

# Promoting Intercultural Learning among Anglophone Students during Residence Abroad.

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## Overview

- Residence Abroad in the current UK Higher Education climate.
- LANG-SNAP Project: General background.
- Exploring our oral interviews: Do participants show evidence of having developed intercultural awareness?
- Some implications of these findings for practical application.
- Discussion.



# RESIDENCE ABROAD:

What for?

## What is expected from a period of RA:

“Outward mobility is essential if UK higher education is to develop graduates who are equipped to compete on the global labour market, and can promote UK business and diplomatic interests worldwide. It also enhances the international profile of UK higher education, as students on overseas placements are excellent ambassadors for the UK.

Research has shown that employers worldwide value graduates with **global competences and international cultural awareness**. [...] institutions are increasingly highlighting the role of study and work placements [abroad] in the development and acquisition of skills for life and work.”

*(UK Strategy for Outward Mobility, The UKHE International Unit, 2013)*

# Other examples:

**Intercultural understanding and openness.** There is no substitute for having to live in, cope with, and ultimately learn to function successfully within the rules and unwritten conventions of a foreign culture. This includes a great deal more than learning its language: it means living its culture, and understanding its history as the lived experience. This can only really be learnt through a substantial period of residence and work in the foreign environment. This provides a life experience unobtainable in the classroom. Furthermore, students are potential ambassadors for the UK in foreign countries, acting therefore as intermediaries for and between cultures and societies often returning with a more nuanced and critical understanding of their own.

**Source:** *Valuing the Year Abroad. A Position Statement.* The British Academy. 2012.



International mobility can also benefit the students' home countries – helping to build capacity and expand participation in tertiary education, to provide opportunities for further learning in disciplines unavailable at home, and to support developing more inter-culturally aware and employable graduates.

**Source:** *The Rationale for Sponsoring Students to Undertake International Study: an Assessment of National Student Mobility Scholarship Programmes.* Going Global. British Council/DAAD. 2014.

ML students: Intercultural Aware Language Specialists... but,

**ARE THEY?**

## Previous research:

- During RA, stereotypes of the host community are not always disarticulated, and **they may even be reinforced** (Coleman, 1996)
- Counter to expectations of an immersion experience, the social **integration of RA/SA participants with NS communities is often problematic** (Ife, 2000; Meier & Daniels, 2011)
- **Erasmus students band together** in a shared temporary international community of practice (often using English as a lingua franca), and /or in national groups (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006; Kalocsai, 2011; Peckham et al, 2012)



# LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND SOCIAL NETWORKS ABROAD PROJECT

LANG-SNAP (2011-2013)

ESRC Funded Project: RES-062-23-2996.



## LANG-SNAP: Data collection period

| When          | Test                      |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| May 2011      | Pretest (Southampton)     |
| November 2011 | Visit 1                   |
| March 2012    | Visit 2                   |
| June 2012     | Visit 3                   |
| October 2012  | Post-test 1 (Southampton) |
| February 2013 | Post-test 2 (Southampton) |

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## **EVIDENCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS.**

## References to the host culture during interviews: LOCATION

**Students praised or criticized their location depending on how ‘traditional’ students perceived their location to be.**

The contrast/preference between big cities or small towns was often linked to the possibility of confirming their pre-conceived idea of the host country. **Students 102 & 107 (Fr)**, for example, spoke enthusiastically about their opportunity to see a more ‘typical’ Paris, guided by their French boyfriends.

“Cancún **no es como el resto de México**. Es un poco americanizada quizá. Pero, pero me gusta... y tiene sus propios valores. **El estilo de vida claro es un poco diferente**. Preferiría que hubiera algo para hacer algo **cultural** por ejemplo, porque no hay mucho que hacer en Cancún. Este no hay mucho de este tipo.” (177b, PRdM)

## References to the host culture during interviews: FOOD & DRINK

Wine (Fr)

Tortillas de  
maíz

Mezcal

Tapas

Patisseries

Chorizo

Quesadillas

Croissants

Red wine "Rioja, ahora  
siempre Rioja" (151cTV)

## References to the host culture during interviews: FOOD & DRINK

### Pre-conceived ideas are challenged:

“I like the food, but **before coming here I thought it was going to be better**, because tapas are ok, and it’s great that they are given to you for free, but many of them are fried and greasy... and so...” (168cNTV)

### Maintaining home cultural practices:

“...they eat too little for breakfast, then a lunch and then a sort of supper and then at about ten or eleven at night, dinner! And I can’t eat that late or that very much that late. **So I still eat as if I were in England**” (165bNTV)

Geof & Byram (2002): “...often learners in this situation find ways of establishing islands of their own reality...”

