed in knowing the influence of Islam in everyday life of the local community. Using Aceh as an example, he sounded familiar with an Islamic state and knew of the prominence of the influence of Islam on the local community.

By comparison to the non-Muslim academics, the Muslim foreign academics believed that they shared the same values with the host culture, which made adjustment easier.

> David: In terms of understanding the people of the host culture, I think it is a bit easier for me to understand the locals because of the similar religion, Islam. Because the culture in Kelantan is a Muslim culture.
>
> Edward: I think mostly the culture is similar because I'm a Muslim, so it's similar.

David and Edward acknowledged the influence of Islam on the host culture when they generalised that their culture and the host culture is similar due to the similar religion, Islam. Their statements implied that the influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture is not only apparent to non-Muslim foreign academics but to Muslim foreign academics too. The Muslim foreign academics viewed the culture of the local community as having an Islamic culture, although Islam itself is not a culture but a religion. Although it is common for non-Muslims to have a prevailing notion that Muslims share a similar culture

due to the similar religion, it seems as though even Muslims have such assumptions too. While Muslims do not necessarily share a common national ethnic culture, some cultural practices are similar amongst Muslim people from different nationalities. For instance, in the context of this study, people of different genders—except for parents and siblings—do not normally shake hands with one another (for details see Section 6.2.2). This practice is similarly true in Islam highlighting that Islam is the religion and a Muslim person who practises the Islamic religion can belong to any ethnic group.

These comments are supported by Ali who is a local Malay academic and also from a student in Focus Group Discussion 1:

> Ali: As Malay, I believe that Malay culture is very much shaped by our religion, Islam. So, I would say that my culture is sort of like Islamic Malay culture.
>
> Student: Let say if they are Muslims, then they would understand more of the Malays here, they may not understand more on us, other religions. [Focus Group Discussion 1]

The local academic, Ali, supported Susan's claim about the influence of Islam on the culture and also the people of the host culture. He further commented that Islam does not only influence the Malay culture, but it shapes the Malay culture to the extent that he used the term 'Islamic Malay culture'. Ali considered the Malay culture as being an Islamic Malay culture because of the prominent influence of Islam in shaping an aspect of the culture. David and Edward as foreigners identified the culture of the people in Kelantan as being Islamic. It can be implied that the influence of Islam in the Malay culture is evident even to people who do not share the same culture. This finding concurs with Mastor et al. (2000) who argue that Malay culture is heavily influenced by Islam as it plays an important role in the identity of Malay ethnicity. They further commented that the influence of Islam is evident in every aspect of Malay lives including behaviours and values. Therefore the life of a Malay is not similar to other ethnics in Malaysia, for example, Malays are forbidden to consume alcoholic drinks and have premarital sexual relationships due to the teaching of Islam that forbid such behaviours. Consequently Muslim foreign academics were found to accommodate easier than non-Muslim foreign academics due to having the same religion.

Similarly, a non-Muslim student in a focus group discussion acknowledged the strong influence of Islam on the Malay culture. He also believed that Muslim foreign academics would understand the Malay community better as compared to people of other ethnicities or religions. His statement indicates his understanding that Islam is a religion and not a culture,

as he believed that Muslims would understand other Muslims despite their ethnic culture. His statement is in line with Ali's statement that they acknowledge Islam as a religion that has prominent influence on the everyday life of the local community and Malay culture. Both Ali and the student who had an existing knowledge of Malays and their culture understood that Islam influenced Malay culture. However, David and Edward who are Muslims but from a different culture and different countries did not identify that Islam influences Malay culture and was not a culture on its own. In other words, the influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the host culture is prominent such that people of different cultures but of the same religion believed that they share the same culture as the host culture due to their similar religious practices. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that Muslim foreign academics would adjust easily to Kelantan or the host culture because cultural differences are evident. These differences relate to and are outside of religion and are specific to that context/location, and the differences of the language and dialect spoken in that particular host culture. Those who share a similar religious background may find adjusting to the new cultural context easier but that does not necessarily mean they are automatically more interculturally sensitive than the non-Muslim foreign academics. In many ways, it might mean the Muslim foreign academics actually can make less effort to adjust and learn the ways of the host culture.

Thus, the non-Muslim foreign academics could experience a drastic change in the way they behaved when interacting with the people of the host culture including dress when they were with the people of the host culture in Kelantan. The foreign academics' acknowledgement of the strong connection between Islam and the local culture demonstrates the foreign academics sensitivity towards the cultural differences. Their knowledge of the cultural differences shows their awareness towards the host culture. This awareness of the connection between Islam and the local culture is evident through their practices of respect and tolerance, which will be explained in the next section.

6.2 Respect and tolerance towards religion and beliefs of the people of the host culture

This section discusses the foreign academics active practices to demonstrate intercultural sensitivity and changes in their behaviour in terms of religious practices in the host culture. Their accommodation towards the different religious practices of the people of the host culture included: not eating in public during the fasting month, limiting physical interaction or body contact with the people of the host culture, not consuming alcohol in public,

modifying attire in public, and adjusting to daily prayers and the call for prayer. In contrast, Muslim foreign academics appeared to be more comfortable than the non-Muslin foreign academics in accommodating with the host culture as they share similar religion. The following sub-sections discuss the foreign academics active engagement that demonstrated their respect and tolerance towards the people of the host culture.

The experiences of the Muslim foreign academic in relation to respecting the religion and beliefs of the people of the host culture were quite different from the non-Muslim foreign academics. This is because, although they come from countries that have a different culture from the host culture, the religious practice of Islam is the same. They could relate to the religious practice of the local community as mentioned in the following excerpts.

> David: I'm a Muslim and since Kelantan is an Islamic state therefore the culture here is aligned with the religion, so it's easier for me to understand the locals.
>
> William: I feel that the ladies are safe here, also there are many mosques around. It's a very easy access to Muslims.
>
> Edward: I know that Malaysia is a Muslim-dominated country so it is free to practise my belief and culture, especially in Kelantan because I'm a Muslim. There are also many mosques here.

The excerpts suggest that the similarity in religion and cultures helped the foreign academics to feel at ease in the community as they did not experience uncomfortable scenarios or situations. It could be argued that Muslim foreign academics do not have to be adaptive and be as interculturally sensitive as non-Muslim foreign academics. They were already partly insiders to at least one aspect of Kelantanese culture—the religion—even if not the local/national culture specifically. The same religious beliefs and values helped the Muslim respondents to accommodate themselves to the local community especially in Kelantan and therefore became sensitive towards the host culture. David, William and Edward commented on the large number of mosques present in Kelantan which made their visit to the mosques easier as compared to their country. They also commented that they feel at ease knowing that ladies are safe in Kelantan. This is in relation with the teachings of Islam that encourages the practitioners to be nice towards the elders, women and also children. This comment is similar to the response from Jennifer in which she felt safe to wear her headscarf in Kelantan. This is because in some countries where Islam is not a dominant religion, Muslim women who wear headscarves are prone to be the targets of racial discrimination. David, William, Edward and Jennifer came from countries where Islam is not the dominant religion.

Further remarks from the local staff and a student reinforced that the Muslim foreign academics seemed to fit in easily with the locals, as follows:

> Noor: I found that Muslim foreign academics who are not from a Muslim country, they find living in Malaysia is very convenient because of the similar religion with us.
>
> Siti: I think the Muslim foreign academics are more active religiously, like going to the mosque and all as compared to our local lecturers.
>
> Student: For example, one foreign lecturer who came from Bangladesh and he's a Muslim and he shares the same culture and also beliefs as the Muslim Malaysia, I think he can actually mix himself well in Malaysia. [Focus Group Discussion 2]

The statements from Noor and Siti indicated that foreign academics found that living in Kelantan as Muslims had helped them to practise Islam more actively. Due to the similar religion, they do not have to struggle to understand the different religious practices. Noor, a local academic, believed that the Muslim foreign academics visited the local mosque to observe their daily prayers more frequently as compared to the local staff in the university. Noor's personal observation indicates that the Muslim foreign academics were seen to be appreciative of the religious facilities provided in the university and also Kelantan. This insight concurs with the comments made by David, William and Edward in which they commented that mosques are more accessible in Kelantan as compared to their countries. The student believed that the Muslim foreign academics would blend in with the locals due to the similarity in terms of religion. Thus the Muslim foreign academics knowledge of Islam helped them to better understand the people of the host culture. Their existing religious practices contributed to their development of intercultural sensitivity. It can be argued from the findings, based on Communication Accommodation Theory that the Muslim foreign academics were neither convergent nor divergent with their behaviour. This aspect of the Muslim foreign academics is known as an approximation strategy (Farzadnia & Giles, 2015) in which they did not change anything neither appear different than the people of the host culture.

The non-Muslim foreign academics similarly respected the different religious beliefs between them and the people of the host culture and tolerated the differences. They and the local community respected one another's religions and tolerated the practice of various religions by deliberately changing and modifying their behaviours. The non-Muslim foreign academics also felt that the locals were tolerant and respected all religions. They did not feel isolated or

awkward or even threatened to practise their beliefs and religions in Kelantan as shown in the following extracts:

> Amanda: There's a lot of tolerance in terms of religions and beliefs in Kelantan. Although I'm not a practicing Christian, I believe that it's obviously free for people to practise their beliefs here. The tolerance is good. I think the locals here are very tolerant and people have not been singling me out although I am different than them.
>
> Jacob: I'm a Buddhist and surely nobody disturbs me to do my religious things or activities here. I can go to the temples and practise my beliefs here. No problem at all ... no restrictions, no judgement or negative reactions from the community.
>
> Michael: I'm a non-Muslim and I am free to practise my belief here. So no problem.
>
> John: In terms of practicing my beliefs here, so far okay. There's no tension about that.

These statements implied that they and people from other religions were not restricted from practising their beliefs in Kelantan. The statements also indicated that although Kelantan is an Islamic state, other religions are neither secluded nor oppressed. Amanda, who is not a practicing Christian, noticed the existence of places of worship in Kelantan which indicated the acknowledgement of other religions in Kelantan. They were aware of the practices of other religions and freedom of religions in Kelantan and they believed that they can freely practise their religions in Kelantan.

Another aspect demonstrating respect and sensitivity for Kelantan as an Islamic state is that the foreign academic, Amanda, also showed respect and active tolerance towards the host culture by spending her western time outside of Kelantan. Amanda commented that:

> Amanda: I would say that Kelantan is a bit Islamic and not as 'Westernised' as compared to Kuala Lumpur. But I have no problem with that. Sometimes during the weekend I would go to meet my other western friends in Kuala Lumpur, or sometimes my friends would come over, or sometimes I go to Perhentian Island with other foreign academics.

Amanda described the time she spent with her other western friends as 'Westernised' time. Her statement indicates her effort to find alternatives to maintain her usual social activities. She converged when she resorted to other places to spend some 'Western time' on her own or with her western friends.

