

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

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Researching Second Language Acquisition in the Study Abroad Learning Environment: An Introduction for Student Researchers, Christina L. Isabelli-García, Casilde A. Isabelli. Palgrave Pivot, Cham (2020). XXII, 138pp., ISBN: 978-3-030-25159-8

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Second language acquisition (SLA) research in study abroad (SA) contexts dates back to the 1960s and has grown in prominence since Freed's (1995) landmark work. Among the numerous titles on SA research, however, very few cater to inexperienced newcomers to the academic community. Against the backdrop, *Researching Second Language Acquisition in the Study Abroad Learning Environment: An Introduction for Student Researchers*, co-authored by Isabelli-García and Isabelli, serves as an invaluable resource tailor-made for novice researchers who wish to explore L2 development in SA experiences.

The book opens with an Introduction that mainly explains the history of language acquisition during a sojourn stay. It then overviews the subsequent six chapters, each covering a particular facet of the research line.

Chapter 1 introduces three fundamental factors of SA—sojourners, academic programs and accommodation. The authors make it clear that only those cross-border travelers who travel for scholarly purposes are the focus of

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the book. Their L2 development can be attributed to program types, components and duration, as well as housing arrangements.

Chapter 2 centers on the frequently adopted theories, perspectives and approaches of language acquisition in SA contexts. Regarding theories, the authors bring to the fore the social and cognitive paradigms of SLA, pointing out that input, negotiated interaction and output are perceived as three essential catalysts for learners' L2 enhancement. What follows is an overview of popular investigative approaches in the literature. The authors first introduce several well-established linguistic approaches, including generative, usage-based and sociolinguistic/variationist approaches. Additionally, since social dynamics have been shown to influence sojourners' L2 development, three signature sociocultural approaches (i.e., the Acculturation Model, L2 socialization and SA as a social ecosystem) also receive particular consideration in the chapter.

Chapter 3 shifts the attention to learner factors. Affective factors, including tolerance for ambiguity, openness and willingness to communicate, are major indicators of language growth. Responsiveness to the host community fosters interaction with native speakers and hence L2 attainment. Meanwhile, language improvement in SA is also related to learners' cognitive abilities (e.g., language aptitude and learning style). Notably, the authors give special heed to personal identity (e.g., race, ethnicity and heritage language), which has become an emerging perspective in SLA research in SA settings due to its mixed impact on L2 attainment. In addition, they also call for more caring attention to LGBTQ learners and students with disabilities, suggesting that humanistic support should be given to these learners in SA environments.

Chapter 4 compares the effects of SA and at-home instruction on L2 proficiency indicated by language and sociocultural development. A revisit of existing empirical investigations suggests that the former learning condition fails to guarantee considerably superior L2 performance regarding linguistic structures and language abilities. Likewise, it is too early to safely conclude that SA has a significant advantage in bolstering communicative competence, which facilitates effective exchanges with people from various cultural backgrounds (Heinzmann et al., 2015). At best, there seems to be an edge in interactional and intercultural sub-competences according to pertinent studies.

Chapter 5 touches upon research methodology, with an emphasis on commonly applied data measures. In quantitative research, evoked language

use, metalinguistic judgments and spontaneous productions are frequently used data-gathering techniques (e.g., role-plays and picture description for oral production; and discourse completion and textual feature evaluation for written production). Regarding qualitative investigations, case studies (e.g., focus groups and questionnaires) and narrative inquiries are typical data collection tools. Notably, mixed-methods designs also have been widely employed as they combine qualitative and quantitative research to achieve multi-faceted insights.

Chapter 6 concludes the monograph by offering promising directions for language acquisition studies in SA contexts. The authors demonstrate noticeable research gaps and underexplored variables in the existing literature, pointing out that future investigations could examine race and heritage identity, pedagogical activities and interventions, service learning and internships and program assessment and outcomes.

The book has at least three major strengths. First, it well serves its intended purpose of providing entry-level guidance on conducting SA research for beginning SLA researchers. In addition to a comprehensive description of essential research components (e.g., theoretical underpinnings, investigation approaches, research objectives and methodologies), the book features several interactive sections, including lead-in questions, self-reflections, content-related activities and research project planning. All of this renders it a thought-provoking and handy instruction manual suitable for student researchers. Second, the book is informative for other stakeholders of SA, such as L2 teachers and education institutions. For instance, Chapter 4 informs language instructors to pay extra attention to the linguistic abilities that are challenging to develop in natural interaction out of class. Moreover, since demographic backgrounds may influence willingness to communicate and openness to the host culture (Chapter 3), school administrators should carefully consider the demographic composition in the international classroom to yield satisfactory learning outcomes. Third, the book should be praised for its reader-friendliness. Readers can learn about the fundamentals of language acquisition in SA contexts via a light-hearted read thanks to the book's plain language, informative charts and tables, systematic structure and intelligible writing style.

Nonetheless, the book has some room for improvement. While it focuses on basic notions, theories and methodologies to cater to novice researchers, it could be complemented by a cursory introduction of more present concepts and

practices of SLA related to SA research, such as translanguaging (Quan, 2021), language learning enjoyment (Dewey et al., 2018) and digital aids in language classrooms (Durbidge, 2019). An up-to-date panorama of the research landscape may stimulate novel academic explorations of beginning researchers.

In a nutshell, this concise book is a wealth of elementary yet essential knowledge about SLA in sojourn experiences. It can be a stepping stone to more advanced volumes on the matter. Therefore, this book is highly recommended to (early career) researchers, L2 instructors, administrators and anyone interested in L2 teaching and learning issues in SA contexts.

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