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Book review: Social interaction, identity and language learning during residence abroad

Mitchell, R., Tracy-Ventura, N., & McManus, K. (Eds.). (2015). *Social interaction, identity and language learning during residence abroad*. Essex: European Second Language Association. 309 pp. ISBN: 978-1-329-43044-0.

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This edited volume is a compilation of select, extended papers from a conference on Residence Abroad, Social Networks and Second Language (L2) Learning that took place at the University of Southampton, UK, in 2013. All of the chapters address two or more of the main themes in the title: social interaction, identity, and language learning in the context of residence abroad. They contribute to the dialogue in this area by presenting studies conducted using a variety of methods and set in a range of contexts, expanding our understanding of residence abroad and challenging researchers to re-examine commonly-held assumptions.

The contexts of residence abroad in this book all have L2 learning as their focus, as opposed to study abroad in the participants' first language. Social interaction is examined as the relationships study abroad sojourners form with locals and other sojourners as well as the frequency and quality of the communication in those relationships. Specifically, these relationships can be examined as social networks. Identity is viewed as a dynamic construct of the sojourner's sense of self, which has an influence on and is influenced by the experience of residence abroad and the language learning that takes part during that time.

The book is organized into four sections. The first section contains papers from the two plenary speakers from the conference. Chapter 1 by Ulrich Teichler serves to set the stage by providing an overview of residence abroad research in Europe and statistics on the Erasmus program, noting that changes in global mobility have made such programs less unique and have required program organizers to focus on the quality of, rather than the size of, programs as they move forward. Chapter 2 by James Coleman addresses the theoretical approaches in social interaction, revealing how the concept of social circles can shed light on the socialization patterns of sojourners.

The second section contains five chapters focused on language learning in a variety of residence abroad placements. Social interaction is investigated in regard to the language socialization, language proficiency, affective gains, *willingness to communicate* (Dörnyei, MacIntyre, & Alastair, 2014), and types of communities of practice of sojourners. Two of the chapters focus on settings where students are learning Chinese, Russian, and Spanish, while the three other chapters focus on residence in France. This section provides a look at a range of studies from micro-ethnographic to large-scale studies of year-long programs, revealing the language learning that can occur in these different contexts.

In the third section, the five chapters highlight social interaction. The methodologies are varied: from interviews, to speaking journals, online platform participation, questionnaires, and social media use. These varied methods encourage and document social interaction, illustrating the unique aspects of social interaction that each can reveal, while at the same time shedding light on the challenges and constraints of asking students to describe or document their interactions as well as the challenges of social interaction during residence abroad. This reader finds herself drawn especially to Chapter 12. Here, Rikki Campbell looks at students' use of social media, including Facebook and Twitter, both during and after their sojourn in Japan. This contribution is timely in

light of the increasing interest of study abroad researchers in social media use among sojourners and how that impacts their language learning (Back, 2013; Godwin-Jones, 2016). Yet Campbell's work is also significant in that she shows how L2 use in social media is often not sustained after the return from the sojourn, suggesting that L2 use is subject to influence by a variety of factors, many of which have not been researched in depth.

The fourth section contains two chapters that focus on social identities. Although set in divergent contexts (Egypt and Germany), these two chapters are well-situated to draw the book to a close since they tie together social interaction and identity as they reveal how students position themselves during study abroad programs focused on language learning. Most salient are the students' stories of the challenges of interacting with "native speakers" and of whose cultural assumptions come into conflict with their own sense of self, especially in regard to gender and national identities.

Overall, this book provides an overview of the research that is currently being done in the study of residence abroad, with a strong presence of studies about European programs. It presents an assortment of studies, some quantitative, some qualitative, of various sizes, some longitudinal, and some short-term. Each provides a strong theoretical base and a unique view of social interaction, identity, and language learning in residence abroad.

References

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