## References to the host culture during interviews: SOCIAL PRACTICES

### Perceived differences between ways of doing things at home and in their host community:

#### **MOSTLY POSITIVE:**

- Long coffee/lunch breaks (France)
- “Vida relajada” (“Lo que dicen de ‘mañana, mañana’ es verdad” 151bNTV)
- Night clubs opening hours
- Siesta (Spain)
- Drinking habits (one glass for the evening)

#### **NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS:**

- Disorganization of host universities
- Additional bureaucracy
- Shop opening hours
- Gossip (Mex.)
- Treatment to women (discrimination in a shop: Mex.)

Mughan, T. (1999): “The question of language/content integration which preoccupies most foreign language course design is considered not to be critical to the development of modular, intercultural foreign language studies which will enhance the employability and mobility of language graduates” (59)

# **SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS**

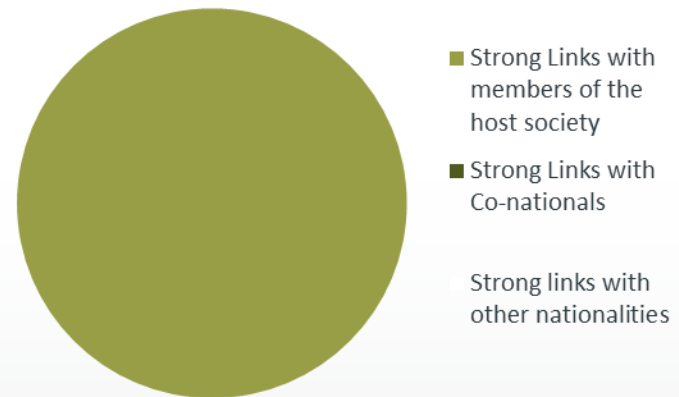
What counts as 'interculturality'?



## Participant 160 (Mexico, male): Is he intercultural?

- Plenty of examples of his life as an islander (means of transport, food, daily routine)
- Evidence of his flexibility to live in a society that challenged his 'primary and secondary socialization' (gossip, corruption, limited infrastructure & transport in the island).
- Adapted to the family rules that applied for his and his (local) girlfriend's home.
- Made explicit efforts to adopt the local accent and vocabulary.

### Socialized with (Top 5)

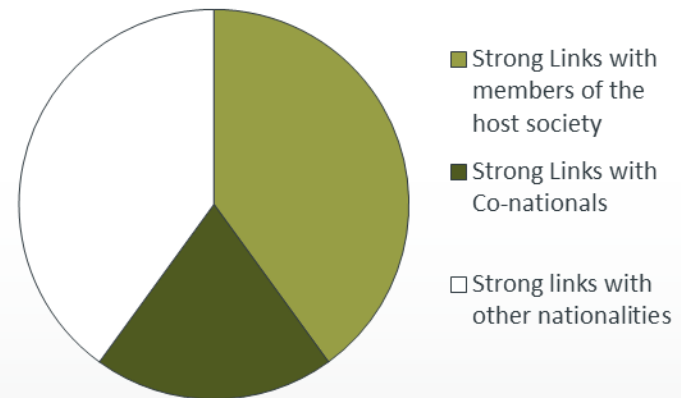


“ And then at about twelve I go to sleep in my hammock... it's incredible, I sleep so well in my hammock...” (160cPRdM)

## Participant 152 (Spain – Erasmus, female): Is she intercultural?

- Lives with two Erasmus students, and two Spanish students.
- Keeps constantly in contact with her family in the UK, and one of her top 5 contacts is another English girl.
- Socializes with her flatmates, their friends and the Erasmus society (mentions modules she takes with other Erasmus and doing class-related group work with Spanish students).
- Describes the “Noche vieja universitaria de Salamanca” as an example of a cultural event that all International students attend, since it’s so spectacular and ‘Spanish’.