Other participants, Zainab, Ali and Siti, an administrative staff member and local academics were aware of the freedom of foreign academics to practise their own religions in Kelantan as the following extracts suggest:

> Zainab: I did ask some of them about their beliefs. As for me, it's something new for me to learn and understand them better.

> Ali: They also explain about their beliefs and all. Like when I go to one foreign academic's house for Christmas, he'll explain about Christianity, but he doesn't talk too often about that as religion is quite a sensitive topic, but for knowledge he does share so that we can understand each other better.
>
> Siti: I think we are more insensitive towards them. Like in our Jeli campus[13], what about the non-Muslim lecturers and students. We don't have church there, and we work on Sundays, so what about their Sunday prayer? Do we give them exceptions to go for their Sunday prayer? Do we cater to that needs then?

Zainab indicated an interest to learn and understand foreign academics' religions and beliefs. She seemed keen to explore other religions and her initiative reinforced the foreign academics' statement that the people of the host culture were respectful towards other religions and beliefs. Ali also explained a situation where he was invited to a non-Muslim foreign academic's home for Christmas. The foreign academics explained to him about Christianity although not in detail. This situation indicated that this foreign academic made an effort to share information about his beliefs and religion so that they could understand each other better. Siti, however, raised her concern regarding the university's hospitality towards the non-Muslims who also need to practise their beliefs in the university. Siti's concern indicates the lack of facilities for worshipping for other religions in the university. Her comment also suggested that the university was yet to be interculturally sensitive towards the religious needs of the foreign academics. Thus in this study, hospitality towards foreign academics was demonstrated at an individual level rather than at an institutional level. Despite the lack of facilities for worshipping in the university, the foreign academics were seen to be respectful and tolerant towards the people of the host culture. They showed active religious tolerance indicated by their association with the people of the host culture despite different religions and beliefs.

The locals similarly respected foreign academics' freedom of religion as they interacted with the foreign academics. This mutual respect and tolerance indicate the sense of freedom of religion in Kelantan. The foreign academics demonstrated their awareness of the influence of Islam in the host culture and further demonstrated active religious tolerance as discussed in the following section.

[13] Jeli campus is a branch campus of Universiti Malaysia Kelantan located in Jeli, Western Kelantan. The campus consists of three faculties namely: 1) Faculty of Agro Based Industry, 2) Faculty of Earth Sciences, and 3) Faculty of Bioengineering and Technology.

6.2.1 Spiritual aspects

In addition to the freedom to practise their beliefs and visit their respective places of worship, another aspect of religious practice that demonstrated foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture is the practice of fasting among the Muslims and the call for prayers and the daily prayers.

This respect of religious practices towards fasting is shown in the following extracts:

> Michael: During the fasting month, as a non-Muslim, I feel free to practise my belief in which, I continue with my everyday life, I don't fast. It does not cause a problem to me or to the locals that I don't fast.
>
> Steven: During the fasting month, I normally don't eat too because I'm quite familiar with this situation. Since most restaurants are closed during the fasting month and if I want to eat I'll just eat but of course not openly, as to respect the people here.

Michael, a non-Muslim foreign academic, indicated that he was aware of the practice of the fasting month but he did not change his behaviour in respect of the local religion. The situation was different for Steven who was aware of the fasting month and as a sign of respect for Muslims during fasting did not eat openly or in public. The foreign academics showed awareness and respect regarding fasting by demonstrating that they knew the time when the Muslims fast by being cautious when eating in the fasting month.

Other participants such as the local academics and administrative staff commented that the foreign academics were being respectful towards the locals' religion and beliefs while also discussing religion as the following extracts suggest:

> Noor: I think the foreign academics do respect us, for example, they don't eat in front of me or in public in the fasting month.

Noor, a Muslim administrative staff member, acknowledged that foreign academics do not eat in front of her or in public during the fasting month. The participants commented that foreign academics occasionally discussed their religion and explained their beliefs to the fellow academics of the host culture.

Another situation that foreign academics found to be strongly associated with the religion is the daily prayers of the Muslims and the sound of the *Adhan*[14]. As Malaysia has had Islam as the official religion since 1957 (Mastor et al. 2012), all mosques have the freedom to direct their speakers facing outside the mosques with the purpose to call the Muslims for prayers.

[14] *Adhan* is the Muslim call for prayer five times a day.

Furthermore, all local television networks will air the *Adhan* five times a day, every day. Hence the sounds of the *Adhan* might cause some discomfort to the non-Muslim foreign academics.

> Susan: Sometimes when we do a programme, we forgot about the prayer time. Like we have to give time for the students to go and pray and all. But even when I forgot, students will remind me. Fortunately, people here are quite understanding in that sense.

Susan further commented that:

> Like during the *Adhan,* at first I felt a bit weird listening to it, because it is five times a day and you can hear it everywhere especially the one for the Morning Prayer. Because for the Morning Prayer, it's so early in the morning, around 5.45 a.m., I would be sleeping at that time, and I would wake up feeling a bit disturbed, but now, I started to get used to it. The sound did not wake me up anymore. Because it's not like that in western countries, it is not broadcasted like that in the western world.

The response suggests that the Susan tolerated the situation of the host culture. Although at first it was a bit disturbing for her, throughout her stay she grew accustomed to the situation and she was able to tolerate the differences. For non-Muslims in Malaysia, the sound of the *Adhan* is something familiar and normal for them unlike in western countries where *Adhan* is not broadcasted openly. As Susan began to understand and know about the religion of the host culture, she started to tolerate the differences.

Responses from local staff members and students further support the comments by the foreign academics.

> Kamal: When we travel out of campus and I ask them to stop for prayer, the foreign academics understand my request and they are okay with it.
>
> Noor: If the foreign academics want to see me and I told them that I want to pray, they will wait and have no problem with it.
>
> Zainab: The foreign academics did ask why we fast and pray and normally I will explain. I believe that we always exchange opinions and views. So we respect each other better.
>
> Student: I think they know about the daily prayer because sometimes when we have lectures during like 4 o'clock like that, we have *Adhan Asar* at that time, when he or she listens and was like owh, now it's time for prayer, automatically she or he will pause the lecture for a while and then wait for the *Adhan* to finish then resume the lecture. [Focus Group Discussion 1]
>
> Student: I notice that some of the non-Muslim lecturers are respectful especially during the *Adhan*, he said that we should stop for a minute to listen to the *Adhan*. [Focus Group Discussion 2]

The statements show two different situations in relation to the daily prayer. The local staff, Kamal, Noor and Zainab, stated that they experienced situations with the foreign academics

in which they had to stop the journey for a while to perform their obligatory daily prayers. Sometimes foreign academics had to wait for the staff to perform their prayers. As for students, both focus groups of students mentioned that they noticed that the non-Muslim foreign academics would pause the lectures until the *Adhan* ends. In both situations, the foreign lecturers showed respect towards the people of the host culture and also they were being tolerant towards the differences.

The act of respect and tolerance of foreign academics indicate their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture. Foreign academics showed their respect towards the major religion of the people of the host culture by restraining themselves from eating in public in the fasting month and adjusted their work schedule so that they would not interfere with the prayer time of the Muslims. The foreign academics demonstrated active religious tolerance so that they could accommodate well to the host culture which would assist their intercultural sensitivity.

Other than respecting the fasting month and the daily prayer routine of the people of the host culture, the foreign academics were also seen to be mindful of their body contact when interacting with the people of the host culture as discussed in the following section.

6.2.2 Body contact

In addition to adjusting and accommodating their everyday routines during the fasting month, another apparent difference influenced by religion was related to body contact or physical interaction. The foreign academics indicated that they needed to think about the way they presented themselves. In the teachings of Islam, body contact is minimal or not allowed especially among men and women who are not blood-related. Some of the foreign academics mentioned the need to have minimal body contact among the people of the host culture. The foreign academics accepted and tolerated the differences by following the behaviour of the host culture.

> Jacob: Like here, there's minimal body contact. Like when people introduce themselves, especially with the ladies, I'm expected not to shake hands and all, but it's understood and no problem at all with me. At first when I did that, I noticed that the ladies didn't respond so I thought that this might be the culture here. Then I observe that people don't do that here, so I don't do it. Then I asked people here as to confirm, then they said that yes we do not do that.
>
> Michael: Like in my country, you can shake hands with anyone, but not here. I am not supposed to shake hands with the ladies. Well, at first I forgot. Then a staff member

> explained and reminded me. So then I no longer shake hand with people of a different gender.
>
> Steven: Few things that I notice here, that's religiously different than when I was in Kuala Lumpur, like shake hands. It's a no-no here, but in Kuala Lumpur they are fine to shake hands. So, normally I'll just observe people around me. If people do it, then I do it. But then, as to be safe, I try to avoid as much as body contact as I can, as I never know to what extent a behaviour can be offensive to some people.
>
> John: Like here in Kelantan one thing about body contact that I noticed is the gender difference like greeting the women and men here, no hand shaking with people of different gender.
>
> Susan: Like here, the body contact is very minimal. Like the hand shaking, I think someone did tell me about it. But then it's the instinct that I tend to do it. But then when I shake their hand, then I'll realise that I shouldn't do it. I always keep on forgetting about it. Also like hugging, in my country, we tend to hug friends and family. But it's strange here because we can't touch or hug people of different gender. It's like, it's normal for us to do that, it's natural back in my country but not here.

Although Jacob, Michael, and Steven are from neighbouring Asian countries, they noticed the different practices in terms of greetings between people of different genders in Kelantan, unlike in their country. It can be inferred that having Asian background or Asian culture does not warrant full comprehension on the life and culture of the people in Kelantan.

For John and Susan, who are both Europeans, some religious restrictions in Islam seemed foreign to them and they required some time to comfortably adapt to the system. They accommodated to the local appropriate religious behaviour by observing the locals closely and asking their colleagues about what was deemed as appropriate behaviour. The foreign academics observed and discussed with their colleagues what behaviours would be appropriate and also prohibited among the people of the host culture. Their observations and discussions helped them in accommodating to the host culture. Their openness and willingness to learn helped to develop their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture.

Some foreign academics indicated they were a bit confused about appropriate behaviours, especially in relation to hand shaking as a greeting between people of different genders. The practice and teachings of Islam also influence the behaviour of the practitioners, for example, the handshake which should only be done with people of the same gender (Mastor et al. 2000). This practice seemed to be more strictly adhered to in Kelantan rather than Kuala Lumpur, as indicated by Steven. This is because Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia

which has multi-ethnic Malaysians and also international residents. The diversity has resulted in a less restricted practice of Islam in Kuala Lumpur.

However, foreign academics who previously had experiences of living in various cultures or whose culture shared similar practices as the host culture were seen to be more aware and tended to understand better this practice. This awareness is evident in the following excerpts:

> Amanda: I think because I used to work in Japan, so I kind of learn to keep my hand as in not to touch people.
>
> Nancy: I don't really have problems with body contacts because in my culture, we do not shake hands when we greet one another.

