

Study Abroad and Interculturality

Perspectives and Discourses

Edited by
Claudia Borghetti and Ana Beaven



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Study Abroad and Interculturality

Study Abroad (SA) as a domain of inquiry in the field of Applied Linguistics has been approached from a variety of different perspectives. Although originally focused on measuring the impact of residence abroad on students' language development, in the last decade the so-called 'social' turn in Second Language Acquisition has brought to the fore the importance of socio-cultural aspects of the students' experiences (such as the amount of contact they have with the local community, their social networks, etc.). This focus on the students' entire lived experiences in the destination country opened the door to an increased interest in analysing their language encounters in terms of intercultural learning.

This new domain of investigation in SA research, focused on the students' opportunities for intercultural development while abroad, is varied in terms of perspectives and discourses, as it catalyses the different interests and viewpoints of the various stakeholders, including educational institutions, international political organisations, teachers or the students themselves. This book gathers some of these voices, with contributions on topics such as the features, dynamics, advantages and shortcomings, preparation needs and pedagogical issues relating to student mobility in terms of the participants' intercultural learning.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Language and Intercultural Communication*.

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Ana Beaven and Claudia Borghetti

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Difference and awareness in cultural travel: negotiating blocks and threads

Adrian Holliday

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Chapter 2

'Breathing the smells of native-styled English': a narrativized account of an L2 sojourn

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INTRODUCTION

Interculturality in study abroad

Study abroad (SA) is now a well-established domain of enquiry in applied linguistics and, like the phenomenon itself, is extremely varied. This variety can be traced back to the 1990s, when the bulk of research on SA began to appear (Freed, 1995; Parker & Rouxville, 1995). Nevertheless, within this multiplicity, three trends in research topics and perspectives can be identified and historically contextualised.

First of all, Coleman (2015) points out that, when SA emerged as a subject in applied linguistics, it was approached according to the methodological principles of mainstream research in that period: thus, mobile students' language gains were mostly measured through pre- and post-sojourn tests, which tended to focus on the acquisition of discrete language skills (e.g. listening or writing) or dimensions (e.g. morphology or syntax). In addition to interests intrinsic to applied linguistics, explanations for this initial trend in SA research can be found in external broader socio-educational factors: in the 1980s and 1990s, the phenomenon of SA was not yet seen as an important step in formal education – at least in terms of numbers. According to the OECD, in 1975 there were 0.8 million students worldwide enrolled outside their country of citizenship, while they were 4.5 million in 2012 (2015, p. 360). This substantial rise in numbers thus created a widespread interest – also on the part of investors such as international political organisations and educational institutions – in establishing what concrete benefits SA had on foreign language learning based on scientific (i.e. measurable) outcomes.

In the last decade or so, SA has experienced a new substantial change in perspective and purposes (Kingtoner, 2009). Again, this shift does not represent a break with previous research, but rather can be interpreted as the development of a synergy between more general socio-cultural factors and a new turn in applied linguistics. Affecting the former is a growing – almost avid – interest in student mobility, framed within the politics of internationalisation on the part of higher education institutions. After all, in the context of globalisation, the growing numbers of students spending a period of time abroad has triggered the interests of the various stakeholders, who see mobility as way of increasing the students' employability potential and global citizenship (Lewis, 2009; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josić, & Jon, 2009; Schomburg & Teichler, 2011). Within applied linguistics, the increased insistence on the benefits of SA has inevitably brought with it a need not only to evaluate, but also to understand better what factors foster or inhibit students' learning outcomes. This has also been motivated by the fact that many studies employing pre- and post-tests seemed to suggest that students' language gains abroad can be highly variable (e.g. Kingtoner, 2011). As a consequence, researchers have been striving to identify what personal and social variables (e.g. type of accommodation, participation in local leisure activities, social contacts in general) foster or hinder students' second language learning abroad (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013; Isabelli-García, 2006; Llanes, Tragant, & Serrano, 2012). Coleman (2015) ironically wonders why applied linguistics failed to take into account such crucial factors for so long. When historically contextualised, it appears clear that this shift in perspective was made possible by the broader social turn (Block, 2003) in applied linguistics. Nevertheless, according to Kingtoner (2013), there is still a dearth of studies in applied linguistics approaching SA from a sociocultural perspective.

The step between focussing on mobile students' whole experience in the destination country and analysing their language encounters also in terms of intercultural learning is short; if language learning is situated in interaction, it becomes necessary to explore the nature of the students' contacts as well as their stances towards those they spend time with. A new trend – the third anticipated at the beginning of this Editorial – thus emerges in SA research within the field of applied linguistics, bringing into focus the students' intercultural relations and possibilities for intercultural development in relation to their stay abroad. While research addressing intercultural phenomena linked to SA pertaining more to the domain of cross-cultural psychology (adaptation, culture shock, etc.) has tended to marginalise the role played by language learning and use (for an overview, see Furnham, 2012), in SA as a domain of enquiry within the field of applied linguistics, language undoubtedly plays a central role also when intercultural issues are addressed. Moreover, 'language' as a construct assumes several meanings in these studies: it refers to multilingualism and personal plurilingual repertoires (Borghetti & Beaven, 2015; Kalocsai, 2009), to discursive construction of diversity (Dervin & Layne, 2013), and to a key factor in performing and shaping identities (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2013; Jackson, 2008; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005). Crucially, awareness of (multiple) language use is also the means through which mobile students' intercultural learning can be fostered (Anquetil, 2006; IEREST, 2015). Once again, interest in the intercultural dimension within SA can be linked to a more general shift in applied linguistics, the so-called 'cultural turn' (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013) in language education, which binds language learning/teaching to interculturality, here broadly defined as the learning process through which individuals become aware of differences as well as able to act upon such awareness.

Although nearly two decades ago Coleman (1998) claimed that European research on SA had had interculturality as a central concern for some time, our impression is that interest in the link between SA and interculturality has been increasing recently, and is now shared well beyond Europe. This domain of investigation – whose boundaries are by no means well-defined – is varied also in terms of perspectives and discourses, as it catalyses different motivations and expectations on the part of the various stakeholders, be they international political organisations, educational institutions or the students themselves.

In this publication we have therefore striven to gather some of these voices, with contributions on topics such as the features, dynamics, advantages and shortcomings of student mobility in terms of the relationship between SA and young people's intercultural learning, but also how best to prepare the students so that they make the most of their experiences. Our aim has also been to allow the perspectives of the different actors involved in higher education mobility programmes to emerge: not only those of researchers, but also of academic staff, of mobility programmes administrators and, of course, of the students themselves.

The present special issue comes at the end of the three-year European project *Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and Their Teachers* (IEREST) co-funded by the European Commission within the frame of the Lifelong Learning Programme 2009–2012 (IEREST, 2015). The project produced a set of teaching modules to be taught before, during and after SA, in order to guide students to take advantage their first-hand experiences abroad in terms of intercultural and personal development. Some of the contributors to this issue were directly involved in the project, while others manifested their interest during its life-cycle. Although the project was aimed at Erasmus students, we have not limited the category of students involved in the studies reported here to this particular European programme or to other within-degree mobility programmes.

This issue opens with a conceptual paper by Adrian Holliday. Through the use of a creative nonfictional narrative of three students studying abroad, he discusses on the one hand the