

Chatterbox #224 – Reverse culture shock

Episode description

Have you ever experienced culture shock while travelling abroad? How about reverse culture shock? In this episode, Andrew talks about some instances of reverse culture shock that he felt in Canada after living abroad in South Korea for a long time.

Fun fact

Reverse culture shock occurs when you return home after immersing yourself in a different culture for a long period of time. Symptoms include boredom, isolation, frustration, and loss of self-identity. Adjusting back to your routine at home can be extremely difficult. Reaching out to your friends and family before you return home can help lessen the effects of reverse culture shock.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To ramble on
- To strike someone as [odd, strange, bizarre]
- A bust
- Out of luck
- To stand out
- To jive with [something]



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everybody. My name is Andrew, and you are listening to Culips.

Greetings from Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada. That's right, I am back visiting my hometown. If you're a regular listener of Culips, you'll know that I live in South Korea. But I'm back in Canada and I've been here for about a week and a half. And when I first came back, the weather was absolutely beautiful. Even though it's the middle of winter, the temperature was warm, the skies were blue and clear, and it was absolutely fantastic weather. So I was outside every day, hiking and jogging and enjoying the beautiful weather. But, yesterday, a snowstorm hit and we have quite a bit of snow on the ground now. So I'm trapped inside, and I'm actually staying with my brother at the moment. My brother's a very avid snowboarder, so he went up to the mountain today to go snowboarding. So I'm inside today, avoiding the snow and the dreary, cold weather.

Today's episode is a Chatterbox episode and I'm just going **to ramble on** a little bit today. I'm all by myself, but I hope that's OK. And, as always, there's a study guide for this episode that is available to download on our website, Culips.com. So if you would like to download the study guide, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations and examples, a quiz, and also some discussion questions, then just visit Culips.com to give it a download.

The topic for today's episode is reverse culture shock. Reverse culture shock. Have you heard of this before? Culture shock occurs when you visit a country with a different culture than your own and you find yourself panicked to be in this strange, new environment. And reverse culture shock is actually the opposite of this, and it's what I'm experiencing right now. So most of my day-to-day life occurs in South Korea in a totally different culture than the one that I grew up in. And since I've lived in Korea for so long, when I come back to Canada, some things about Canadian culture **strike me as really strange or bizarre**, and that's what I'm going to talk about today. I'm going to highlight the top three things that have caused me to experience reverse culture shock since I've been back in Canada this week.

The first thing that caused me to feel some reverse culture shock is actually the landscape and the environment of Canada itself. Canada is a huge country with a small population and, because of this, when I come back it feels really, really empty. The first place I visited when I landed in Canada was Victoria, BC. Now, by Canadian standards,

Victoria is a medium-sized city. I think the greater Victoria area has a population of around 300,000 people, which, by Canadian standards, is a medium- to large-sized city.

Victoria's actually the place where I went to university and studied for 4 years, and I remember when I moved there thinking that Victoria was a pretty happening, busy place compared to my hometown of Kelowna. When I visited Victoria, I thought it was really exciting. There was lots of new things to do and see. But when I visited last week, I was shocked at how small and empty it felt. I guess now I'm used to big Asian cities, where there's tons of people everywhere and businesses are open 24/7. In Victoria, this is totally not the case at all. I was walking outside at night at around 9 p.m., so it's not like it's a crazy late time or anything, and almost all of the stores were closed. Many of the restaurants were closed. I even was talking with an old buddy of mine and he joked that you have to make sure that you get something to eat before 8 p.m. because after 8, everything's closed and you're **out of luck**.

I met up with three of my really close old friends who live in Victoria, and we agreed to meet at a local craft brewery place to drink a beer together. We decided to meet at 8 p.m., and I arrived at the location at 7:55. I was the first one to arrive, and I went in, sat down, and the waitress came over to me and she said, "Ah, I'm so sorry, but we're closing in 5 minutes." And I was really shocked, oh, my gosh, this is, like, a place where people meet to drink beer after work and they're already closing at 8 p.m.

So I went outside, waited for my friends to arrive, and they suggested that we go to a pub around the corner. So we decided to do that, we walked around the corner to the pub, and it was also closed. This was a Tuesday night, but we were shocked. Oh, my gosh, 8 p.m. and the pub is closed and the local craft brewery place is closed.

