

# Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts

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Series Editor: David Singleton, *Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland*

# **Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts**

Edited by

Margaret A. DuFon and Eton Churchill

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# Contents

Preface . . . . .	vii
Acknowledgements . . . . .	x
Contributors . . . . .	xi
Transcription Conventions . . . . .	xiii
1 Evolving Threads in Study Abroad Research <i>Eton Churchill and Margaret A. DuFon</i> . . . . .	1
<b>Part 1: The Acquisition of Pragmatic Competence During Study Abroad</b>	
2 Learning to Take Leave in Social Conversations: A Diary Study <i>Tim Hassall</i> . . . . .	31
3 Learning to Say 'You' in German: The Acquisition of Sociolinguistic Competence in a Study Abroad Context <i>Anne Barron</i> . . . . .	59
<b>Part 2: Interaction and Socialization at the Host Dinner Table</b>	
4 The Socialization of Taste during Study Abroad in Indonesia <i>Margaret A. DuFon</i> . . . . .	91
5 Joint Construction of Folk Beliefs by JFL Learners and Japanese Host Families <i>Haruko Minegishi Cook</i> . . . . .	120
6 Norms of Interaction in a Japanese Homestay Setting: Toward a Two-Way Flow of Linguistic and Cultural Resources <i>Masakazu Iino</i> . . . . .	151
<b>Part 3: From Home to School in the Study Abroad Environment</b>	
7 Negotiation in a Japanese Study Abroad Setting <i>Bigail McMeekin</i> . . . . .	177

8	Variability in the Study Abroad Classroom and Learner Competence <i>Eton Churchill</i> . . . . .	203
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**Part 4: The Influence of Individual and Program Variables on SLA  
Abroad**

9	Study Abroad Social Networks, Motivation and Attitudes: Implications for Second Language Acquisition <i>Christina Isabelli-García</i> . . . . .	231
10	Language Learning Strategies in the Study Abroad Context <i>Rebecca Adams</i> . . . . .	259
	References . . . . .	294
	Index . . . . .	319

## Preface

As the number of study abroad programs has continued to increase into the 21st century, so has the interest in and breadth of research on language learning in these contexts. Following trends in the field of second language acquisition, the research agenda has expanded from a focus on global linguistic gains to include investigations into learning processes, individual differences, dimensions of sociolinguistic competence, the development of specific skills and the role that the host context plays in shaping opportunities for interaction and learning. Accordingly, situated studies employing qualitative research methods (e.g. videotapes of table talk, interviews, learner journals) have come to play an important role in furthering our understanding and in supplementing data collected through quantitative measures.

The chapters in this volume – selected for their contextual diversity and methodological approaches – contribute to this evolving body of research. *Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts* features nine studies that address specific calls for research by previous authors (e.g. Freed, 1995a; Huebner, 1995b) and engage in theoretical discussions in the field of second language acquisition. The volume opens with a review that outlines primary areas of research on study abroad in the last 10 years and situates subsequent chapters within this work.

Part 1 follows with two studies that investigate the acquisition of pragmatic competence. First, ‘Learning to take leave in social conversation’ documents the case study of an adult learner attempting to acquire native-like proficiency in leave-taking in Indonesia. Diary data drawn from two sojourns in Indonesia are analyzed for leave-taking and applied to the theoretical claims made by Schmidt (1993), Bialystok (1993) and Schumann (1997) regarding SLA processes and the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge. Touching on similar theoretical issues, ‘Learning to say “you” in German’ examines the development of sociolinguistic competence of 33 Irish learners of German in their use of second person pronouns (e.g. *Sie*, *du*) on three administrations of a free discourse completion task over a 14-month span.

Part 2 focuses on interaction at the host dinner table to look at socialization processes, the sharing of folk beliefs through stories and the co-construction of identity and interactional norms. 'The socialization of taste' applies a language socialization framework (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986b) to investigate how Indonesians, through their discourse moves, socialize learners into the Indonesian world of food, which includes themes such as food as pleasure and as an ethnic identity marker. Adopting a similar theoretical framework, 'Joint construction of cultural folk beliefs' examines the dynamic process of joint storytelling between JFL learners and their hosts and presents evidence that co-telling provides an opportunity for transforming and negotiating one's stereotypical cultural beliefs and social identity. Continuing with the theme of a bi-directional flow of linguistic and cultural resources, 'Norms of interaction' illustrates how the interactional dynamics in the Japanese host family are mutually negotiated providing opportunities for language learning and the co-construction of identity.

