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Title
Introduction to the Special Issue: Study Abroad in the Twenty-first Century

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8924j6vf

Journal
L2 Journal, 8(2)

Author
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Publication Date
2016

DOI
10.5070/L28231965

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L2 Journal, Volume 8 Issue 2 (2016), pp. 3-11 http://repositories.cdlib.org/uccllt/l2/vol8/iss2/art1/

Special Issue

Study Abroad in the Twenty-first Century

Introduction to the Special Issue

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In the recently released *Open Doors* report, the Institute of International Education (2015) issued an overview of changes in the study abroad population since the turn of the twenty-first century. At first glance, the numbers are encouraging in many ways: More than twice as many American college students study abroad today compared to fifteen years ago. Those who study abroad come from more diverse academic disciplines and are themselves more diverse, with the number of minority participants having nearly doubled since 2000. Moreover, their destinations are far more heterogeneous, including places previously less traveled by American students, such as China and the Middle East.

Many of these changes seem to indicate the often-sloganized beliefs about the twenty-first century: diversity, a flattening world, and ultimately, globalization. Indeed, the time we live in is characterized by unprecedented mobility—of goods, capital, information, ideas, and here we must add, people—at the global scale. Intensifying globalization processes have facilitated a sustained proliferation of American study abroad programs and have created discourses that legitimize, motivate, and mediate study abroad. These discourses, like globalization itself, are a complex—and potentially contradictory—blend of economic, political, cultural, and philosophical interests and ideologies that the papers in this special issue will address and problematize in detail.

STUDY ABROAD AND GLOBALIZATION

Our first and foremost goal in this special issue is to situate study abroad in the discussion of globalization today, given that the population that can go abroad, the choice of their destinations and target languages, and their language experiences overseas can all be mediated by discourses linked to globalization. For example, American political discourses at the national level often promote study abroad as a response to the post-911 geopolitical context and the learning of certain languages as means for national security (see Diao & Trentman, this issue; Kramsch, 2005). Furthermore, as many scholars have already underscored, globalization is not experienced the same way everywhere; issues of unequal access, and even hegemony, must be addressed, especially in the discussion of their impact

on Americans and American institutions, which are seen by many critics as the primary beneficiaries—or even perpetrators—of globalization (e.g., Ritzer, 1998; Schiller, 1985). Others suggest that globalization has in fact specifically hurt American study abroaders' capacity for the kind of cultural immersion experience traditionally promised; they argue that as the world becomes increasingly Americanized, "given the rampant success of the U.S. economic model, the hot cakes exportability of our pop culture, [and] the umbilical availability of instantaneous electronic communication" (Engle & Engle, 2002), American students abroad are less inclined than ever before to recognize and negotiate cultural difference (Kinginger, 2010). Moreover, the Internet and social media provide students abroad with the means to avoid participation in the foreign culture altogether (Kinginger, 2008).

STUDY ABROAD AND (LANGUAGE) LEARNING

Indeed, it is easy to understand American study abroad as a victim of its own success, from an educational point of view. As student demand has grown, study abroad has been increasingly outsourced to for-profit private organizations that package study abroad as academic tourism and capitalize on neoliberal discourses about the global marketplace (Bernstein et al., 2015; Bolen, 2001; Park & Lo, 2012). Thus, unsurprisingly, study abroad participants come primarily from privileged families, and still fewer than 10% of American college students participate at all (Institute of International Education, 2015). Moreover, such privatization and commodification of study abroad—along with popular ideologies that promote English as the global language *par excellence*—have further marginalized the need for American students to master other languages, rhetorically rendering language learning non-essential to the study abroad experience (Warner & Gramling, 2013). Indeed, nearly 20% of Americans who study abroad do so in English-speaking countries, primarily the UK and Australia; of the remaining 80% who study in non-English-speaking countries, many take some or all of their classes in English. Furthermore, as programs multiply, the length of stay is shrinking, with only 3% of participants spending more than a semester abroad (Institute of International Education, 2015).