So there was another pub right across the street and we walked over there and it was also closed. So the third location was also **a bust** and we're **out of luck** there. We decided to walk into the more touristy area of town and we found a pub there, but there were no seats. I guess since Victoria businesses on a Tuesday night like to close early, a lot of people who are looking for a drink decided to go to the same place. And we're **out of luck** there as well. So we tried four different places before we finally found a place to grab a beer, took us many tries—five tries, in fact.

But this just reinforced the idea that Canada is smaller and sleepier than I remember it being. And now, since I'm back in Kelowna this week, like I mentioned at the top of the show, I've been out hiking and running. And it's really bizarre to me that I can go out for a run, I can run for about 10 kilometres—which, you know, is almost an hour of being outside—and I will pass nobody on the streets. I won't run into anybody. Mind you, I'm not running downtown in the more busier parts of the city, I'm in the suburbs where people live, they don't really work or shop around here. But you would still expect to see some people out for a walk, but nobody. The other day when I was out running, it was really strange to me that I passed nobody while I was out.

All right, so that is point number one, that I found Canada to be sleepier, quieter, and emptier than I remember.

The second thing that's caused me to feel some reverse culture shock is eating at restaurants. Restaurant culture between Asia and North America is really, really different, and it's difficult to adjust to coming back to Canada and eating at restaurants.

One of the main things that has struck me as being quite strange is how chatty and conversational the servers are. Something that's happened three times since I've been back to Canada is that the server will introduce themselves to me, shake my hand and ask what my name is, and use my name the whole time that I'm eating there. So, for example, the server might say, "Oh, hi, my name is Brian, what's your name?" and then shake my hand, learn my name, and then use my name through the whole visit. So, "Hey, Andrew, how's your food today?" "Hey, Andrew, can I bring you some more water?" "Hey, Andrew, would you like dessert?"

I don't remember this happening before, so I'm not sure if it's something new, a new trend in Canadian restaurant culture. But I found it really bizarre and a little bit intrusive, like they were being too friendly with me. Also, the questions that the servers have been asking have been quite personal, almost like they were talking to me like I was their friend. Questions that servers have asked me so far have been, "What are you going to do tonight?" "What did you do on the weekend?" "How has your evening been going so far?" These are quite personal questions, not just regular small talk about the weather or something, and this really shocked me. I was taken aback because, in restaurants in Korea, I'm used to sitting down, ordering right away, having absolutely no small talk between the waiting staff and myself, but here it's like I'm visiting a friend's house.

And so I was thinking, why are the servers doing this? Why are they being so outgoing, so friendly and trying to make things so personal? And I think it's because of tipping, OK? In Canada, we have a tipping culture, which means that you have to leave a tip, minimum 15%, for the waitstaff, and I think what the servers are trying to do is, you know, be really friendly, really outgoing with you so that they can perhaps get a higher tip. And to be honest with you, it worked. I did tip some of the servers more because I felt like they were really working for that tip. To be honest, I'm not a super outgoing person, I don't really like chatting with strangers too, too much, which is a little bit ironic since I'm talking to a lot of strangers right now, isn't it?

But I felt like the waitstaff in the restaurants that I visited were really working hard for their tip and trying to make me feel comfortable and being friendly. So their effort paid off, and they got a little bit of a higher tip from me.

So to sum up point number two, restaurant culture and server small talk, this was something that caused me to feel reverse culture shock.

The final thing that caused me to feel reverse culture shock is really weird, and I don't know why I felt this, exactly. But it was seeing a lot of people that look like me. I guess in Korea I really **stand out**, there's not a whole lot of foreigners there, especially outside of Seoul, there's not a whole lot of foreigners. And for me to be walking around in Canada and seeing other people that look like me, that have the same skin tone, and especially seeing men with beards really struck me as strange.

Now, I'm constantly on and off. I have a beard sometimes. I don't have a beard sometimes. I go back and forth. But in Canada in the winter, many men will have beards because it's a way to protect your face against the cold weather. And in Korea, I don't really see this very often. Korean guys don't have beards and many Korean people have told me that they think beards actually look a little dirty and unkempt and, let me tell you, when I came back to Canada and I saw all of these guys with beards, I felt the same way. I thought they looked really dirty, which is so strange because I actually have a beard right now, too.

So I don't know where this is coming from, I felt like I was going a little bit crazy in my head. But it shocked me to see a bunch of people that looked like me. I guess I've just been an outsider for so long that coming back and not being an outsider anymore has really played with my head a little bit. So I found that bizarre. I think I've adjusted now. It was just the first initial 2 or 3 days that caused me to have some strange thoughts about appearance. Maybe I was just jet lagged or something, I don't know, but that was the third thing that caused me to feel some reverse culture shock.

