Chapter Two

Researching Whole People and Whole Lives

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Abstract

In tracing the author's own emerging insights into study abroad, this chapter contextualises key aspects of the phenomenon. It queries widely accepted approaches and instruments, and asks whether, in attempting to achieve significant generalizations, we have sometimes distorted reality by narrowing our definitions and our measures, and by leaving crucial information unconsidered or even unstated. The chapter challenges the legitimacy of the expression "the study abroad context", arguing that both contextual and individual variation contribute, together with social networks, to the essential fluidity and complexity of the study abroad experience. Elements of a recent long-term study illustrate a more comprehensive perspective.

Introduction

Study abroad researchers sometimes dismiss high individual variation as a nuisance factor undermining the neat patterns which quantitative Second Language Acquisition research seems to require. Building on my taxonomy of learning outcomes and contextual variables (Coleman, 2006a), I will argue instead that study abroad research can escape

the narrow confines of cognitive SLA and see its subjects not just as language learners, but as rounded people with complex and fluid identities and relationships which frame the way they live the study abroad experience.

Study abroad remains an ill-defined research domain, embracing related but disparate experiences. Research to date disproportionately addresses certain departure zones, notably North America and Europe, although typical study abroad patterns vary considerably even between these two contexts. And since the bulk of the growing number of studies focuses on language gains, the subject is framed only as a language learner. Such an approach provides only a partial picture of study abroad participants and the impact of study abroad on their lives.

This chapter is in some respects the account of a personal quest of discovery and reflection to find out more about what we may call "study abroad." My background is not that of a conventional applied linguist: as a specialist in French Renaissance literature, I stumbled, through sheer serendipity, via co-authoring of language teaching materials, and guiding students of French, to an academic research interest in many facets of foreign language learning, what makes it happen, and the environments in which it takes place. While I have sought during my career to compensate for the absence of formal training in applied linguistics, in research methods and in pedagogy, and there are no doubt many notions which still escape me, I hope I have along the way begun to comprehend what study abroad is.

Academic research is the process by which we attempt to understand a phenomenon. The phenomenon addressed in this chapter, generally known as "study abroad", can be approached from many directions, and as an outsider I have repeatedly

asked the wrong questions, or at least unconventional ones, which insiders feel no need to ask. From an administrative point of view, what can we do to make study abroad work? From an ethnographic point of view, what are its common practices and givens? From an enquirer's point of view, how have people explored it, and have they gone about it in the most appropriate and effective ways? From my current perspective as a lobbyist on behalf of modern languages, how can I persuade the UK Government that study abroad is worth supporting through policy and funding decisions, and persuade society as a whole to invest in it at a time of both globalization and economic constraint?

European Language Proficiency Survey

Fifteen years ago, in reporting a survey of over twenty thousand language students (Coleman, 1996), I sought to integrate my own personal and professional insights with the statistical findings. The European Language Proficiency Survey (ELPS) used a very efficient measure of global target language proficiency, the C-Test (Coleman, 1994), alongside a detailed questionnaire to profile students of French, German, Spanish and Russian in British and Irish universities, and was subsequently extended to include students of English in several continental European countries. The ELPS was guided by those who had developed the C-Test and brought genuine Second Language Acquisition (SLA) expertise to the study. The project involved a UK pre-pilot (N = 427), pilot (N = 3119) and main study (N = 18264, of whom 12477 participants were students of French, 3824 of German, 2462 of Spanish and 550 of Russian). Comparisons were drawn with students of English and other languages in Continental European universities (N = 2646).

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Although a cross-sectional study, the numbers of participants allowed some generalizations to be drawn from ELPS data, notably regarding the accelerated linguistic progress during the third year of a four-year language degree, the "year abroad" spent in "L2land". I was reassured to find that all students in all institutional contexts typically acquired the L2.

> Rates of progress, however, seem to vary: rapid progress in the last two years of secondary education may not be matched during the first two years at university. Rapid gains during residence abroad seem to be followed by no gains whatever, despite tuition, during their final year (Coleman, 1996, p. 41).

And thus "the contribution of residence abroad to the foreign language proficiency of advanced learners is greater than that of a year's tuition in the home institution" (Coleman, 1996, p. 45). Longitudinal components within the study showed no language gain after return from abroad.

My principal interest, as a language teacher substantially motivated by concerns about the way languages were being taught in the UK, had been purely domestic, a fact reflected in the unconventional (and *post hoc* or *propter hoc* widely uncited) publication of the findings. However, the results shed light not only on huge and unacknowledged differences in proficiency levels between universities, but also on individual learner differences, motivation, attitudes, goals, success factors, non-specialist linguists, and transferable (including intercultural) skills.