For those working in foreign language education, like the editors and contributors to this special issue, these statistics are discouraging, as we see language learning as not only an end in itself, but also as a means to develop the kind of intercultural (Byram & Alfred, 2002), translingual/transcultural (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Language Learning, 2007), and/or symbolic (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008) competencies understood as the primary ends of study abroad of any sort.

GAUGING THE IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD: RETHINKING COMPETENCE

Beginning in the 1980s, applied linguists began to question the feasibility and appropriateness of positing the native speaker as the model for formal language learning (e.g., Paikeday, 1985; Quirk & Widdowson, 1985). In Europe, scholars working in connection with the Council of Europe's *Language Learning for European Citizenship* project created the notion of the *intercultural speaker* (*intermédiaire culturel*) who develops not native

speaker competence but rather an *intercultural communicative competence*, or the capacity to mediate between a number of cultural perspectives and between the target language and the first language (Byram & Zarate, 1994; Risager, 2006). Within the context of the unification of Western Europe, this competence emphasized international cooperation as the result of increased mobility of national citizens across geographic, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. In a later reformulation, Byram (1997) distinguished between *intercultural competence* and *intercultural communicative competence*, with the former designating the ability of native speakers to interact with non-native speakers and the latter specifically referring to the use of a second/foreign language in interactions with native speakers of that language or in *lingua franca* situations.

However, given the realities of foreign language studies in American higher education as well as the growing recognition among applied linguists that attaining native speaker proficiency is a flawed and unrealistic goal of language education, many language educators are beginning to propose alternative models of competence. Drawing on ecological perspectives on language learning and use, Kramsch offers the notion of *symbolic competence* (Kramsch, 2006; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008).[1] Kramsch (2008) draws attention to the ability of speakers to manipulate the various linguistic codes at their disposal to manage not only their capacity to "approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (p. 664). In this view, a special emphasis is placed on the ways in which speakers negotiate the shifting interstices of real and historical time when faced with the various symbolic exigencies of multilingual interactions. Kramsch argues for considering not just the socially recognized and legitimized *identities* in play, but also the more personal-historical, affective, and aesthetic dimensions of communicative practice—what she calls *subjectivity* (Kramsch, 2006, 2009).

Indeed, Kramsch's notion of symbolic competence can be seen as an extension of the work done on "translingual and transcultural competence" by the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Language Learning (2007, p. 3), of which she was a member. As part of an effort to reconceptualize and revitalize the role of foreign language study in American higher education, this committee recognized the inadequacy of the native speaker model (Cook, 1999) and replaced it with an eminently intercultural paradigm in which American students learn to "operate between languages" (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Language Learning, 2007, pp. 3-4). However, if American study abroad programs continue to move away from intensive language learning, we worry that the educational promise of study abroad for developing such laudable competencies may be undermined.

STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A QUALITATIVE TURN

Moreover, at first glance the history of research on the language learning outcomes of study abroad seems bleak. While early research in the 1960s suggested a causal link between study abroad and rapid language learning (Carroll, 1967), subsequent large scale quantitative studies in the 1980s and 1990s cast considerable doubt on the promise of study abroad for second language acquisition (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1990, 1995; Freed, 1993, 1995).

[1] For a discussion of Byram's intercultural and Kramsch's symbolic competence, see Chapter 2 of Kearney (2016).

In fact, the most salient finding of these later studies was a high degree of individual variation in learning outcomes after a term abroad. This issue of individual differences (i.e., that who one is may drastically affect what one learns and *vice versa*) was taken up in the next wave of predominantly qualitative, case-study research that began just prior to the turn of the twenty-first century and that is exemplified by the studies contained in this issue.