So just to wrap up this episode, to summarize, reverse culture shock is the idea that, when you've been away living in a different culture and then you return to your home culture, you can notice some things that **strike you as odd**, that you took for granted before, but then now cause you to feel strange because it just doesn't **jive with the** foreign culture that you've been immersed in for the last little while. And the three things that have caused me to feel reverse culture shock now that I'm back in Canada are the quiet and empty Canadian streets, the friendly and outgoing staff at restaurants, and also beards and not being an outsider in terms of my appearance.

I would love to hear about your experience, and I'm curious if you've ever experienced reverse culture shock and what that looked like for you. I know a lot of our listeners have travelled extensively, and I can almost guarantee that some of you have some really good stories about reverse culture shock. So please send me an email and let me know your story. You can reach me at contact@Culips.com. I would also really encourage you to follow us on social media so that you can stay up to date with all the latest comings and goings here at Culips. If you search for Culips English Podcast on any of your favourite social media sites, you'll be guaranteed to find us.

One more time, our website is Culips.com, that is the place where you can find all of the rest of our Culips episodes. So if you're just dying to listen to some more Culips before our next episode is released, visit Culips.com and you can listen to one of the over 500 episodes in our library. We will be back soon with another brand new Culips episode, so stay tuned for that and I'll talk to you then.

Goodbye, everybody.

Detailed Explanations

To ramble on

Phrasal verb

To ramble on is to talk about something for a long time, usually in a boring or roundabout way. In this episode, Andrew jokes that he will **ramble on** to the listeners about today's topic, because he doesn't have a cohost to talk to in this episode.

Here are a couple more examples with **to ramble on**:

Daniella: Are you even listening to me right now?

Franny: What? Oh, sorry. You've been **rambling on** about your ex-boyfriend for 5 minutes now. I got kind of bored and stopped listening, but I didn't want to interrupt.

Daniella: Wow, what a good friend you are—not!

Franny: You broke up with him 5 months ago. It's time to move on!

Frank: Have you seen that documentary about volcanoes? You know, the one on the Discovery Channel?

Paul: You actually watch nature documentaries? It's just a bunch of stuffy narrators **rambling on** about useless science facts for 2 hours.

Frank: Really? I think they're cool. I'm pretty sure I've gained 10 IQ points watching them.

Paul: Yeah, well, the only thing they are useful for in my life is background noise when I'm looking forward to taking a long afternoon nap.



To strike someone as [odd, strange, bizarre]

Idiom

To strike someone as [something] refers to an object or situation that makes someone feel a particular emotion. In this episode, Andrew mentioned many occurrence of reverse culture shock in Canada that **struck him as odd, strange, or bizarre**, such as the quiet streets, friendly staff at restaurants, and abundance of people with similar appearances to himself.

The Culips team already defined this term recently, in Chatterbox episode 209, Luxury Products, but we are reviewing it here due to its relevancy to this episode's topic, reverse culture shock. If you are interested in seeing some more examples of this phrase, head on over to the Culips website to download episode CB209.

Here's one more example with **to strike someone as [odd, strange, bizarre]**:

Fernando:	It really strikes me as odd that Jasper didn't come to class this morning.
Simon:	Why? Maybe he's sick.
Fernando:	He's never missed a day of class in his life. Even when he's running late, he makes sure to send me a text or give me a call to let me know.
Simon:	I'm sure he's all right.
Fernando:	Yeah, maybe. Even so, I'm worried about him. I hope he's OK.

A bust

Noun

To call something **a bust** is to say that thing is useless, a failure, or a waste of time. In this episode, Andrew discusses his multiple failed attempts to find a bar in Canada on a quiet Tuesday night. When he went to the third bar, he called it **a bust**. In other words, going to the third bar was also a failure; the bar was also not open.

Here are a couple more examples with **a bust**:

Tamera:	How was the movie?
Miko:	It was a total bust ! The movie was terrible, a complete waste of my time.
Tamera:	Really? You were really looking forward to it before you left.
Miko:	Yeah, I was. The director must have been crazy! Remember I told you it was supposed to be based on one of my favourite books? Well, the movie was nothing like the book, and the acting sucked.

TV reporter:	Due to the weather, the Ariana Grande concert tonight in Central Park is cancelled. Concertgoers will be refunded the price of their tickets within the next few days.
Janessa:	Are you kidding me? The concert is cancelled! I've been waiting months for it. What a bust !
Mikey:	Nobody can predict the weather. It's just bad luck in your case.
Janessa:	Yeah, bad luck, indeed!