The excerpts suggest that Amanda, a European who used to work in Japan, felt comfortable and could control herself from making any physical contact when interacting and greeting the people of the host culture. Nancy, who is a Japanese, was comfortable with the practice as her culture does not require hand shaking when greeting people. The statements from both Amanda and Nancy also indicate that due to their prior intercultural experiences, they seemed to adjust and accommodate to the host culture easily. As they both come from different countries and embraced a different religion from the majority of the host culture, they felt comfortable as they had experienced similar practices in other countries. Their past experiences seemed to have eased their social interaction with the people of the host culture. It was also found that foreign academics' past experiences had helped them in understanding the host culture better. This past experience of the foreign academics also indicates the foreign academics have cultivated the habit of a culture similar to the host culture.

The local research participants—like the administrative staff, local academics and students—also commented on the Islamic restrictions of body contact as practised in Kelantan.

> Zainab: Like shake hands with the foreign academics, sometimes it happens spontaneously, I couldn't avoid it. But if possible I will try to avoid that situation. Or perhaps decline politely.
>
> Ali: Like kiss on the cheeks ... Like hugs and shaking hands. I did explain to them the restrictions, but sometimes, I just follow and slipped. But they do understand the restrictions.
>
> Student: As for me, I believe that since they come here to our country so, it is better that they adapt to the culture here because, for example, if the lecturer is from America, US, he cannot be hugging all the students to say hi, right? Because according to the religion here, for example, like Muslims you should not hug people of different religion or gender. [Focus Group Discussion 1]

> Yusof: Like in Kelantan, it is forbidden to shake hands or even to jokingly pat on the shoulders. Those gestures are seen as inappropriate between people of different gender. Somehow, foreign academics would view these as cultural barriers or gaps between them and the locals ... in the advertisements in *Malaysia Truly Asia* there are pictures of people shaking hands, greetings. So they thought, I can shake hand with you. But then when they are here, and they offer to shake hands, our people back off. So they would feel a bit shocked and maybe offended.

Zainab, an administrative staff member, commented that sometimes she had to shake hands with the foreign academics yet there were also times where she managed to politely decline the handshake. Zainab's response demonstrates her understanding of foreign academics' ways of greeting people which is by shaking hands, however, instead of explaining the reasons for the restriction, she preferred to avoid the situations or decline the offer. Meanwhile, Ali had a different approach to this matter. He explained to foreign academics about the restrictions of body contact. Although explanations were provided, both parties—Ali and foreign academics—experienced situations where either one or sometimes both, slipped and shook hands. An incident like this is forgiven in the teaching of Islam because the behaviour is considered as unintentional. The student in Focus Group Discussion 1 also believed that the foreign academics should have the awareness of the limitations around body contact interaction in Kelantan which can be acquired by one's own observations or experiences when interacting with the people of the host culture. Although the student is a non-Muslim, he demonstrated his understanding of the restrictions of body contact for Muslims when he said that it is forbidden to hug people of a different gender.

However, Yusof, an administrative staff member, seemed to be more open to shake hands with people of a different gender. He believed that the restrictions had created a social barrier or social gap between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture within the university and also outside of the university. His statement also demonstrated his uneasiness towards the restrictions as he gave examples of advertisements from tourism organisations in Malaysia or *Visit Malaysia*. In the advertisements, citizens were seen to shake hands with one another as a sign of being friendly. However, as foreign academics came to Kelantan, people declined the handshake which he believed would leave a negative impact on and perceptions of the foreign academics. One advertisement portrays the varieties of ethnicities in Malaysia yet despite of the various ethnicities, Malaysians share one similar culture. The advertisement, however, targeted foreign tourists and not necessarily people who would work for a longer time with the local people. The participants consumed this kind of place-based marketing (brochures, websites) before they relocated to Malaysia and Kelantan, and this

often shaped their understandings of place and appropriate behaviour before their arrival and during the early days of them living there. However, they quickly realised, by living and working in this region for an extended period, that the tourist construction of place did not match the realities of living there.

Although Zainab, Ali and Yusof are practising Muslims, they portrayed a different religious stance in relation to body contact among people of a different gender. Despite these different opinions, they acknowledged that there is minimal body contact in Kelantan. They also acknowledged that foreign academics understood the restrictions and accommodated these restrictions. They tried their best to be more cautious when making any body contact.

The findings showed that foreign academics actively tolerated and were cautious with their body contact when interacting with the people of the host culture. Although the restrictions of body contact among the Muslim people of the host culture, some practicing local Muslims seemed to be more flexible with body contact. These different views of body contact among the locals caused some confusion for foreign academics. However the foreign academics resorted to following the practice of the majority which was to limit body contact when interacting with people of a different gender. This aspect of foreign academics showed their respect towards the differences and active religious tolerance to the people of the host culture which demonstrate their aspect of being sensitive interculturally. The next section discusses another aspect of the everyday life of the host culture, namely alcohol consumption.

6.2.3 Limiting alcohol consumption

Another instance where the participants said that the practice of Islam in Kelantan is seen as stronger compared to other states in Malaysia was in relation to alcohol consumption. They were informed of places they could go for a drink and that they respected and tolerated the local regulations. They knew that Muslims are forbidden to consume alcohol/liquor. In Kelantan, Muslims who are seen consuming or buying alcohol can get arrested by the local authority or/and the Islamic council. A small number of non-Muslims or non-halal restaurants in Kelantan are permitted to sell alcohol on their premises. Restaurant owners need a license from the local council to sell alcohol/liquor. These restaurants are frequently visited by non-Muslim foreign academics in their free time or what Susan and Amanda described as ‘Western time’. This idea is mentioned in the following statement:

> Susan: Kelantan is not a westernised area. Like drinking, there are places where we can go to. There are always ways and means. So it's fine with me ... I've never been to a place or county where alcohol is not part of the social aspect. Therefore I think we have to be discreet about that. I mean we couldn't say, let's go to the pub and all. Also people here are not used to seeing people drinking not in public especially … I respect the culture here like, I still smoke and drink. But I keep discreet and be more sensitive about it.

Susan commented that she had to be careful and cautious especially when consuming alcohol. Perhaps she associated Kelantan as being Islamic as compared to other big cities like Kuala Lumpur in which the practice of Islam is not as strict as in Kelantan. In addition, the community in Kuala Lumpur is more multi-racial compared to the community in Kelantan. This comment suggests that she had to change her behaviour so that she would not behave offensively towards people of the host culture. It can also be inferred that she was being respectful and tolerant towards the people of the host culture. This behaviour also indicates the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity towards the host culture.

The foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity is further supported by the responses from the local research participants as the following extracts suggest:

> Kamal: We did receive a report recently about a foreign lecturer who drank alcohol at the student's hostel. So we then advised him not to do it again.

> Zainab: Previously a foreign academic was a bit culturally shocked to know that he couldn't drink here. But we did inform him the appropriate place for him to go for a drink.

> Hawa: If they were to commit the offence once, I used offence like when they lived in the hostel as they are not supposed to be drinking, so we explained to them that they are not supposed to drink in this premises, so they adhered to the rules and regulations later on and they apologised as they were not aware. Like in the Europe, students can start to drink when they are 18-years-old and above, but it's not similar here, you can't smoke or drink in the hostel or in the campus area. Furthermore when you are lecturers or teachers, you should show good examples to the students.

> Aisyah: I spotted a male foreign academic walking down the street while holding a beer. For me that's insensitive ... I mean you don't walk around with beer in hand, especially in Kelantan.

Three participants, Kamal, Zainab and Hawa, shared their experience of receiving reports about a foreign academic who was drinking alcohol in the student hostel[15]. Kamal and Zainab were the administrative staff members who were in charge of foreign academics at the respective departments, and Hawa was a local academic who was in the same faculty as the foreign academic. The statements show that the foreign academic did not know about the

[15] The reported foreign academics stayed at the college resident's room at the student hostel while searching for their own house.

restriction and was informed later of appropriate places to go for a drink. Aisyah who spotted a foreign academic holding a beer felt that the behaviour was inappropriate and insensitive. These incidents happened during the foreign academic's initial weeks in Kelantan. The statements suggest that the local staff were neither angry nor offended with the incidents but rather politely advised the foreign academic and suggested a more appropriate place to drink.

The local staff views support those by the foreign academics who knew about the sensitivity of the people of the host culture with regards to drinking alcohol and that they should not be seen with alcohol in public. They also knew that they were not forbidden to drink in Kelantan, rather they had to find a more suitable and appropriate place to go for a drink.

In regards to drinking alcohol, again the foreign academics' behaviour converged to the host culture. They made sure that they did not drink or make themselves visible with liquor in their hands when they walked around the city or the neighbourhood. The foreign academics also diverged in their non-verbal interaction when they maintained their drinking culture and their lifestyles by going to restaurants or places that allowed them to do so as well as going to places that are more suitable for them. The foreign academics converged and at the same time diverged their behaviour as to show respect for the host culture and being tolerant.

When the foreign academics converged and diverged, it shows that the foreign academics respected the host culture sensitivity towards alcohol consumption and the regulations and they tolerated the differences by finding alternatives to make themselves and the host culture comfortable. The majority of the participants showed a high level of tolerance with the host culture and the community as they deliberately changed the way they behaved in public. The following section demonstrates the way they presented themselves at their workplace and in the local community, which also suggests that they were interculturally sensitive towards the host culture.

6.2.4 Modifying clothing/attire

Another instance where the participants said that the practice of Islam in Kelantan is seen as stronger compared to other states in Malaysia was in relation to the clothing/attire, especially for women. Muslims should cover parts of the body in front of people of a different gender. This practice is called as *Aurah*[16]. The concept of *Aurah* is different for both genders.

[16] *Aurah* is a term used in Islam that indicates the intimate parts of the body, for both men and women which must be covered with clothing. Exposing the *Aurah* is unlawful in Islam and is regarded as sin.

Restrictions of *Aurah* for male Muslims, however, are not as restrictive for female Muslims. Female Muslims must cover their body except for their face and their palms, lower their gaze, be modest and cover their body in front of people of a different gender (Holy Quran, Ch 4, v. 31). Therefore, due to the Islamic governing system in Kelantan, Muslim women must dress accordingly. In Kelantan Muslim women who work in a government sector must wear a headscarf or hijab and observe the appropriate dress code. Although not restricted for non-Muslims in Kelantan, a common practice among the people in Kelantan is to respect one another and to dress and behave accordingly.

Therefore, non-Muslim foreign academics who are not familiar with the dress code among practicing Muslims would require some time to adapt and understand the reasons for the restrictions. They changed their way of dressing, explained in the following statements:

> Nancy: I don't wear skirts here. I don't want to look a lot different from other people. People here wear long pants and long skirts unlike in Kuala Lumpur, so I don't feel comfortable to look different. So that to blend well with the community.
>
> Amanda: I think more carefully about what to wear here. I don't wear shorts or anything, or sleeveless or those crop tops ... like appropriate dress or behaviour kind of thing.