In this work, researchers adopt more ethnographic methods and more sociocultural and/or post-structuralist analytical frameworks (e.g., Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; Taguchi, 2015). Following the suggestions of Firth and Wagner (1997), these studies present study abroaders as "whole people" (Coleman, 2013) rather than simply learners or students. Issues of motivation and investment (Norton, 1997) come to the fore, as case study after case study illustrates that participants' reasons for studying abroad are complex, shifting, and potentially conflicting. For example, as McGregor (this issue) and Shively (this issue) address, participants in an ostensibly intensive language-learning program may see advanced linguistic proficiency as subordinate to other learning and/or personal goals (Wolcott, 2013), or their language learning goals may be drastically modified or even abandoned altogether due to intervening experiences while abroad (Kinginger, 2008).

It is through this issue of learner motivation that we return to the discussion of the effects of globalization on study abroad, and to the role of discourses in sustaining, mitigating, or challenging them. Just as it is tempting to conceive of the forces of globalization as absolute and hegemonic, it is easy to adopt a deterministic view of how and why American study abroaders learn or don't learn as expected. However, as Diao and Trentman's paper will illustrate, although American students in China and the Middle East may align themselves with U.S. national security discourses that position Mandarin and Arabic as economically and politically "critical languages,"[2] participants must negotiate this alignment once abroad according to local exigencies that may disrupt and reconfigure their understanding of what they are doing—educationally speaking—by studying abroad. As Robertson (1992) argues, globalization can perhaps be better understood as *glocalization* (p. 179),[3] as in practice it always entails an interaction between the global and the local (and the individual) that is synergetic rather than purely hegemonic or homogenizing.[4] In this late-modern, globalized context, then, perhaps study abroad provides an opportunity for American students to experience such glocalization, which the study abroad historian Hoffa (2002) describes as "personal experiences that provide glimpses into the intersections of their American-ness, the local culture, and the *global* culture" (p. 68, italics in original).

Furthermore, as applied linguists have argued recently, perhaps the dominant discourses that shape and evaluate language learning in American higher education are themselves inadequate (Gore, 2005; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). As McGregor's and Shively's studies (this issue) will demonstrate, study abroad often offers participants access to communicative practices that may not conform to the native-speaker-focused, standard language norms of the language program curriculum. In the twenty-first century, multilingualism is increasingly

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[2] See the National Security Education Program website for a list of "critical languages": https://www.nsep.gov/content/critical-languages.

[3] In Robertson's original coinage of the term, glocalization referred to the business practice of, for example, a global American company (e.g., McDonald's) adapting its products and marketing to local cultures abroad. Here, however, I am using his term more metaphorically to account for the ways in which, for example, an American student abroad must position him/herself in relation to a global American culture, the foreign culture, and his/her more personal or idiosyncratic interpretations and identities.

[4] See also Block & Cameron (2002) for an extended discussion of globalization and language learning.

the norm, and many communities use code-switching and non-standard language varieties in ways that conflict with the monolingual norms of the language classroom, either to the dismay or the delight of study abroaders. In this way, also following Firth and Wagner (1997), contemporary study abroad researchers often strive to re-examine traditional notions of learner failure. These authors assume instead that study abroaders who fail to accommodate to the monolingual native speaker norms of the language classroom may be more or less consciously flouting institutional discourses in favor of using their first and second languages in ways that better suit their linguistic identity (as in Shively's study) or particular communicative contexts (as in McGregor's).

A DISCOURSE APPROACH

As we draw on the notion of discourse, it is understood primarily in the Foucauldian (1974) sense, as multiple and as *institutional*—serving the interests of particular communities of practice and "forming the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). For example, in Bae and Park's study as well as in Diao and Trentman's, national discourses constitute study abroad as a political enterprise for students, maintaining national identity or national security, respectively. Moreover, like Foucault (1977), we acknowledge—and several articles in this issue illustrate—the historical, *longue durée* (Braudel, 1958) dimensions of discourses that transcend arbitrary lines between centuries. In fact, at the risk of overgeneralizing, one of the major themes of these studies is that the dominant discourses that most heavily influence how students understand the purposes of study abroad reproduce twentieth century ideologies[5] that remain relatively unchanged and are, as all of the authors and some of the focal participants point out, ultimately anachronistic. In the end, this represents the main point of the studies in this special issue: while twentieth century economic, political, and pedagogic discourses do persist, the complexities of twenty-first century realities challenge, complicate, and occasionally undermine the epistemological assumptions of these discourses for contemporary study abroad.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