### Socialized with (Top 5)

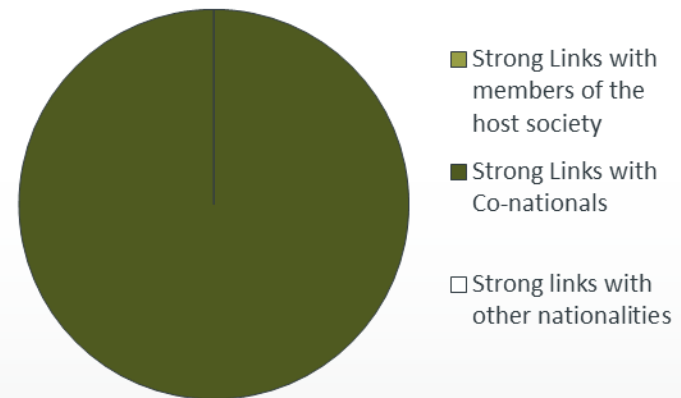


“I don’t want to go back, really. It’s because this is a city for students, it’s young... and they are used to having foreign people, so they are happy to have us here” (152bNTV)

## Participant 180 (Spain – TA, female): Is she intercultural?

- Spend her year in a district where Euskera is spoken more than Spanish.
- Lives & hangs out with other four British girls (TAs all of them).
- Doesn't spend time with the teachers at school because they speak Euskera among themselves.
- But does manage to establish a few links with members of the local society through the teachers at school who asked her to teach English to their friends' children.
- Evidence of maintaining her own habits as much as possible (eg. eating habits).

### Socialized with (Top 5)



“The most difficult thing is the lunchbreak, because they won't eat until 3pm and I feel hungry before then, so I take my lunch and my dinner, because I can't wait to have dinner at 9pm” (180cPRdM)

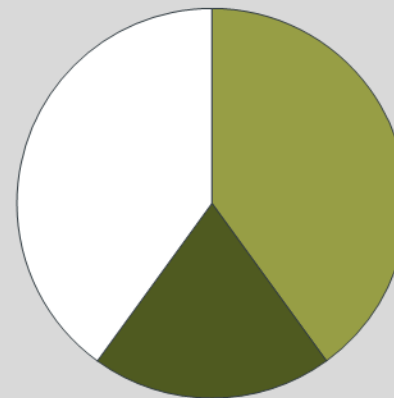
# INTEGRATED = INTERCULTURAL?

160



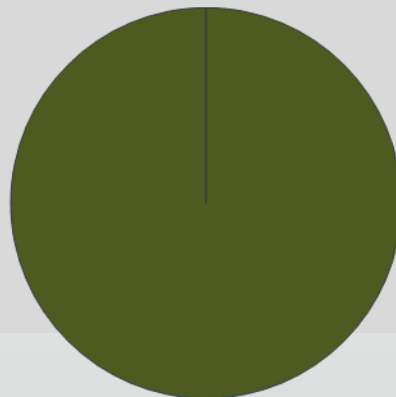
- Strong Links with members of the host society
- Strong Links with Co-nationals
- Strong links with other nationalities

152



- Strong Links with members of the host society
- Strong Links with Co-nationals
- Strong links with other nationalities

180



- Strong Links with members of the host society
- Strong Links with Co-nationals
- Strong links with other nationalities

## **SOME CONCLUSIONS**

What we've learned so far

## Some conclusions

- As temporary sojourners may and do travel with a (stereotypical) pre-conception of the host society they wish to find (Norton, 1995/2011). Our findings confirm that some stereotypes are challenged, but when encountered with an unexpected version of the host society, **students don't seem to be able to relate their observation/experience to their "cultural" (ie. content) studies** (Romero de Mills, 2008; Johnston et al, 2012). In some cases these stereotypes are reinforced (Coleman, 1996)
- The vast majority of the ML undergraduates are, like our participants, young; minds in development in more than one sense (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Mitchell, 2014). Thus, their need to form "islands of their own reality" (Geof & Byram, 2002)

(cont.)

- However, **it is still possible to observe in most cases important changes or ‘moments of realization’** that are **the start** of a successful integration into the host society.
- These interviews show evidence of participants’ **successful processes of adaptability and flexibility**, which in turn, allow different degrees of **integration**...

But, of interculturality?

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

Discussion: What's on the agenda?



**If we are to prepare students, we need to understand the process ourselves:**

- **Is ‘interculturality’ the same as ‘integration’?**
- **Is this a ‘teachable’ skill? If so, WHAT and HOW can it be taught?**
- **By language tutors necessarily or a different kind of professional/academic?**
- **When/where in the curriculum would this agenda fit in?**
- **Issues of TRANSFERABILITY.**
- **Assessment?**

**Thank you**

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