Nancy and Amanda deliberately changed the way they dressed in public because they wanted to be viewed as similar to the people of the host culture. It was also evident that they felt uncomfortable to appear different than the local community. Nancy made a comparison to the local community in Kuala Lumpur which she implied was more modern and western in terms of clothing.

However, Jennifer, a Muslim foreign academic, mentioned that:

> Jennifer: Muslim ladies here, we can wear the head scarf without being judged or discriminated by other people. It's your freedom to wear it, but in Bangkok if I wear the head scarf it's difficult for me to practise it. It's peaceful here.

Jennifer felt safe to wear her headscarf in Kelantan as compared to when she was in Bangkok. She commented that she did not feel judged or discriminated against when she wore headscarf in Kelantan. In Bangkok, however, Muslims are the minority and therefore, to appear physically different than the majority, would attract people's attention. The response from Jennifer indicated the common practice of wearing clothing among the Muslim women in Kelantan. Jennifer's response is similar with Nancy's in which both did not want to appear different from the people of the host culture. Attention from the locals made them feel uncomfortable.

By contrast, the male foreign academics did not have to change the way they dress as it is similar with other local males. Changes were apparent among female foreign academics in accommodating themselves with the people of the host culture. Their efforts to blend in with the local community indicated their active tolerance. It can also be inferred that they were interculturally sensitive of the way they should present themselves in public.

Aspects of religion are significant in the cultural awareness of foreign academics which enables them to be more interculturally sensitive by converging and diverging their behaviours. Previous studies on intercultural sensitivity have not included religion. Other studies have found that intercultural sensitivity is achieved when one accepts, respects and tolerates cultural diversities (Shi-Yong, 2006), is sensitive and observant in understanding verbal and non-verbal messages from culturally different counterparts (Jia-Fen, 2015), integrates and compromises during interactions as to avoid conflicts or tensions (Yu and Chen, 2008). In this study, the foreign academics also demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity as they adjusted to the dominant influence of Islam in everyday life in the host culture of Kelantan.

6.3 Conclusion

In summary, the role of Islam as a religion is significant for all people living in Kelantan. Islam is a central part of host culture lifestyle. Despite the integral role of Islam, the non-Muslim foreign academics were comfortable to practise their beliefs and cultures. They believed that the locals were tolerant and considerate or understanding when it came to beliefs and religion, and believed that they shared a mutual respect and tolerance towards each other's religion. This mutual respect and tolerance has made it possible for the participants to respect and tolerate the differences in terms of the dominant religion and beliefs with the host culture as they observed how people behaved in the host culture. The actions where they tolerated the differences can be interpreted as an act of respect towards the host culture. They changed their behaviours in their lives, like not eating in public during the fasting month and becoming accustomed with the *Adhan* and prayers, having less body contact with the locals, restraining themselves from drinking alcohol in public, wearing modest clothing (female foreign academics). This tolerance is because of their respect towards the host culture and the locals. However, it does not mean that they abandoned their own religion and beliefs as they were free to practise their own religion and beliefs and go to temples or churches at their own convenient time.

The non-Muslim foreign academics showed awareness through their respect and tolerance of religion in the host culture. In this way they also demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity to the people living in Kelantan. The foreign academics demonstrated tolerance towards the religious beliefs of others through various strategies. For instance, they appear to be convergent when they have to accommodate to the Islamic lifestyle of the host culture and when they want to make communication less difficult with the host culture. They also appear to be divergent when they want to distinguish themselves from the host culture. There is a possibility that these strategies applied by the foreign academics related to their ways of maintaining their own culture and beliefs as well as accommodating to the host culture.

However, due to the similar religion between the Muslim foreign academics with the host culture, the Muslim foreign academics did not have to converge their behaviour as to appear similar and neither diverge, as to distinguish themselves from the host culture. The Muslim foreign academics maintained their beliefs and behaviours, although a few practices in the religion might be slightly different from a section in Islam to another. However, the differences of sections in Islam were not discussed during the interviews as it was not the main focus of the research.

The other local supporting participants were also accommodative of the foreign academics' religious needs and routines; they even suggested alternatives for foreign academics to maintain their routines and lifestyle. Despite the uniqueness of the context of this study—that foreign academics were in a setting where Islam has a very strong influence in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture—the foreign academics managed to maintain their religious practices and routines and received support and help from the people of the host culture. For instance, alternatives were suggested to non-Muslim foreign academics for them to continue their routines and lifestyle.

The support and sensitivity from both foreign academics and the people of the host culture, portray the dynamic intercultural context in Kelantan which also indicates that foreign academics' behaving to show their intercultural sensitivity also contributes to the locals' sensitivity. Although past studies on intercultural sensitivity mention respect for cultural differences which also inclusive of religion (Chen & Starosta 2000; Tamam 2010), this dynamic and unique setting of this research has given a more in-depth understanding of the concept of respect for the importance and influence of the religion of the host culture in developing intercultural sensitivity.

The following Discussion and Conclusion chapter will integrate the findings of all the three elements of intercultural sensitivity presented in the previous three data chapters. These are: 1) intercultural interaction of foreign academics with the people of the host culture, 2) foreign academics accommodating to the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect, and 3) foreign academics adjusting to the dominant influence of Islam in the everyday life.

Chapter 7: Intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics: towards a model of intercultural ecology

This study has investigated foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity in a public university in Malaysia. Past studies in this field have examined the intercultural sensitivity of international students, sojourners and immigrants but not foreign academics (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, past studies on intercultural sensitivity (for example, Straffon 2003; Dong et al. 2008; Park 2013) have not integrated responses from the people of the host culture regarding foreigners' intercultural sensitivity and how they interact with one another. In response to that gap, this study interviewed different groups of people within the host culture who are directly affected and/or influenced by the intercultural sensitivity of the foreign academics.

Data were generated with four sets of stakeholders within the university through interviews with foreign academics (n = 13), local academics (n = 6), administrative staff members (n = 6) and two student focus groups (n = 15). The data was analysed thematically and informed by Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles 1973) to understand the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity. The findings show that the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics is influenced by: the foreign academics intercultural interaction with the people of the host culture within the university and outside the university context (Chapter 4), the foreign academics' engagement with the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect (Chapter 5), and the influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture (Chapter 6).

The analysis in the data chapters (Chapters 4–6) has shown the complexities of understanding and developing intercultural sensitivity, which I argue requires attention to local contexts and which takes account of the perspectives of multiple people within the host culture (foreign academics, university staff, students and local people). Through three different but related lenses (intercultural interaction, language acquisition and religious practices), the results have provided insights into how foreign academics understood the cultures within and outside of the university and how their everyday practices and communication strategies shaped their intercultural sensitivity and ultimately, their experiences of resettlement. It has been argued that intercultural sensitivity requires adaptation and openness from all participants where the host culture needs to accommodate and support the learning of new arrivals to the same extent that the new arrivals need to actively engage and participate in learning about and interacting with the host culture. While some participants could more easily adapt to the new

location because of their prior experiences, kinship ties, religious or cultural backgrounds, an important argument in this study is that this may have made transition easier, but it does not indicate whether an individual is more or less interculturally sensitive. Intercultural sensitivity, I argue, depends on the ongoing openness and active engagement of individuals, regardless of their prior experiences and knowledge. It is future-focused around a commitment/orientation towards lifelong learning and interaction with diverse others. Intercultural sensitivity requires groups and individuals to develop connections between cultures that are based on openness and respect. Rather than one-way transmission or transition, it involves the exchange of knowledge between diverse counterparts, working with diversity as an asset rather than a problem to be managed. Having prior intercultural experience that is similar to the host culture was found to be helpful with the foreign academics' accommodation process and in developing their intercultural sensitivity. Similarly having the same religion with the majority of the people of the host culture also assisted the foreign academics' accommodation process. However, these two indicators could not be interpreted as being more interculturally sensitive than the others.

This chapter discusses and integrates these findings (Section 7.1), before developing the concept of intercultural ecology as a useful model for understanding the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in a multicultural society (Section 7.2). It then discusses the implications of this research for theory, methodology and policy practice as it relates to enhancing opportunities for strengthening intercultural sensitivity amongst foreign academics working in the diverse cultural setting of a Malaysian university (Section 7.3). The final section discusses the limitations of the study and provides some suggestions for future research (Section 7.4).

Through this case study I show how intercultural sensitivity depends on three interconnected factors, which include the level of engagement and respect for: local cultures and practices, language, and religious beliefs and customs. In this chapter, I argue that these elements are central to developing the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity as I draw on these findings to develop a model of intercultural ecology, which proposes a 'whole of environment' approach to understanding the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics. I argue that there is a need to pay attention to: the complex layers of informal and formal interactions between foreign academics and the host culture within and outside of the university; the need to adjust to language and religious practices and expectations; and the

need to take into consideration how individual dispositions/orientations of foreign academics and their prior knowledge influences their levels of intercultural sensitivity. The model provides a practical and useful understanding of individuals' intercultural sensitivity in a multicultural setting. Intercultural sensitivity is not a one-way relationship between foreign academics and the host culture but involves complex interactions in multiple settings. Rather than being a linear or uncomplicated transition to resettlement, foreign academics intercultural sensitivity was an ongoing process and commitment to openness and learning, which involved challenges and successes over time.

7.1 Discussion of research findings

The foreign academics demonstrated their intercultural sensitivity in accommodating themselves with the people of the host culture. This accommodation process involved the foreign academics intercultural interaction with the people of the host culture both within the university context and in the neighbourhood. The foreign academics invested time learning the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect and adjusted to the strong influence of Islam in the everyday life of the people of the host culture in order to develop a sense of belonging in the host culture. The following subsections discuss the intercultural interaction and engagement between foreign academics and the people of the host culture, arguing that cultural context and adjustment, language and religion all shape the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in Kelantan.

7.1.1 Intercultural interaction between foreign academics and people of the host culture

The foreign academics displayed their intercultural sensitivity during their interactions with the people of the host culture, both within the university context and outside the university. Foreign academics explained their efforts to adjust to the people of the host culture, integrate with them and engage with them by joining activities organised by the university and also by the local community. Their involvement in the local activities and celebrations assisted their understanding of the people of the host culture, which influenced their intercultural sensitivity. Foreign academics made efforts to understand the power dynamic and social structure of the host culture, for instance, the way they should address people with a specific honorary title like *Datuk.*

Foreign academics had to accommodate first to Kelantan and then to the different organisational culture within the university. They commented on several aspects such as the practice of avoiding conflicts for the act of saving face. This act of indirectness in the local community is seen as something common amongst the locals because the local community puts high importance on the act of saving face. However, for some foreign academics, this act is seen as being ineffective in resolving conflicts. The foreign academics explained that conflicts are often left unresolved. Although their comments implied frustration, they acknowledged the culture that is being practised and they also tried to be non-confrontational with their workmates. The foreign academics' ability to acknowledge the different intercultural interactions at the university and adapt their actions indicated their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture. They behaved in such a way to avoid conflicts with their culturally different counterparts at the university so that they could work together harmoniously. This behaviour indicated their convergence strategies in which they accommodate their behaviour in order to be part of the organisation and avoid conflicts and an unpleasant working environment.

