

Second Language Acquisition in a Study Abroad Context: International Students' Perspectives of the Evolution of Their 'Second Language Self'

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Abstract : This study examines the experiences of graduate international students in Study Abroad (SA) in order to understand the evolution of their second language (L2) skills during the period of their sojourn abroad. The study documents students' perspectives through analysis of interview data situated within the context of their overall SA experience. Based on a phenomenological approach, the study focuses on a sample of nine graduate students with at least one year of SA experience. Gass & Mackey's (2007) interaction approach and Vygotsky's (1962) sociocultural theory help frame the study within the discourse of second language acquisition (SLA) in SA, such as to highlight the effects of SA on L2 skills of advanced-level learners. The findings of the study are first presented as individual case vignettes where students' interpretations of their personal experiences are described in entirety, followed by an analysis across the cases that highlight emergent themes. The results of this study show that the linguistic outcomes of international students studying abroad are highly individualized. Although students reported to have improved some of their L2 skills, they also reported a lack of improvement in other L2 skills, most of which differed by case. What emerges is that besides contextual factors, students' pre-program exposure to L2, interactions with NSs, frequency of L2 use in context, and personal beliefs contribute to their linguistic gains in SA.

Keywords : context, interaction, second language acquisition, study abroad

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