Out of luck Idiom

To be **out of luck** is to have zero luck or to have bad fortune. To be out of something is to have none of something, so to be **out of luck** is to have no luck.

In this episode, Andrew was **out of luck** searching for open bars in Canada on a Tuesday night. Everywhere he looked, the bars were closed or full of too many people.

Here are a couple more examples with **out of luck**:

Waiter:	Can I get you anything else this evening?
Leanne:	Yes, please. I'd love a piece of your famous chocolate cake.
Waiter:	Oh, I'm so sorry. You're out of luck , I'm afraid. We ran out of our chocolate cake an hour ago, but we have a delicious carrot cake you can try.
Leanne:	Really? What a bummer. Well, in that case, sure; I'll try the carrot cake. Thank you.

Dionel:	You wanna hear a crazy story?
June:	Yeah, of course!
Dionel:	So, I had a job interview uptown this morning. I was on my way to catch a bus when I saw this woman's scarf blow away in the wind. I just had to help her get it back, so I ran after it and caught it. She thanked me and I went back toward the bus stop, but then I realized I'd missed the bus. I thought I was really out of luck then. The interview started in 30 minutes, and I knew I would be late.
June:	So what happened?
Dionel:	Well, I got to the interview 15 minutes late. They almost didn't even let me sit down with the interviewer, but guess what? My interviewer was the scarf lady! She recognize me, told me what a kind man I was, and gave me the job!
June:	Wow, what an unbelievable story!



To stand out

Phrasal verb

To stand out is to be noticeable or different from the norm. Someone who looks different from everyone else **stands out**; for example, an adult **stands out** in a playground full of children. **To stand out** can also be used to describe someone who has a special quality that makes him or her superior to others in some way.

Here are a couple more examples with **to stand out**:

Mr. Cravitz: James, I'm calling to let you know that the job is yours if you want it. We had a lot of applicants for this job, but your resume really **stood out** from the rest.

James: Wow, thank you, sir! I would love to work with you.

Mr. Cravitz: That's great news! I'll talk to Human Resources and have you scheduled in for a meeting with me at 9 a.m. Monday morning. Have a nice weekend, James.

James: Thank you, Mr. Cravitz! I'll see you on Monday morning.

Mariam: What is one of the hardest parts about living in Japan?

Ben: Well, I really **stand out**, you know? I'm 190 cm tall and I have bright red hair. People stare at me everywhere I go.

Mariam: Oh, that must be hard. I can understand why that might get tiring after a while.

Ben: Yeah, sometimes I like the attention, but other times I really just want to fit in like everybody else.

To jive with [something]

Phrasal verb

To jive with [something] is to match or to go along with something. Usually this phrase is used in a negative context, as in, “That didn’t **jive with me**.” If you don’t **jive with [something]**, then you don’t like it, you don’t agree with it, or it doesn’t feel right to you.

Here are a couple more examples with **to jive with [something]**:

Gigi:	Is something the matter with Carlos?
TJ:	I don’t think so. Why?
Gigi:	He was acting strangely earlier. I questioned him about it, and he kind of dodged my questions. I think something must be wrong, his story didn’t really jive with me .
TJ:	Then let’s call him and find out!

Reggie:	Wanna go to this jazz concert with me tonight?
Winona:	Sorry, Reggie. Jazz doesn’t really jive with me . I’ve hated it ever since I was young.
Reggie:	No problem, I’ll just ask Jamal if he’s interested. He never says no to jazz.



Quiz

1. What does it mean if something was a bust?

- a) it was a success
- b) it was a failure
- c) it was a blast
- d) it was a beauty

2. What is something that strikes you as odd?

- a) a sunny day in July
- b) an owl flying at night
- c) a person reading a book upside down
- d) a crowded subway in New York City

3. Which is not an example of standing out?

- a) getting the best grade in class
- b) being the only person with red hair in a room
- c) being bald at a hair salon
- d) being a girl at a boy band concert

4. To have bad fortune is to be:

- a) out of luck
- b) in luck
- c) luck of the draw
- d) lackluster

5. Which is not a synonym of to ramble on?

- a) to drone on
- b) to chatter
- c) to be pithy
- d) to jabber



Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever experienced reverse culture shock? How so?
2. What was one difficult thing you experienced when travelling abroad?
3. Have you ever stood out? How so?
4. When was a time that you were out of luck?
5. Is there something that you just don't jive with? Why not?

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.c 3.d 4.a 5.c

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