When engaging with the people of the host culture in local events or activities, the foreign academics accommodated to the host culture by eating local cuisine. In the findings, some foreign academics articulated the different preferences in terms of food between them and the people of the host culture. Although they have different food preferences, the foreign academics accommodate the differences by adapting to the convergence strategy in which they cooked their own food and some foreign academics invited their local colleagues and neighbours for lunch or dinner at their residences so that they could introduce their own local cuisine.

The ways foreign academics interact with others in an intercultural setting highlighted the efforts they made in accommodating better with the people of the host culture which portrayed their intercultural sensitivity towards the people of the host culture. The more intercultural experiences they have, the higher the level of intercultural sensitivity. This is also similar to a study by Yeun and Grossman's (2009) findings about intercultural sensitivity which showed that individuals' intercultural sensitivity can be developed when one experienced interculturality. The foreign academics gained more intercultural experiences when they involved themselves in cultural festivals and activities throughout their accommodation process, which is viewed as unending. The efforts they invested resulted in

them becoming interculturally sensitive. Their understanding of the cultural differences especially at the university—where they spent most of their time—reflected their intercultural experiences. The daily interaction with people of the host culture within and outside of the university context helped their accommodation process and thus increased their level of intercultural sensitivity. In the findings some foreign academics mentioned that they spent most of their free time with their family and single foreign academics would spend their free time with other foreign academics or they would go outside Kelantan for some 'Western time'. The majority of the foreign academics joined cultural festivals and activities organised by the university and by their neighbourhood community which reflected their social interaction with the people of the host culture.

The other study participants—local academics, administrative staff members and students—reflected similar perspectives to the foreign academics. The local participants in this research believed that the foreign academics faced some difficulties in accommodating to the local culture. Despite the difficulties, the foreign academics managed to accommodate and some even promoted their own local cuisines and traditional attire to the people of the host culture. According to Communication Accommodation Theory, individuals accommodate to their respective interlocutors in three ways by: 1) converging their speech and behaviour as to show a sense of belonging and to appear similar to the people of the host culture, 2) diverging their behaviour to distinguish themselves from the people of the host culture, and 3) approximating their behaviour—when individuals make their behaviour similar or different than the people of the host culture for the purpose of maintaining their own cultural values (Beebe & Giles 1984; Farzadnia & Giles 2015; Gallois & Giles 2015). The foreign academics appeared to use all three approaches to accommodate to their new culture.

In engaging with the people of the host culture, the foreign academics mostly converged their interaction to the people of the host culture in order for them to fit into the community within the university and outside the university. They sometimes diverged from the host culture when they wanted to distinguish and portray their culture, for instance when they introduced their local cuisines or wore their traditional attires to some events. The foreign academics efforts to join the people of the host culture and to exchange information and knowledge of their own cultures signified the active intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture.

Foreign academics engagement with the people of the host culture indicates their willingness to accommodate better in the host culture. It was also found that foreign academics prior intercultural experiences in other countries assisted their accommodation process and better understanding of the people of the host culture, compared to those with less intercultural experience. Other than prior intercultural experience, having Asian family members also helped in foreign academics' accommodation process and intercultural sensitivity. Although these factors helped foreign academics' in accommodating to the host culture, it did not imply that they were more interculturally sensitive than foreign academics without the abovementioned factors. However, such factors could make individuals' accommodation process easier than other people. While some people may adapt more easily than others, I suggest that intercultural sensitivity is less about the outcome (how well they have adapted) and more about the process (the continual openness to learning and interaction with culturally diverse others). A person can develop the latter disposition regardless of whether they have prior international experiences.

Their active intercultural interactions had affected their language ability as the people of the host culture interact in their own local dialect—the Kelantanese dialect alongside the formal language in Malaysia—the Malay language. The following section discusses the findings on the influence of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect to the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

7.1.2 Learning the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect

To accommodate to the host culture, foreign academics invested their time and effort to learn the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect. They could have chosen to ignore the Malay language and use English as their only medium of communication during formal academic activities in the university and during government transactions outside the university and still manage to make their way in the host culture. Instead, they decided to learn the Malay language with the intention to communicate more effectively while working in the university. Similarly, they could have ignored learning the local dialect and also only used English to communicate with the people of the host culture outside the university context, as the people of the host culture do understand English although some are not fluent in the language. They also learned a basic level of the Kelantanese dialect to become more at ease in their interaction with the people of the host culture in the community. This intention indicates the

participants' acceptance of the Malay language and local dialect and their desire to develop a sense of belonging in the host culture, through the ongoing acquisition of language skills.

However, in the process of accepting the wide use and the importance of the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect, the foreign academics experienced a range of challenges in their daily interactions and in formal transactions at the university. Learning the Kelantanese dialect was like learning a different language as the dialect has different linguistic elements as compared to the Malay language. Thus learning the Kelantanese dialect was another challenge experienced by the foreign academics. They acknowledged the Kelantanese dialect as the identity of the people of the host culture. They realised that to accommodate well and to feel a sense of belonging in the host culture, they had to embrace and accept the importance of both the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect to the people of the host culture and understand the use of both languages in different settings (for example, the foreign academics would use the Malay language with people within the university especially for formal requests or transactions and would use the Kelantanese dialect when they interact with the locals outside of the university).

In the process of learning and accommodating their speech to the people of the host culture, the foreign academics sought to mediate their challenges by adapting communicative strategies like request repetition, request clarification, let it pass, repeat the phrase, paraphrase, avoid local/idiomatic vocabulary, body language and also foreigner talk. One of the foreign academics would speak in English in a slower pace and if the listeners did not understand, he would repeat the phrase and if the listeners still did not understand, then he would let it pass. Past studies of intercultural sensitivity, due to its quantitative nature, provide less opportunity for in-depth exploration of the 'how' aspects of intercultural sensitivity. The communicative strategies that were evident from the findings led to a better understanding of the 'how' aspect of language aspects of foreign academics in accommodating to the host culture and developing their intercultural sensitivity. It was also apparent of the convergence strategy when the foreign academics adjusted their speech pace to suit the locals.

The effort put forth by the foreigners in learning the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect are further supported with past studies in which learning the language of the host culture is helpful towards increasing one's intercultural sensitivity (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992; Hokanson 2000; Peltokorpi 2010; Starks & Willoughby 2015). It is fair to acknowledge

foreign academics' frustrations during the process of acquiring the language and dialect as they have significant different linguistic aspects. This aspect of foreign academics needing to learn the Malay language and also the Kelantanese dialect provides a multilingual situation. This situation is complicated further as some of the foreign academics were non-native speakers of English and had their own mother tongue. For example, the Hungarian foreign academic spoke Hungarian language as his first language and was also fluent in German, as his place of origin is quite close to Germany. He also speaks fluent English and is fluent in Malay Indonesian as he is married to an Indonesian. When in Kelantan, he adapted to Malay Malaysian which is quite different than Malay Indonesian in terms of the vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Aside from that, he had to also learn the Kelantanese dialect to facilitate his daily interaction with the people of the host culture. This is just one example of the complex range of languages that foreigners may be trying to navigate every day.

Scholars indicate that language affects individual's intercultural sensitivity (Bhawuk & Brislin 1992; Kulyuk 2011) and the implications of the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect to the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity found in this study aligned with the outcomes of other studies in the field, in which that foreigners who had better command of the local language would be able to accommodate better and were identified as being more interculturally sensitive. However, as for the context of this study the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect had to be learnt side-by-side simultaneously as both are used in their daily interaction with the people of the host culture within and outside the university. For formal interaction and purposes, the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect is used in daily interactions. Although past studies mentioned the advantage of learning the language of the host culture to individual's intercultural sensitivity (Hokanson 2000; Peltokorpi 2010; Starks & Willoughby 2015), quantitative studies cannot clearly indicate the influence of an individuals' length of stay on their effort in learning the language of the host culture. For instance, a few of the foreign academics mentioned that they had the intention to stay for a long time in Malaysia and due to that, they actively participated in local activities and practised the Malay language and Kelantanese dialect (for example, when they went for grocery shopping, when they went to the mosque, and when they joined local festivals/activities). Nevertheless, as some of the foreign academics did not plan to stay long in Kelantan, they only learnt some basic expressions instead of investing more time and effort to seriously learn the Malay language and the Kelantanese dialect.

Apart from the language and dialect in assisting with their accommodation process and developing their intercultural sensitivity, the foreign academics developed awareness and respect towards the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture and deliberately changed their behaviour to respect the differences between their beliefs and the host cultures. The following section discusses the influence of Islam on the foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

7.1.3 Adjusting to the dominance of Islam

Distinctive in this study is the strong influence of Islam in the everyday life of the people of the host culture, both internally within the university and externally in the local community. The foreign academics showed an awareness of and accommodated to the influence of Islam in everyday life and also in the culture of the people of the host culture. This behaviour was apparent when foreign academics explained some of the influences of Islam on the people of the host culture, for example, the practice of handshaking between males and females and also the dress code. The foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity was also more apparent when they showed respect for the practice of Islam and tolerated the different religions and beliefs of the people of the host culture by deliberately changing their behaviour so that they would not offend the people around them, for instance, by not eating openly during the fasting month, limiting their body contact when interacting with the local people of different genders and not drinking alcohol openly. Such convergence demonstrated that they were interculturally sensitive towards the people of the host culture due to feeling the need to fit into the society (Farzadnia & Giles 2015). This change can be explained by Communication Accommodation Theory as people converging their behaviour and speech as to feel a sense of connection and belonging to the host culture.

Respect for cultural differences is one of the elements of intercultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 2000). Similarly, as found in this study, due to the strong influence of Islam in the life of the people of the host culture, Malay culture is perceived as the Islamic culture. This perception is evident in the findings as the Muslim foreign academics believed that they had similar cultural values due to the similar religion. Non-Muslim foreign academics behaved and presented themselves in public in Kelantan differently from if they were in Kuala Lumpur or any big cities in Malaysia. The other participants in this study—the local academics, administrative staff members and students—also acknowledged the strong influence of Islam in the everyday lives of the people of the host culture. They also noticed

that Malay culture is influenced by the religion Islam. One of the students mentioned that he believed that Muslim foreign academics would have lesser or maybe no problem in accommodating themselves with the people of the host culture because they share a similar religion. Due to the fact that Kelantan is an Islamic state, the context or the setting of this thesis has contributed significantly to the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in the university because it allows for a more specific understanding of the influence of host culture religion to individuals' intercultural sensitivity.

The element of respect and tolerance in this study is mutual between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture. Interestingly, the people of the host culture commented on their own hospitality towards the foreign academics in ensuring the foreign academics' comfort in practising their beliefs in Kelantan. This dynamic and mutual support and sensitivity between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture has influenced the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and also the people of the host culture. This dynamic setting has contributed in giving an in-depth understanding of the element of respect for cultural differences and in particular, on the importance of the religion of the host culture to an individual's intercultural sensitivity.