Part 3 begins with 'Negotiation in a Japanese study abroad setting' comparing interaction between American students and Japanese interlocutors at home and in the classroom for frequency and type of negotiation, modified output and focus on form. Within the framework of negotiation studies (e.g. Long, 1981a; Pica, 1993), the data are also analyzed to illustrate the opportunities and processes of language learning in the two contexts. Also focusing on instructional contexts, 'Variable learner competence in the study abroad classroom' draws on learner journals and classroom observations to investigate how Japanese learners of English were differentially incorporated into the classroom during their time in the United States. It is suggested that interactions between program-wide decisions, the reception received at the school level and dynamics specific to individual classroom cultures contribute to how learners' competence is locally co-constructed.

The concluding two studies in Part 4 investigate the relationship between contextual and learner factors and gains in linguistic proficiency. Based on learner diaries, informal and oral proficiency interviews, 'Study-abroad social networks, motivation and attitudes' explores the relationship between the ability of learners to create social networks (Milroy, 1987), their motivation towards learning, attitudes toward the host culture and ultimate acquisition as measured by oral proficiency interviews. Program variables (e.g. volunteer work, host family involvement) and learner investment are shown to interact in influencing ultimate gains in proficiency. Also touching on the role of program design, 'Language learning strategies in the study abroad context' reports on the effects of



program variables, personal variables and self-reported changes in proficiency on the development of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). The findings of this multi-program study suggest that students who increase their strategy use abroad are more likely to experience gains in language skills and that specific program-related factors could influence the development of learning strategies.

While each of these studies offers a privileged window into learner experiences in a variety of contexts and addresses important theoretical issues current in the field of second language acquisition, read together they help portray the wonderfully complex experience that study abroad constitutes. Together, the studies in this volume paint a picture of the individual learner struggling with choices at the micro-level which are shaped by sociolinguistic concerns (e.g. how to take leave in the target language and which second person pronoun to use). They document the socialization processes collaboratively constructed at the host dinner table and provide insight into how the conversational dynamics in both the home and classroom support language acquisition, while also acknowledging that both individual and program variables can play an instrumental role in facilitating, and sometimes restricting, opportunities to engage in negotiation, to improve one's learning strategies and to increase investment in learning processes.

In terms of theory and praxis, these studies bring a wide range of perspectives and invite readers to interrogate with the contributors the degree to which learner competence is constructed, to which motivation (or investment) is a fixed trait or shaped by interactions in the host context, and to which the acquisition of pragmatics is a cognitive or social process. The chapters suggest directions for further research, include implications for language teaching and provide recommendations for program development. Indeed, because of the various methodological and theoretical approaches, *Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts* is intended primarily for graduate students and advanced researchers investigating second language acquisition and socialization both in study abroad and in other contexts. In addition, this volume also promises to be a useful reference for educators involved in study abroad programs as it contributes to our understanding of the overseas sojourn.

# ***Acknowledgements***

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Finally, on behalf of all the contributors, we would like to express our appreciation to all those who participated in the studies presented in this volume – as program administrators, teachers, members of the host communities or the language learners themselves – who allowed us to closely scrutinize them in the interest of advancing our knowledge of second language acquisition particularly as it pertains to study abroad.

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# ***Transcription Conventions***

[	overlapped speech
=	latching
(0.5)	the number indicates the length of a pause in seconds
(.)	unmeasured micropause
( )	unclear utterance or (xxx), where each <i>x</i> indicates one unclear syllable
(( ))	commentary
::	sound stretch
WORD	loudness
◦ ◦	portions which are delivered in a quieter voice
-	cut-off
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation (full stop)
@word@	word said with laughter
.	
.	skipped turns
.	



## *Chapter 1*

# ***Evolving Threads in Study Abroad Research***

ETON CHURCHILL and MARGARET A. DuFON

### **Introduction**

For the second language acquisition (SLA) researcher, there are perhaps few contexts as potentially rich and complex as study abroad. On the one hand, concentrated time enjoyed by learners in the host context would appear to facilitate significant linguistic gains. On the other hand, pre-departure individual differences interact in complex ways and are affected by the study abroad context, itself conditioned by cultural norms and factors related to program design. Adding to these dynamics, patterns of acquisition of skills and specific forms are far from linear and have proven difficult to consistently record based on pre-post tests. Given these interactions, it is not surprising that within-group differences are just as frequently reported as between-group differences and that these findings are supported by accounts in qualitative studies (see Coleman, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998; Freed, 1995a, 1998 for overviews; Huebner 1995b, 1998; Pellegrino, 1998 for discussions of research methods; and Regan, 1998; Pellegrino, 1998 respectively for reviews concentrating on sociolinguistics and conditions of learning experienced by the SA student).

In the present chapter, drawing primarily from studies published subsequent to the reviews cited above, we will focus on what is learned, how individual differences interact with proficiency gains, and how cultural and program related factors shape opportunities for contact with native speakers. We begin with the literature on gains in linguistic skills and then turn our attention to the area of pragmatics. We then address the research on individual differences concentrating on motivation, learning strategies and anxiety. Finally, we focus on the dynamics of language learning highlighting learner involvement in the host context, and on how engagement