



Book Review

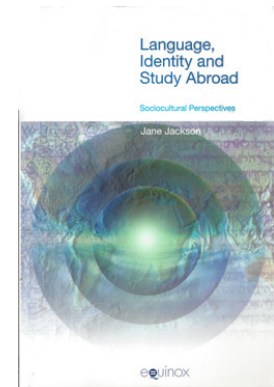
Language, Identity and Study Abroad: Sociocultural Perspectives

by Jane Jackson

London: Equinox Publishing Ltd. (2008)

ISBN-13 (Hardback) 9781845531416

(Paperback) 9781845531423



This is a qualitative research study involving four female university students from Hong Kong with varying levels of English ability. The students participated in a five-week study abroad (SA) programme in the U.K. as well as a one-semester pre-departure orientation and a series of post-return activities over one semester. The book is organized in a pattern similar to many ethnographic studies with an introduction, literature review, study description, and discussion of possible research implications. From a cohort of 15 English majors who participated in a 2004 SA programme, the author selected a contrastive sample of four individuals venturing overseas for the first time. Drawing from their diary entries, language use logs, interviews, surveys, essays, group interaction sessions, as well as her own fieldnotes, Jackson highlights how SA experiences vary widely from participant to participant. Although some readers might feel bogged down by some theoretical discussions in this text, its case studies offer compelling narratives of how complex linguistic, social, cultural, political, and psychological factors shape SA experiences.

Audience

This volume will most appeal to those organizing, chaperoning, or teaching in SA programmes. It might also interest researchers in cross-cultural communication, sociolinguistics, and second language acquisition. Jackson, who has been teaching intercultural communication, language, culture and research classes at the Chinese University of Hong Kong since 1995, wrote this book with two objectives. The first is to explore “the relationship of identity to intercultural communicative competence” (p.11) and relate this with poststructuralist concepts such as ‘outsideness’ (Bakhtin, 1981), ‘encapsulated marginality’ (Bennett, 1993), and ‘thirdspace’ (Bhabha, 1994, Kramsch, 1999). A second aim of this text is to give voice to SA participants, illustrating “the complex, deeply personal processes of language and cultural learning and identity (re)construction.” Her use of first-person narratives makes the theoretical concepts easier to grasp.

Theoretical Grounding

Although Jackson strives to transcend the gulf between theory and praxis and frankly acknowledges no single theory can adequately account for SA outcomes (p. 198), she nonetheless provides a pastiche of current views concerning language, culture, and identity. Ways that Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Bourdieu, and others have shaped poststructuralist notions of identity, language, and culture are briefly highlighted. Detailed information about identity negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1999, 2005), which provides the main theoretical backbone of this work, is provided. Those interested in knowing how SA might impact identity should become acquainted with the core assumptions of that theory, which are summarized online by Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2014).

Readers who have already studied socio-linguistics can probably skim through Chapters 2 and 3. Novice readers might prefer texts such as Baldwin, Coleman, González, and Shenoy-Packer's *Intercultural Communication for Everyday Life* (2014) or the author's *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication* (2014).

Some Pros and Cons

One nice feature of Jackson's work is that it relies on thick descriptions of how each SA participant changed over a 22-month period. Another admirable feature is how the informants' experiences are often linked with existing theories. A third feature we found particularly appealing about this book was its description of possible pre-departure and post-return activities. To her credit, Jackson also does a good job of weaving the various themes of this book together in its final two chapters. She emphasizes how personal traits such as resilience to stress, tolerance of ambiguity, and willingness to step outside of familiar norms can often shape SA outcomes. At the same time, she emphasizes how supportive host families, well-designed SA programmes, and competent staff in fostering student growth can also foster student growth. Jackson reminds us that merely placing SA participants in a host speech community will not necessarily result in significant linguistic or cultural learning. It takes a lot of work and "a significant investment" (p. 218) from all major stakeholders for SA to be successful.

Two methodological concerns about this book are worth mentioning. The first was about coding: all of the data was coded solely by the author-researcher. According to Gorden (1992, p. 180), a better practice would have at least two researchers do some kind of independent coding. A second concern – and problem common to many cross-cultural studies – was about the translation protocols: part of Jackson's data was in Cantonese and unfortunately the translation protocols were not explicit. Indeed, it is sometimes unclear what language the informants were using and/or whether any English errors had been corrected.

The Bottom Line

The book provides lucid etic and emic descriptions of four SA participants. Since all of the participants were highly motivated female English majors with GPAs of 3.3 or higher and C1 and C2 CEFR levels prior to departure, it should be remembered that they differ in many ways from Japanese tertiary norms. Nonetheless, some common threads that run through many experiences described in this text also shed light on what many Japanese overseas sojourners experience. Time-constrained teachers and administrators wanting practical advice about how to run SA programmes may wish to focus on the final two chapters of this book. Others desiring to get a better handle on the overall theory may find Ting-Toomey and Chung's *Intercultural Communication* (2011) (as well as the previously mentioned texts) a more approachable introduction. For those in between, however, curious about SA participant perspectives and also wanting to bridge the interface between theory and narrative, this work provides thoughtful reading.

- Reviewed by Allan Goodwin & Tim Newfields

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* [The dialogic imagination: Four essays]. (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.) Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. (Original work published 1975).
- Baldwin, J. R., Means-Coleman, R. R., González, R. & Shenoy-Packer, S. (2014). *Intercultural Communication for Everyday Life*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bennet, M. J. (1993). Towards ethnorelativism: A development model for intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed). *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-34). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Gorden, R. L. (1992). *Basic Interviewing Skills*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press
- Kramsch, C. (1999). Thirdness: The intercultural stance. In T. Vestergaard (Ed.). *Language, Culture, and Identity* (pp. 41-58). Aalborg University Press.
- Jackson, J. (2014). *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*. London: Routledge.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating Across Cultures*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (2005). Identity negotiation theory: Crossing cultural boundaries. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed). *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication* (pp. 211- 234). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ting-Toomey, S. & Chung, L. C. (2011). *Intercultural Communication* (Second Edition). Oxford University Press.
- Ting-Toomey, T. & Dorjee, T. (2014). Language, identity, and culture: multiple identity-based perspectives. In T. M. Holtgraves (Ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Social Psychology*, (Forthcoming). Retrieved from www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199838639.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199838639-e-013



Japan Association for Language Teaching Study Abroad SIG

全国語学教育学会研修研究会

<http://jalt-sa.org/PDF/7-2Goodwin-Newfields.pdf>