In summary, the discussion of the research findings has argued that in the multicultural society of Kelantan, the foreign academics developed their intercultural sensitivity through accommodating differences by using the three strategies namely convergence, divergence and approximant in three different circumstances which are, 1) when interacting in an intercultural setting of the host culture, 2) learning Malay and the Kelantanese dialect, and 3) adjusting to the dominance of Islam. This process of accommodation occurs when the foreign academics converged, diverged and/or were being approximant in their speech and behaviour in the dynamic interaction between the foreign academics and the people of the host culture—within the university community and in the neighbouring community.

In addition, the findings of this study from all three themes show that intercultural sensitivity is not just how easily they adapted to cultural, linguistic and religious contexts, but also individuals' disposition towards ongoing learning despite frustrations and setbacks. The findings indicate accommodation is easier for foreign academics with these characteristics:

1) Foreign academics who had vast intercultural experiences tended to accommodate faster than those with little intercultural experience.

2) Prior experiences and knowledge of the foreign academics affects their overall disposition towards new cultures and also the ease with which they are able to adjust. However, some participants with no prior knowledge of Malaysia or living overseas were still highly open to learning about Kelantan and adjusting to this new context, for example, foreign academics were willing to invest time and effort to try local cuisines, join cultural festivals and celebrations and initiated conversation with people in the local community.

3) Foreign academics with spouses who have an Asian background and/or speak/understand the Malay language seemed to have better understanding of the host culture due to some cultural similarities and have better language proficiency.

4) Muslim foreign academics found accommodating to the people of the host culture much easier due to their similar religion.

All of these indicators do not necessarily mean that these foreign academics were more interculturally sensitive than foreign academics who were single with no Asian background and were non-Muslims. In some ways, the characteristics of the foreign academics who could accommodate more easily means they can make less effort to adjust and learn the ways of the host culture. Foreign academics who were single and had less intercultural experience but actively sought opportunities to practise their language skills with locals, attend religious events, adapt their behaviour/dress could be considered to be more sensitive interculturally because they had to make an active choice to engage, despite the challenges. Intercultural sensitivity is a complex process that is insufficient to be understood only from one perspective nor comprehended by a quantitative scale. An individuals' intercultural sensitivity is influenced by the individuals' intercultural experiences and their background, involvement of people around the individuals and the environment of the host culture.

The foreign academics' accommodation process involves the complexity of developing their intercultural sensitivity through interaction and intercultural activities between people within the community. This concept of the complexity of interactions has parallels to the scientific/environmental concept of 'ecology', as explained in the next section which introduces a framework for 'intercultural ecology'.

7.2 Towards a framework of Intercultural Ecology

This section develops a framework for 'intercultural ecology' which represents the range of intercultural interactions supporting the development of intercultural sensitivity. This proposed framework aims to present an understanding of the intercultural sensitivity of the foreign academics in a public university in Kelantan that may be applicable to other intercultural settings.

The scientific concept of ecology describes the interaction between living things and their surrounding environment, how every living thing influences other living things that share the same area and also the function and structure of ecosystems (Moran 2006; Sharma 2009). The concept of ecology has also been applied in other fields, such as communication studies which discuss the notions of cultural ecology and language ecology. Cultural ecology refers to the role of culture in the dynamic part of ecosystems (Frake 1962). It is described as the influence of culture in one's adaptation to the environment. In other words, it refers to how culture and human behaviour function and interact in an environmental context (Sutton & Anderson 2010). Human ecology, by distinction, is the study of the functions of ecosystems, the relationships and interactions between different kinds of inhabitants with each other, their cultures, biological aspects and also their physical environments (Sutton & Anderson 2010). It is described as the influence of culture in one's adaptation to the environment. In other words, it refers to how culture and human behaviour function and interact in an environmental context (Sutton & Anderson 2010). In relation to this study, the environment and culture of Kelantan and the foreign academics' cultures influence the behaviour of foreign academics and the Kelantanese in accommodating and adapting to one another. Similarly these aspects influence the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and the people of the host culture.

An early description of language ecology dated back to 1972 as explained by Haugen (2001). Language ecology refers to the study of the interaction between a language and its environment. This early description of language ecology describes how the environment, society and the people of the society play an important role in sustaining the development of a language. Language ecology has been studied extensively in relation to the development of a language, namely how the language is developed over time and how language affects the environment, death of a language—language that faces endangerment or extinction or when its last speaker died which may result in language death (Černý 2010; Kornai 2013), as well

as language policy and planning which research about the planning on the development of a language and the policy regarding a language in a country (for example, Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1996; Blackledge 2008; Kaplan & Baldauf 2008; Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 2008, 2011; Kubota & Mckay 2009; Wyman 2009; Whitman 2011). For instance, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) initially suggested an ecology-of-language paradigm that aims to develop languages other than the mainstream English language, encourage multilingualism and learning of foreign languages. The paradigm was extended by Blackledge (2008) who explained that the paradigm aims to reflect the complex relationship of language with the speakers of the language and the impact of language on the social structure of the society of the spoken language. It includes speakers' values, beliefs, practices and discourses. These studies indicate that due to the intercultural settings of many countries and the existence of global organisations (for example, the United Nations, European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization) that involve world leaders and representatives who speak different languages, the ecology of the foreign languages have then developed and they are gradually being perceived as being as equally important as the mainstream language of English.

In the context of intercultural communication, one study has adapted an ecological approach to understand intercultural interaction (Uryu et al. 2014). This approach seeks to better understand the function of language in the context of human existence. This approach is about how cultural understanding can be fostered by having more information about and a greater tolerance towards the cultural 'Other'. This approach emphasises empathy for diverse perspectives and experiences. Uryu suggests the need to go further with conceptualising intercultural communication as it is harder to distinguish between cultures now due to globalisation, the internet, and, time–space compression associated with the modern world. What is one's own and what is another's culture has become really intertwined, making it complex. In the context of this study, one's own intercultural sensitivity is interconnected with the host culture and the people around them.

Intercultural communication is necessary when large cultural differences create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently and appropriately in relation to the values/practices of a society. Nevertheless, there is not necessarily only one way to be competent in intercultural interactions (Lustig & Koester 2010, p. 66). The goal of the interaction is to understand the many ways that a person can behave in an interculturally

competent manner. Lustig and Koester (2010) also believe that intercultural communication is contextual in that it produces behaviours that are both appropriate and effective in a specific setting and it requires sufficient knowledge, suitable motivations and skilled actions (p. 66-67). Similarly, the previous experiences and backgrounds of every individual within an intercultural context are different. Therefore, an individual's behaviour and interaction in accommodating to the different intercultural settings will be different too. Hence, this level of complexity requires a model that could encapsulate the uniqueness and variety of an intercultural setting or context. Every setting has different dynamics and so policy makers in respective host cultures need a model that is flexible enough to be responsive to their context. The proposed intercultural ecology model could respond appropriately to different intercultural settings in understanding intercultural sensitivity of respective participants.

This study examined the intercultural setting of a Malaysian university with an ecology that involves all individuals in the university in which the foreign academics are working and also people in the neighbouring community, highlighting the complexity of the interactions that foreign academics negotiate on a daily basis and the need for foreign academics to accommodate to aspects new to them in an existing multicultural context. The intercultural sensitivity of the foreign academics was influenced by the intercultural interactions between people within this setting (both within the university and in the neighbouring community). The ecology of the university consists of foreign academics, local academics, administrative staff and students. These individuals are furthermore connected to the neighbouring community. In other words, the subjects of this research are individuals who interact interculturally with others in their environment; they are part of an intercultural ecological system. This intercultural ecology does not only include the community of the host culture in this study or any host culture, it can expand to beyond the host culture (see Figure 1).

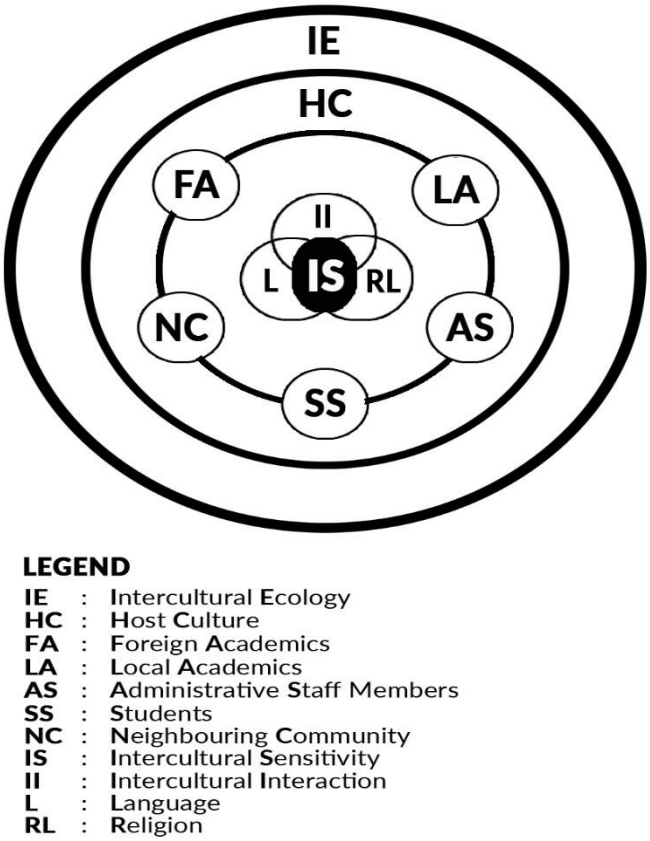

Figure 1: Intercultural ecology

Intercultural sensitivity is evident through active engagement and consideration of three elements: the overall intercultural interaction with the people of the host culture, language or/and dialect of the host culture, and the major religion of the host culture. These three elements indicate different aspects of the ways foreign academics demonstrated intercultural sensitivity in adapting to the host culture, the different settings and ways of living. Of these three elements, intercultural interaction parallels the existing elements of intercultural sensitivity of past studies on intercultural sensitivity namely: Chen and Starosta's Five-factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2000)—1) respect for cultural differences, 2) interaction attentiveness, 3) interaction enjoyment, 4) interaction engagement and 5) interaction confidence; and Tamam Three-Factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2010)—1) interaction attentiveness and respect, 2) interaction openness and 3) interaction confidence. These three elements identified in this study encapsulate the existing elements of intercultural sensitivity from intercultural sensitivity models of Chen and Starosta and Tamam. In

accommodating to the intercultural interaction with the people of the host culture, the foreign academics demonstrated their respect for cultural differences; they voluntarily joined cultural activities and festivals and enjoyed the time they spent engaging in those activities. Their efforts (getting involved with the people of the host culture) and enjoyment can be translated as having interaction enjoyment and interaction engagement. Although the elements from past studies on intercultural sensitivity were visible in this study (as discussed in Section 7.1.3), intercultural sensitivity is more complex than just understanding the interaction aspect from only the foreign academics' views as individuals' intercultural sensitivity also involves the involvement from the whole ecology of the host culture. This study does not only explore the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics but recognises that intercultural sensitivity is a two-way process. This intercultural ecology model reflects the dynamic relationship between foreign academics, local academics, administrative staff members and students in developing intercultural sensitivity.

The intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics teaching in a multicultural country is influenced by the intercultural nature of interactions and the setting. This intercultural ecology framework includes the specific element of languages spoken with the host culture as individuals are also able to converge their speech to accommodate to the people of the host culture and take the initiative to learn the language or the local dialect of the host culture. This intercultural ecology framework also includes the specific element of religion and how it influences the daily lives of the people of that particular context. Individuals, by respecting the major religion of the people of the host culture and tolerating the differences, deliberately converge their behaviour yet also maintain their own religious practices to portray their own beliefs and culture. Thus, intercultural ecology is a concept which can be used to capture the dynamic environment within which intercultural interactions take place, between a diverse range of participants. The ability to navigate this environment, to be open and accepting of different cultural practices and active and intentional in developing cultural knowledge, as an ongoing process of learning, contributes to becoming interculturally sensitive.

7.3 Implications of the research

7.3.1 Theory and field

This research study has contributed to the field of intercultural communication, in particular in understanding intercultural sensitivity by proposing a framework of intercultural ecology. This framework adds additional elements to intercultural sensitivity (including intercultural

interaction, language and religion) to provide a fuller understanding of the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics. This framework is developed based on views of other individuals who are directly involved with the subjects (in this case, foreign academics) which past studies have not included. This framework is therefore based on an understanding of intercultural sensitivity as a two-way process. Individuals' intercultural sensitivity is influenced by their environment and the people of the host culture. This new framework of intercultural ecology gives a broad and in-depth understanding of the elements of intercultural sensitivity that involve multicultural subjects in a multicultural setting. As has been demonstrated in this study, views from local participants often provide confirmation of responses from the foreign academics, especially on the aspect of foreign academics' social interaction and engagement with the people of the host culture. For example, local participants acknowledged and commented that foreign academics constantly tried to integrate and communicate with the locals by joining the cultural activities organised by the university and tried the local cuisine. However, local participants' perspectives also demonstrated contradictions in how the host culture and foreign academics perceived the same issues (findings discussed in Chapter 5). For instance, my findings demonstrated that non-native foreign academics believed that they did not have any problems interacting with the students, while the students commented that they struggled to understand the non-native foreign academics due to the accent of the non-native foreign academics. These differing views provide a better understanding of the accommodation process of foreign academics. These views also provide a reflection of the host cultures support towards the foreign academics and how the behaviour and responses from the people of the host culture affect the foreign academics' efforts towards integration.

This research applied a qualitative case study approach which is distinctively different from the traditional approach of studying intercultural sensitivity. Much of the previous research in this area (for example, Bayles 2009; Tamam 2010; Tamam & Abdullah 2012; Park 2013; Roh 2014; Wu 2015; Tamam & Krauss 2017) usually involves surveying participants who answer inventory items with Likert scales. This quantitative approach is useful for examining the correlation between variables, testing and confirming the research. However, the use of in-depth interviews for this research provides a rich understanding of intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics and allows for a deeper exploration of the whole ecology of the host

culture that is directly involved with the foreign academics and its influence to foreign academics' intercultural sensitivity.

This case study found that intercultural sensitivity is a complex on-going pursuit in which individuals' intercultural sensitivity does not only revolve around the individuals but also the people of the host culture and the environment as their interaction. In addition, being interculturally sensitive is not only specific towards a certain country or a certain host culture. The foreign academics may relocate again and their ongoing development of intercultural sensitivity is anticipated to assist them to accommodate to the next new host culture.

7.3.2 Policy directions for universities

The three elements identified in this study (i.e. intercultural interaction, language of the host culture and religion of the host culture) contribute to an in-depth understanding of intercultural sensitivity in a complex cultural and linguistic context of Kelantan, Malaysia. The findings may enable public and other universities in Malaysia to prepare appropriate mechanisms with respect to the recruitment of foreign academics and provide a better understanding amongst the foreign academics in Malaysia on the importance of being interculturally sensitive and competent communicators. For example, the local academics suggested that the university should have an induction programme for foreign academics to introduce the university and also the host culture. The induction programme should only focus on foreign academics in getting to know the university and the host culture, but also be a more collective induction programme which involves all local and foreign academics and administrative staff to encourage intercultural interaction between the foreign academics and the local staff at the university. The induction programme should be a start to the intercultural interaction between foreign academics and the local staff at the university. The university could also initiate intercultural awareness training for local staff at the university. This recommendation is based on the findings that intercultural sensitivity is not a one-way process. Intercultural sensitivity involves the whole ecology of the host culture. This intercultural training could also prepare the local academics at the university for future academic mobility opportunities since academics are mobile and local academics at the university are no exception. After the induction programme, the university could also create a formalised mentoring program between new foreign academics in their first year at the university. This mentoring programme could create opportunities for the foreign academics to

learn and understand the host culture and for the local staff to establish international networks and relationships.

The University could also provide written documentation on the do's and don'ts for interacting in a culturally sensitive way within the university and in the host culture. It is important for foreign academics to be oriented to the local systems. One idea would be to provide a booklet of the local phrases used at the workplace and the people of the host culture. Other suggestions could include language classes being provided to foreign academics in the university. The University management could make it compulsory for foreign academics to attend a Malay language class and passing the subject with certain marks would add value for their contract renewal. So far, for this university, the foreign academics are encouraged to join the language class, yet not many foreign academics elect to. By making it compulsory would be helpful for them to engage and interact better with the people of the host culture; within the university context also outside the university context.

As for universities in Malaysia in general, this study provides an understanding of intercultural interactions between foreign academics and the ecology within the university. This research did not aim to change the way the university operates and deal with foreign academics, rather to provide a better understanding of intercultural interactions and the importance of being interculturally sensitive specifically with the foreign academics. However, this knowledge has the potential to shape university policy in the future. As for implications to other foreign universities, for instance in Australia and globally, the context is different than the context of this thesis. Therefore, it is seen to be inappropriate to assume that this study would have any implications to Australian universities. However, given that Australian universities are multicultural, the intercultural ecology model could be worth testing in terms of suitability.

As for the context of this research, the state government of Kelantan could further develop the concept of being an intercultural state. The state government should continue to celebrate the cultural and linguistic diversity among its people to not only promote the Kelantanese cultures and dialect and the Malay language but also at the same time acknowledge migrants' cultures and languages. The state government could also explore an approach to the concept of intercultural cities that has been in practice by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2016) in developing policies that are inclusive of intercultural strategies. The policy considers the migrants as groups that need support from the local government and also as stakeholders

that could contribute to the growth of the economy and development of a diverse society and culture. Similar notions could be shared with the state government of the host culture in the context of this study. The foreign academics could be celebrated for their diverse cultures and languages and could be viewed as stakeholders that contribute to the economic growth of the host culture through their expertise and research. An example from the intercultural cities initiative by the Council of Europe is to hold seasonal meetings and discussions with policy makers, experts, and practitioners from other cities, to discuss new ideas, strategies that could help to improve and strengthen the cities. The host culture in this study could implement a similar idea and invite foreign academics to join the discussion with local/foreign experts, practitioners and policy makers on how the state of Kelantan can be developed and improved.

7.4 Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations which lead to possibilities for future research. The first limitation is that this study was conducted with only one interview at one point in time. Therefore, the findings of this study are limited to only the year the data was collected. A longitudinal study, in comparison, would allow an exploration of how participants' intercultural sensitivity shifted over time, as their resettlement journeys continued. It would allow for investigations of temporality (El-Shaarawi 2015) in the resettlement of foreign academics in a public university in Malaysia. This approach may provide insights into the foreign academics' mobility and reasons for them to remain in the country and/or to move to other country.

Another limitation is that this case study is set in only one Malaysian state and may not be representative of other foreign academics in other public universities in Malaysia or globally. Nevertheless, some aspects may be useful in examining other university contexts. In relation to the language of the interviews, a number of local participants experienced language issues/barriers, and this situation was addressed by reframing the questions and conducting interviews in English and Malay. For future research, a translator could be employed for the non-native foreign academics for other languages especially so that they could express their opinions and responses in their first language. Another limitation that could benefit future research would be to interview the people of the host culture who are not affiliated with the university so that the understanding of intercultural sensitivity of an individual would be more comprehensive.

The use of Communication Accommodation Theory in this study provides a more in-depth understanding of foreign academics interactions with the people of host culture and their accommodation process in the host culture. As the findings suggest foreign academics' intercultural experiences contributed to their cultural adjustment and accommodation. In future research, it would be valuable to explore individuals' intercultural sensitivity by implementing the intercultural ecology framework framed by another intercultural communication theory.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

This study of foreign academics intercultural sensitivity has provided many insights on intercultural sensitivity and accommodation processes. The struggles that the foreign academics experienced and the struggles that the people of the host culture experienced when interacting with one another revealed that intercultural sensitivity is not a one-way process. It seems unfair to expect a foreign newcomer to be interculturally sensitive towards the host culture if the people of the host culture themselves are not being accommodative and sensitive towards their culturally different counterparts.

Past studies of intercultural sensitivity explore the intercultural sensitivity of 'I', namely how 'I' respond—how 'I' respect other people of different cultures, how 'I' view other cultures, how 'I' enjoy interacting with people of the host culture and many more opinions on how, why and what 'I' feel towards people of the host culture (Chen & Starosta 2000; Wu 2015; Tamam & Krauss 2017). In contrast to the orientation of such studies, this thesis shifted the view and provided a perspective on the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics by adding insights from the people of the host culture with whom the foreign academics interact. Thus, this study has resulted in a new framework that captures an individual's intercultural sensitivity in relation to other people in this multicultural setting, highlighting the concept of intercultural ecology.

This research should not stop here. A large-scale study examining the intercultural sensitivity of foreign academics in other public universities in Malaysia should be done by integrating and testing the new framework of intercultural ecology. The end of this thesis points to new opportunities for exploring intercultural sensitivity within other educational contexts in Malaysia.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet (Interview)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (INTERVIEW)

School	School of Communication, International Studies and Languages
Research Title	Intercultural Sensitivity: A Case Study of the Intercultural Ecology of a Public University in Malaysia
PhD Candidate	Jamilah Shaari Tel: +61 8 830 24735 Email: shajy027@mymail.unisa.edu.au
Principal Supervisor	Dr. Giancarlo Chiro Tel: +61 8 830 24653 Email: Giancarlo.Chiro@unisa.edu.au
Co-Supervisor	Dr. Shamsul Khan Tel: +61 8 830 24790 Email: Shamsul.Khan@unisa.edu.au

You are being invited to take part in a study on the effects of intercultural sensitivity among foreign academics to the cultural ecology of a public university in Malaysia. In this study, you will be interviewed on the aspects of intercultural communication and sensitivity at the university. This research is mainly to study participant's attitude to issues surrounding intercultural sensitivity of the foreign academics and the cultural ecology of the university itself where inter-racial communication is the norm. You will also be audiotaped during the interview. The audiotaping will be used to help with transcribing the interview texts. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked. The estimated time for the interview will be around 30 minutes to an hour. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will be given a consent form to indicate your voluntary participation in giving information for this research study. You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time with/without explanation. You have the right to ask any data that you have supplied to be withdrawn or destroyed. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from the research study.

