

Discursive constructions of transformative experiences in (interviews from) a study abroad program

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Intro:

Our focus:

- transformative learning in study abroad
- students' own perceptions as described in interviews (not factual/objective “truth” about cultures)
- participants' perspective: making learning visible

Our study abroad program:

- Canadian “summer language school” in Mannheim, Germany
- 6 weeks July – August
- first time in 2014: cohort of 9 students
- for-credit second-year German courses for UW students
- classroom instruction and field trip/excursion-based learning with local students

Data and Method:

Data:

- 5 summer school students participating in interviews with graduate student interviewers
- Interviews pre, during and after SA
- Selected excerpts for analysis

Sample interview questions:

- Can you think of an experience you have had where something happened that you knew was somehow culturally “wrong”?
- Can you think of an experience that you were worried about previously that actually turned out to be surprisingly easy/pleasant/fun?
- Can you think of an experience that you were not worried about previously that actually turned out to be very difficult to handle?
- What kinds of things would have been helpful to know before you left?
- What are the most important relationships to you during your time in Germany?
- What are/ were you hoping to get out of your time in Germany?
- What do you think you learned while you were abroad?

Research focus:

Research questions:

- What do participants perceive as significant in shaping their linguistic and cultural identities?
 - What do they perceive as significant experiences?
 - How do they describe those as learning experiences, i.e. as moments that triggered changes that can be regarded as identity changes?

Research background:

- Identity and positioning (Benwell & Stokoe 2009; Harré & Van Langenhove 1991)
- Study abroad: identity (Kringler 2004, 2010, 2013) and transcultural/symbolic competence (Kramsch 2013; Kramsch & Whiteside 2008)
- Method: interaction analysis (Sidnell & Stivers 2013)

Example 1: Becky_i 21:08, 793-94, “figured out”

min 21:08

778 INT: do you have any feelings there:,
779 or do you just think oh it's different.=I have to deal with it.
780 (.)
“thinking” gaze upward
slight head shake ***slight shoulder shrug***
781 BEC: *uh *(0.2)** I think ↑it's ***f↑ine.*=it's just*** di[fferent.]
782 INT: [okay.]
783 it's [just] different [okay.]
[*smiles*] [*nod *nod]
784 BEC: [*°yea:h.°*] [*yea:h=*ah.] <<smile voice> I've go-
moves hands in gesturing position
785 I've got *like a* system go- like going.>=
=so I don't like (.) buy too much,
786 INT: m_h[m,
[*swipe w/r/hand*
787 BEC: [and while they're *scanning,*=
bagging gesture
788 =I *put a few things* in my backpack?
moving items sideways gesture
789 BEC: and then *grab the other [things°] off the table;*
790 INT: [°y:eah.°]
hands/arms back to home position
791 BEC: °and then finish *up.° .h*

Example 2: Becky_r 03:33, 73-146, “day of rest”

113 INT: yeah.=nod
114 BEC: u:m it's i guess a public like (.) day of rest.
C nods
115 INT: *(0.4)
116 BEC: um (.) cause i know* in um °hh (in a-)
117 i'm not sure if it is in ukraine;
118 but i just know like (.) throughout my life my: mom
119 and my grandma and my dad would always tell me like-
119a °h <<quoting> no becky don't do-
120 eh it's sunday don't do any work;
121 like don't do don't clean your room don't do homework
122 just just relax.>
123 °h i'll be like **i don't understand why**;
124 so i'm not gonna.
125 *nod nod nod*
126 BEC: so i always like did homework and so. *and stuff.*
127 BEC: °hh um and **now i just kinda get it** and it just kinda=
C smiles, nods
128 =clicks that *it's like °it's your relaxing day;°*

Example 2 cont.

129 BEC: even though i di:d like um 'h still do homework while
130 i was in germany on sundays.
131 INT: okay.
132 BEC: um (.) ah i still took the time to like go out and
133 like relax a bit.
134 INT: m_hm.
135 BEC: hang out with some friends-
136 BEC: even if it's like ove:r like lunch;
C nods
137 *(0.2)
138 BEC: you know.
139 (0.2)
140 BEC: yeah.*
141 INT: just to do some stuff with other people.
142 BEC: m_hm.
143 INT: okay.
144 BEC: get away from the work.
145 INT: okay.
146 (0.2)
147 INT: and wha' what what other kinds of differences;
148 i mean that's a pretty that's a pretty big one.

Summary of observations:

Identity as described in these interviews: noticing changes about themselves, e.g.:

- Ex. 1: becoming a resourceful and successful participant in local encounters
- Ex. 2: developing symbolic competence by positioning oneself with regard to different cultural practices
- Other examples: dealing with difficult identity issues: going from a successful learner of German in Canada to an inexperienced/struggling learner of German in Germany

Transformative includes:

- figuring out complex interactional phenomena and how to navigate and manipulate them
- repositioning oneself culturally by (re-)evaluating and adopting certain new practices

Implications for pre-departure training:

Awareness raising:

- non-linear identity development is a part of study abroad
- identity (positioning) is context-dependent and changing
- encourage/force reevaluation of held perspective and beliefs
- sources prompting change can be external (ex. 1) or internal (ex. 2)
- transformational experiences may be positive or negative

Training method:

- work with transcript of interactions (e.g. study abroad experience interviews, interactions in different settings)

Thank you!

Danke!

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Addl. Example: Dana 11:17, 409-426, “the nearest atm”

409 INT: have you had any language issues since you've
410 been here? with german?
411 DANA: no: like i've TRIED to talk to someone, like ah
412 they were asking me directions,=so: where's the
413 nearest (.) atm, and i'm like oh there's one in
414 parADeplatz
415 INT: okay
416 DANA: and then they stared at me sort of blankly
417 an- i'm like (.) (n-yeah) in the parADeplatz
418 like is there anywhere=is there anyone NEARer?
419 INT: yeah
420 DANA: and i'm like no i don't know this: city
421 INT: yeah
422 DANA: yeah
423 INT: and you were doing that in german or english?
424 DANA: in: german
425 INT: in german?
426 DANA: yeah