Chapter 4

The Academic Second Language (L2) Socialization and Acculturation of International Exchange Students

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ABSTRACT

As internationalization efforts intensify across the globe, the number of higher education (HE) students who are gaining some form of international educational experience is on the rise. A large percentage of study abroad participants are from East Asian nations (Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Korea, Macau SAR, Taiwan), and most enroll in English language enhancement modules or English-medium content courses during their stay abroad, depending on their level of proficiency. To better meet their needs and ease their adjustment in an unfamiliar academic and social environment, it is imperative for researchers to conduct systematic studies that delve into study abroad experience. This chapter reports on a mixed-method study that investigated the second language socialization and acculturation of international exchange students from a Hong Kong university who took part in a semester-long stay in their host country. The findings have implications for both home and host institutions.

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the number of students who have been studying outside their home country for part of their tertiary education has increased dramatically. Among them, a significant number are from East Asian nations (Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Korea, Macau SAR, Mainland China, and Taiwan) and most study in a second language (L2) while abroad, with English the most common medium-of-instruction. To facilitate their L2 socialization and acculturation in the host environment, it is imperative for study abroad researchers to conduct systematic studies that help us to acquire a deeper understanding of student needs, expectations, and challenges. The analysis of this data can provide useful direction for pedagogical interventions both in home and host institutions.

This chapter reports on a study that investigated the developmental trajectories of undergraduates from a bilingual (Chinese-English) university in Hong Kong who joined a semester-long international exchange program. Many elements have been scrutinized, however, in this work discussion largely centers on the participants' perceptions of, attitudes towards, and reactions to diverse educational practices.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

As this chapter centers on the academic L2 socialization of international exchange students, the literature review covers the following topics: acculturation and L2 socialization, culture confusion, and 'cultures of learning', with particular attention paid to L2 study abroad participants.

Acculturation and L2 Socialization

Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis and Sam (2011, p. 464) defined acculturation as 'changes in a cultural group or individuals as a result of contact with another cultural group'. This contact may bring about changes in both parties e.g., study abroad students and host nationals, particularly in individuals who are receptive to novel ideas and 'ways of being'.

Within the context of border crossings, Berry et al. (2011) depict adaptation as the process whereby newcomers employ strategies to deal with the natural 'ups and downs' of acculturation. Some scholars distinguish between *psychological* adaptation i.e., the nurturing of personal well-being and self-esteem, and *sociocultural* adaptation i.e., the ability to cope with everyday life in the wider society (Ward,

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