It is against this historical backdrop that we offer this special issue on "Study Abroad in the Twenty-first Century." As the participation statistics outlined above would suggest, the papers included in this issue report on the experiences of predominately middle class youth and young adults; however, unlike the majority of American study abroaders, these focal students are studying abroad first and foremost for the purpose of foreign language learning. The authors in this issue demonstrate through case studies that it is this motivation for language learning that leads the focal students to negotiate various national and global discourses about language, culture, and identity.

McGregor reports her findings from case studies of two American undergraduates studying abroad in Germany for the 2009-2010 academic year. Drawing on post-structuralist theories of identity, she illustrates how these students, Brad and David, struggle to redefine

[5] In particular, American study abroad learning goals are still largely set according to a capitalist neoliberal ideology that sees education strictly as a means to accumulate marketable skills, and foreign language learning outcomes continue to be determined by a nationalist ideology that assumes a one-language-one-nation mapping whereby monolingualism is positioned as an unmarked norm.

themselves as their expectations for language use in study abroad are challenged by the multilingual complexities of twenty-first century Germany. Although Brad arrives in Germany with a desire to interact primarily with monolingual Germans, his multilingual experiences making friends at a boxing gym help him to recognize and valorize the linguistic and racial diversity of both Germany and the United States. Similarly, David begins his year abroad convinced that the only way to perfect his German is to have only German monolingual friends. This conviction falters in the face of a period of intense loneliness, which leads David to participate in multilingual international student groups and, like Brad, to realize that code-switching is not antithetical to language learning but instead represents a linguistic norm.

Diao and Trentman bring a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to the study of the continuities and conflicts between American national discourses on foreign language study and student accounts of their experiences studying abroad in China and the Middle East. The authors first demonstrate that framings by the American government and media of the purpose of 'critical language' study at home and abroad have maintained a nationalistic and "orientalist" (Said, 1978) perspective since the 1990s. As Mandarin and Arabic replace Russian and Japanese, the purported goals of studying such critical languages remain centered on issues of national security (i.e., as a soft power (Nye, 2004) approach to maintaining American global dominance). In their analysis of student accounts of study abroad in China and Egypt, Diao and Trentman find that while many students attempt to frame their experiences *in situ* in accordance with these dominant discourses, they struggle with local discourses that posit American study abroad as an arm of American hegemony.

Shively reports on her analysis of naturalistic interactions recorded by Jared, an American undergraduate student who studied in Toledo, Spain for a semester. Of central interest is whether or not Jared orients to second language (L2) learning in these interactions with his host mother, Carmen, and peer, Luis. For Jared, who started learning Spanish in an immersion program in Kindergarten, learning Spanish has meant using and interacting in the language without attention to its formal properties. At home, for example, he enjoyed using "kitchen Spanish" to joke around with Mexican co-workers at his restaurant job. In Toledo, however, Jared was confronted with discourses about language learning that promoted native speaker competence as the primary goal. Nevertheless, Jared remained motivated to use Spanish primarily to communicate ideas and develop relationships with others. At one point, Jared began to prioritize his relationship and interactions with Carmen in a bid to improve his L2 grammatical accuracy. Though it would be easy to interpret this new orientation as evidence of a desire to improve his overall Spanish language abilities, Shively uses an activity theoretical framework to show that Jared's actions were instead a function of his desire to impress Carmen and earn her high esteem for his linguistic abilities. Overall, Shively found that Jared resisted discourses that put native speaker competence on a pedestal and experienced great enjoyment in more relaxed and friendly contexts of Spanish interaction.

