

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

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Language Learning in Study Abroad: Social, Cultural, and Identity-Related Factors. Erasmus Students in Northern, Southern, and Eastern-European English as a Lingua Franca Contexts. Mocanu, Vasilica. (2023). PUV. ISBN: 9788411181952

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Keywords

Europe; foreign language learning; multilingual data; study abroad

1. Introduction

Following the social turn (Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2009) and multilingual turn (Diao & Trentman, 2021) in study abroad research and second language acquisition, Vasilica Mocanu's (2023) book *Language Learning in Study Abroad: Social, Cultural, and Identity-Related Factors* used mixed methods to understand the interplay between social, cultural, and identity-related factors with language learning and study abroad experiences in three different European contexts (i.e., Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe). Although the participants are all from the Erasmus+ program, the sociolinguistic context and the sociocultural environment of the three destinations differ. The book is a timely contribution to a more in-depth understanding of students' firsthand study abroad experiences, particularly within the context of European study abroad (SA) programs.

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2. Book Summary

Chapter 1 introduces the background and rationale of the study, which lays the background of the book. Mocanu discusses the importance of understanding language learning within SA programs, focusing on how social, cultural, and identity-related aspects may impact and be impacted by language acquisition. The chapter briefly reviews the evolution of research in this field, highlighting the shift from purely linguistic studies to those incorporating sociocultural perspectives, and emphasizes the need to explore the experiences of Erasmus students across different European contexts.

The following chapter examines previous research on how program variables, such as the length of stay and the nature of the host context, affect language learning outcomes. It also discusses the role of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in shaping the language learning experiences of Erasmus students, emphasizing the importance of pragmatic strategies in intercultural communication (Jenkins, 2007). Additionally, the chapter explores identity-related factors, arguing that the study abroad context enables students to reshape a sense of self and sometimes challenges them to negotiate new identities in an additional language. The chapter emphasizes the importance of considering neoliberal subjectivities, especially in SA contexts.

Chapter 3 outlines the mixed-methods approach used in the study (in this book, PRE and POST Likert-scale questionnaires and semi-structured interviews), combining qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the participants' SA experiences comprehensively. The chapter details the research design, including the selection of the Erasmus program as the focus of the study, the choice of locations (Oulu, Bucharest, and Lleida), and the participants' demographics.

Mocanu presents both quantitative and qualitative findings of the study in Chapter 4, focusing on how different factors, including the role of the host context, social, cultural, and linguistic contact, and identity-related factors (e.g., motivation, investment, and neoliberal rationales). The findings highlight the significance of local languages (and sociolinguistic complexity) and the degree of interaction with local communities. Individual differences in language ideologies within and across contexts are also discussed. The concept of "employability" in the neoliberal economy is highlighted, analyzing how language competencies and investment towards learning and using a language are perceived as linguistic capital that can enhance future career prospects. The perception of English in three different contexts is very distinctive, which

results in various degrees of investment in learning an additional language in the SA context.

In the final chapter, Mocanu synthesizes the main findings of the study, discussing their implications for applied linguistics and study abroad research. More specifically, compared to the Oulu and Lleida groups, Bucharest offers an environment that most enables the growth of personal points of view. It is exciting to note that Lleida is imagined as a place that provides opportunities to learn Spanish, which has proven to be close to the initial expectation. Regarding linguistic hierarchy, Mocanu discusses the perceived importance of different local languages (e.g., Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan) and English and how the perception of economic value contributes to the motivation and investment in shaping the SA experiences. Mocanu also discusses the study's limitations, such as the specific regional focus and the challenges of generalizing the findings. Longitudinal studies and the integration of more diverse contexts are needed for future research.

3. Book Contribution

This book adopts an interdisciplinary approach by integrating concepts from sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and identity theory to offer a holistic view of how social, cultural, and identity-related factors interact in language learning. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, the book provides rich and valuable context and lived experiences to the statistical findings. Notably, exploring English as a lingua franca within the Erasmus context is insightful, giving different perspectives comparing the traditional study abroad research in the Global North. Mocanu challenges traditional language learning paradigms by highlighting how ELF functions in multilingual and multicultural settings in the SA context. ELF serves as a pragmatic tool in some contexts, which echoes recent studies of ELF in applied linguistics in understanding the role of English in transnational experiences.

In sum, *Language Learning in Study Abroad: Social, Cultural, and Identity-Related Factors* is an important contribution to applied linguistics and study abroad research and offers valuable insights into the social and cultural dimensions of language learning. This book will be beneficial for students, educators, and researchers who are interested in the intersection of language learning, identity, and study abroad experiences. The interview data, mainly, are very interesting resources to read more in-depth to get a sense of the lived experiences of SA students. Combining the recent development in multilingual turn in SA research (Diao & Trentman, 2021), such data offers opportunities to

understand multilingual experiences and how these experiences may shape and reshape identities during transnational crossing. The regional focus, while insightful, could have been balanced with a discussion on how these findings speak to previous studies in different contexts, especially previous SA research in the Global North. As Mocanu mentioned, it will also be a future direction to include a more longitudinal design (perhaps also including ethnographic observation if the conditions allow) to understand the long-term impact of these experiences on students' language learning and identity development. The researcher's positionality will offer the audience some background on how the self-reported data might interact with the positionality of the researcher(s). The findings could also provide a more systematic summary towards the end of each section to offer a more straightforward summary of the different factors discussed.

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Author Biography

Yi Wang is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian and Asian American Studies at Stony Brook University. Her research focuses on the social and cultural aspects of language use and second language learning, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, including social network analysis. She investigates how identities such as race, ethnicity, and gender influence language learning experiences and ideologies within multilingual communities. Her work also includes research on study abroad and its impact on language learning and identity.

Editorial Note

This is the last book review to be published by *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. It was in progress before the Editorial Board voted to discontinue consideration of book reviews for publication in the Journal, as already outlined by the Editor in her [introduction to the April 2024 issue](#). No new book review submissions will be considered.