The data that will be collected will not contain any personal information about you and the selected public university will not be identified. In addition to this thesis the data will also be used for publications such as journals, seminars or conferences. Your identity will remain anonymous at all times and no personal details will be revealed either in the thesis or future publications. All data will be stored for 5 years to comply with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. The data will be disposed after the retention time has lapsed.

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your right as a participant or any complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 830 23118; Email: vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet (Focus group discussion)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (FOCUS GROUP)

School	School of Communication, International Studies and Languages
Research Title	Intercultural Sensitivity: A Case Study of the Intercultural Ecology of a Public University in Malaysia
PhD Candidate	Jamilah Shaari Tel: +61 8 830 24735 Email: shajy027@mymail.unisa.edu.au
Principal Supervisor	Dr. Giancarlo Chiro Tel: +61 8 830 24653 Email: Giancarlo.Chiro@unisa.edu.au
Co-Supervisor:	Dr. Shamsul Khan Tel: +61 8 830 24790 Email: Shamsul.Khan@unisa.edu.au

You are being invited to take part in a study on the effects of intercultural sensitivity among foreign academics to the cultural ecology of a public university in Malaysia. In this study, you will be asked to discuss on the aspects of intercultural communication and sensitivity at the university. This research is mainly to study participant's attitude to issues surrounding intercultural sensitivity and the cultural ecology of the university itself where inter-racial communication is the norm. You will also be videotaped during the interview. The purpose of videotaping the discussion is to help with transcribing the discussion texts. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked. The estimated time for the discussion will be around an hour. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You will be given a consent form to indicate your voluntary participation in giving information for this research study. You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time with/without explanation. You have the right to ask any data that you have supplied to be withdrawn or destroyed. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from the research study.

The data that will be collected will not contain any personal information about you and the public university will not be identified. In addition to this thesis the data will also be used for publications such as journals, seminars or conferences. Your identity will remain anonymous at all times and no personal details will be revealed either in the thesis or future publications. All data will be stored for 5 years to comply with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. The data will be disposed after the retention time has lapsed. Though given the nature of focus groups, confidentiality of group discussions and participation cannot always be guaranteed, every effort will be made to maintain anonymity.

This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your right as a participant or complaints, please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 830 23118; Email: vicki.allen@unisa.edu.au

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix 3: Consent form

Use this consent form when taped materials, photographs or original works are to be retained
This project has been approved by the University of South Australia's Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any ethical concerns about the project or questions about your rights as a participant please contact the Executive Officer of this Committee, Tel: +61 8 8302 3118; Email: Vicki.Allen@unisa.edu.au

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Researcher's Full Name:	JAMILAH SHAARI
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Contact Details:	Giancarlo.chiro@unisa.edu.au
Protocol Number:	-
Project Title:	INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERCULTURAL ECOLOGY OF A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MALAYSIA.
Participant's Full Name :	
Contact Details:	

SECTION 2: CERTIFICATION

Participant Certification

In signing this form, I confirm that:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential, unless required by law. If other arrangements have been agreed in relation to identification of research participants this point will require amendment to accurately reflect those arrangements.
- I understand that given the fact of the small community, my identity may not be easily disguised.
- I understand that the tape will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at University of South Australia. The tape will be stored for 5 years to comply with the Australian Code for Responsible Conduct of Research and will only be accessible to the researcher and her/his respective supervisor(s).
- I understand that I will be audiotaped / videotaped during the interview and the recording will only be used for transcribing purposes.
- I understand that all responses from other participants are confidential and I should not afterwards discuss or report anything said by other members of the group.

Participants under the age of 18 normally require parental consent to be involved in research. The consent form should allow for those under the age of 18 to agree to their involvement and for a parent to give consent.

Participant Signature	*Printed Name*	*Date*

Researcher Certification

I have explained the study to subject and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher Signature	*Printed Name*	*Date*

Appendix 4: Interview guidelines (Foreign academics)

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES (FOREIGN ACADEMICS) FA: 1

Please note that all information given is strictly confidential. The participants will remain anonymous throughout this study and their responses will be only for the purposes of this research. Participants will be identified by the reference number indicated on the top right of this form.

Respondent's Background

Age:

Gender:

Country of Origin:

Home Language(s):

Teaching experience in Malaysia:

Educational qualification:

Other overseas work experience (where and duration):

Intercultural Sensitivity

1. Do you have any previous experience living / working/ studying overseas? Where?
2. Did you have any knowledge of Malaysian cultures before arriving?
3. Have you ever joined any cultural activities in Malaysia? If so, what were they? Do you enjoy the cultural activities?
4. Do you socialise with the locals? (i.e. events, food) If so, how often?
5. How do you spend your free time?
6. Do you think that the locals are open to other or foreign cultures?
7. Do you like living and working in Malaysia?
8. Would you consider to continue working and living in Malaysia?
9. Do you feel that you are free to practise your beliefs or cultures here in Malaysia?
10. Do you feel accepted by the local community?

Challenges and Barriers

1. Do you find any difficulties in adapting to the cultures (i.e. Malays, Indians, Chinese etc.) in Malaysia?
2. Do you find any difficulties in interacting with the locals? (your students, administrative staff, academic staff; local and foreign)
3. Are you aware of any expectations that people have on you?
4. Are you aware of any customs or practice that could lead to cultural misunderstandings?
5. Have you ever encountered or been in a situation that has somehow offended your beliefs /culture? How did you handle the situation? Do you find it easy or difficult for you to make the locals understand your culture and beliefs?
6. Have you ever been asked by the locals to wear their traditional attire or eat their traditional cuisine? Are you okay with it or offended with the request? Why?
7. Has it been easy or difficult to work with people of different cultures?
8. Do you think that you have integrated well with the environment and the local community?
9. Do you think that you are interculturally sensitive? What do you mean by that?

THANK YOU!

Appendix 5: Interview guidelines (Local academics)

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES (LOCAL ACADEMICS) LA

Please note that all information given is strictly confidential. The participants will remain anonymous throughout this study and their responses will be only for the purposes of this research. Participants will be identified by the reference number indicated on the top right of this form.

Respondent's Background

Age: Gender: Country of Origin:

Home Language(s):

Educational qualification:

Work experience (where and duration):

Questions

1. Do you have any experience going overseas? Or have you made friends with people of different cultures?
2. Have you faced any difficulties in interacting and understanding the foreign lecturers?
3. Do you think that the foreign lecturers understand your culture and beliefs?
4. Has the foreign lecturer talked to you about his / her own culture / beliefs? Has he / she helped you in reflecting on cultural similarities or differences?
5. Does the foreign lecturer have specific strategies to help you understand them?
6. Do you think that it is important for foreign lecturers to adapt themselves to the host culture? In which ways?
7. Have the foreign lecturers ever said or done something that has made you feel offended personally, or on behalf of your culture or beliefs? How did you react to it? Did you make the foreign academics aware of your concerns?
8. Do you think that the foreign academics in this university are generally interculturally sensitive? Are some more sensitive than others? Why?

THANK YOU!

Appendix 6: Interview guidelines (Administrative staff members)

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES (ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF) AS: 1

Please note that all information given is strictly confidential. The participants will remain anonymous throughout this study and their responses will be only for the purposes of this research. Participants will be identified by the reference number indicated on the top right of this form.

Respondent's Background

Age: Gender: Race: Religion:

Language(s) used at home:

Educational qualification:

Questions

1. Do you have any experience going overseas? Or have you made friends with people of different cultures?
2. Are there any elements of intercultural awareness being included in the guidelines of foreign academics recruitment?
3. Are there any cultural issues which have been mentioned as a case of concern ever since the recruitment of foreign academics? How do you handle the issues?
4. Do you think that it is important for foreign academics and the university management to have some understanding on cultural differences and sensitivity?
5. Do you face any difficulties in interacting and understanding the foreign lecturers?
6. Do you think that the foreign lecturers understand your culture and beliefs?
7. Has the foreign lecturer talked to you about his/her own culture/beliefs?
8. Does the foreign lecturer have specific strategies to help you understand them?
9. Do you think that it is important for foreign lecturers to adapt themselves to the host culture? In which ways?
10. Have the foreign lecturers ever said or done something that has made you feel offended personally, or on behalf of your culture or beliefs? How did you react to it? Did you make the foreign academics aware of your concerns?
11. Do you think that the foreign academics in this university are generally interculturally sensitive? Are some more sensitive than others? Why?

THANK YOU!

Appendix 7: Interview guidelines (Focus group discussion)

GUIDELINES FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (STUDENTS)

The moderator for this discussion is the researcher herself and an assistant will be hired to help record the discussion. Before the moderator starts the discussion, she will introduce herself and her assistant. The moderator will also explain the nature of the research and the procedure for the discussion. The participants will be given a form to fill in their personal details. Every form is marked with a number and that number will represent the participants in the research. This is to ensure the participants' confidentiality. Participants will remain anonymous throughout this study.

Please note that all information given is strictly confidential. The participants will remain anonymous throughout this research and their details are only for the use of this research. Participants will only be identified by the reference number indicated on the top right of this form.

Participant's details

Age: Gender: Race: Religion:

Language(s) used at home:

Semester / year of study:

Questions

1. Do you have any experience going overseas? Or have you made friends with people of different cultures?
2. Do you face any difficulties in interacting and understanding the foreign lecturers?
3. Do you think that the foreign lecturers understand your culture and beliefs?
4. Has the foreign lecturer talked to the class about his/her own culture/beliefs? Has he/she helped the class reflect on cultural similarities or differences?
5. Does the foreign lecturer have specific strategies to help you understand them?
6. Do you think that it is important for foreign lecturers to adapt themselves to the host culture? In which ways?
7. Have the foreign lecturers ever said or done something that has made you feel offended personally, or on behalf of your culture or beliefs? How did you react to it? Did you make the foreign academics aware of your concerns?
8. Do you think that the foreign academics in this university are generally interculturally sensitive? Are some more sensitive than others? Why?

THANK YOU!

Appendix 8: Follow-up interview guidelines (Foreign academics)

1. In relation to the question on interacting with the locals (students, admin staff, and academic staff), do you have any specific strategies to ensure or to confirm that they; students, admin staff, academic staff understand you? For example, do you look for certain gestures like, nodding, confirmation words (yes, uhum, ok etc)?

THANK YOU!