Kinginger's study introduces the notion of *postfeminism* (often also known as *anti-feminism*), an ideology that reframes femininity as the body that needs to be disciplined, regulated, and scrutinized. By combining the notion of postfeminism with neoliberalism, she analyzes how French women are imagined in American popular culture as inherent experts at taking care of their bodies and thus as models for American women to appropriate. She then revisits and reanalyzes her (2008) interview data (i.e., interviews with a cohort of 23 Americans studying abroad in France in 2003) from the perspective of postfeminism. Her findings

show that while these American women often draw on discourses about French femininity, they also reject these same discourses by positioning themselves as superior to the French in terms of gender equality. Furthermore, female students' accounts are contrasted with some of the male students' experiences. Bill, one of the men in the cohort, praised French femininity and its implied difference between men and women but presented himself as an American man who respects women and promotes an American discourse of gender equality. Therefore, these American young women struggled because they could not physically live up to the French ideals about the female body, while they were simultaneously inclined to reject such ideals and hold on to the American ideals about gender equality. Meanwhile, men like Bill could enjoy the comfort of being seen as gentle American men. Even though both the men and women drew on similar sets of discourses ("French women's ideal bodies" and "America's progress on gender equality"), ironically these very discourses on American gender equality valorize American men (rather than women) when they are overseas.

Despite obvious cultural and national differences, Bae and Park's study adds an interesting non-American pragmatic perspective to the experience of study abroad. Their study is situated within the context of three Korean families sending their children to study abroad in Singapore at a younger age (*jogi yuhak*) with the hope that they will achieve a more advantageous place in the job market by virtue of the linguistic and cultural skills gained from study abroad. Singapore has become a popular destination because it offers the opportunity to learn both English and Mandarin. However, these families gradually came to prioritize the children's learning of English over Mandarin. The authors further explore how these families negotiate the use of English and Korean. While English was seen as indexing an imagined flexible identity in the neoliberal global market, Korean became understood as symbolic of a nationalistic Korean identity. These two discourses are in apparent contradiction with one another: one emphasizes flexibility and language as an economic resource, while the other highlights a sense of rootedness and an essentialist view of language as national identity. The conflicting ideologies further interact with the multi-layered discourses about race and distribution of labor in the workplace in Korea and elsewhere. As a result of such discordant neoliberal and nationalist discourses, these families eventually came to position their children's future careers in a very specific place: working as regional directors for multinational companies' Korean branches.

The studies in this issue highlight the complexities of study abroad in the twenty-first century, as participants work to negotiate the nexus of influences and interests that impinge upon their ostensibly personal learning experiences. They demonstrate the continuities and disconnections between dominant discourses concerning the educational purpose and potential of study abroad and the actual experiences of participants on the ground. The papers also evidence the struggle shared by all contemporary language teachers to manage students' learning goals that are heavily affected (and often, in the end, stymied) by discourses outside of our control as teachers and experts. For example, as study abroad is increasingly sold as a relatively easy way to boost participants' employability on the labor market (Bernstein et al., 2015) through participation in increasingly short-term programs, it becomes ever more difficult to justify rigorous program designs aimed at advanced linguistic, intercultural, symbolic, or transcultural competence. However, at the same time, we are encouraged and intrigued by how the unexpected complexities of study abroad contexts can help participants reimagine their language learning goals and linguistic identities in ways that are satisfactory for them and that more accurately reflect the increasingly translingual

practices of twenty-first century speech communities, which increasingly include English as a global lingua franca. In the end, the educational promise of study abroad remains in part in its unpredictability; although programs must be able to yield consistent learning outcomes across all participants, the case studies in this issue demonstrate that students also learn a lot about language, culture, and themselves from the unexpected outcomes of their term abroad. Furthermore, while dominant discourses may exert undue influence, the complexity of study abroad affords participants the capacity to "make do" (de Certeau, 1984) within discourses that can constrain but never fully determine what is feasible or sayable (Foucault, 1974) during study abroad in the twenty-first century.

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