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Terminology

Chapter Four of *Studying Languages* (Coleman, 1996) was entitled not "Study Abroad" but "Residence abroad and its impact". "Residence" not only contrasts with the standard terminology in other European languages (*Auslandsaufenthalt, séjour à l'étranger, estancia al extranjero, estadia no estrangeiro*, etc.), each of which implies a shorter and more temporary sojourn (Coleman, 2001, p. 139) but also encompasses choices for the intercalary period other than formal university classes. While working on the European Language Proficiency Survey, and in particular the literature review which informed both *Studying Languages* and an overview article on language learning through student residence abroad (Coleman, 1997), the North American literature I encountered had a clear (but usually inexplicit) notion that "study abroad" meant precisely that, while UK reports assumed that the norm to be investigated was working as an English Language Assistant in a foreign school. From my actual experience of the phenomenon, administering the year abroad in successive UK universities and, from 1997 to 2001, coordinating the national Residence Abroad Project (Coleman, 2002), I understood that British students chose between study, assistantship and work placements.

The earliest UK study (Willis, Doble, Sankarayya, & Smithers, 1977) had found that a work placement enhanced both linguistic achievement and motivation. Such *stages en entreprise* accounted for 12% of UK outgoers in 1986, 22.3% in 1991/92, and 21.2% in 2009/10 (Carbonell, 2011). A particular form of work placement, the language assistantship scheme, which sees language undergraduates providing native-speaker L1 input in a school in L2land, celebrated its centenary in 2005 (British Council, 2005), and

was for so many years the norm that some earlier UK research had not considered study or alternative types of work (Coleman, 1996, pp. 59, 71). Peace Corps (e.g. Gunterman, 1995) and missionary work (e.g. Rubio, 2003) have also been included in study abroad research.

From a UK perspective, then, it is certainly the more inclusive "residence abroad" that should be the over-arching category, and "study abroad" a sub-category, rather than the latter being, thanks to the dominance of North American research, both an all-encompassing genus and a specific species (Coleman, 2007, p. 38). The transatlantic disparities which led Barbara Freed to commission a separate European overview when she edited a special issue of *Frontiers* on language learning in a study abroad context (Freed, 1998) extend also to the apparent tribal separation in the USA between study abroad researchers and administrators, and noted among others by Deardorff (2006). When, in 1997, nearly £1 million was allocated to three "year abroad" projects (including the Residence Abroad Project which I coordinated), it seemed natural to draw on both published research and the best practices embedded in the academic community (Coleman, 2001; 2002; Coleman & Parker, 2001). Project outcomes embraced both research and practice, a continuing UK tradition evidenced in 2010 when the University of Bath devoted a conference to "Assessment of the Year Abroad in Modern Language Degrees" (http://www.bath.ac.uk/education/research/conferences/meier/info.html). A major study of the development of criticality in arts and social science degrees (Johnston, Mitchell, Ford, & Myles, 2011) retains both "residence abroad" and "year abroad". A nationally funded project undertaken by the University Council of Modern Languages in 2011 refers carefully to "work or study abroad (the 'year abroad')" (UCML, 2011). For a

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UK observer, the phenomenon thus comprises both practical and scientific concerns, and embraces not just study but also language-teaching and other work placements.

Definitions

"Study abroad" or "residence abroad" is a significant but diverse phenomenon. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development counted 3.7 million mobile students in 2009, an increase of 77% since 2000 (OECD, 2011). With consistent double-digit annual increases, student mobility is expected to double by 2020: representing currently just 2 per cent of all students, there is certainly scope for further growth. More than half of the world's mobile students are enrolled in European universities (Teichler, Ferencz, & Wächter, 2011).

If there exists a degree of consensus on overall totals, details are nonetheless hard to pin down, and all commentators lament the lack of precise data (e.g. Carbonell, 2011; King, Findlay, & Arens, 2010). The primary division is between whole-programme mobility and within-programme mobility, also known respectively as degree mobility and credit mobility (Sussex Centre for Migration Research 2004, p. 11).

Despite the many similarities between whole-programme and within-programme study abroad, which includes factors such as acculturation, social networks, accommodation, integration, national academic cultures, language and culture shock, etc., applied linguists, no doubt for pragmatic reasons, tend to limit their research either to incoming students or to outgoing within-programme students. Even here, there is substantial diversity. The US and Europe represent the bulk of study abroad research

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(Kinginger, 2009, pp. 7-8, citing Block, 2007), but whereas in the U.S.A. 1.5% of eligible students undertake study abroad each year, mostly for 6 to 8 weeks, with only 0.05% of eligible students spending a whole academic year abroad, the Erasmus exchange programme alone involves 0.85% of eligible European students each year, with a typical stay of at least one semester; a similar number of "free movers" undertake study abroad independently.

Definitions of "study abroad" vary depending on the particular research context, and the professional identity and disciplinary background of the researcher, for "study abroad", being such a substantial social and educational phenomenon, not unexpectedly retains the attention not just of linguists, but equally of academics concerned with higher education policy, economics, psychology, social identity, gender studies, human geography and many more (see for example the chapters in Dervin, 2011).

Kinginger (2009, p. 29) refers to study abroad as a "sub-field of applied linguistics." But if we ask, "Which sub-field?," we encounter uncertainty. At the 2010 conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), where the symposium which gave the impetus to the present volume was held, language-related "study abroad" papers appeared under no fewer than seven headings – RWL, LCS, BIH, LLC, SLA, DIS, and SOC – and interculture-related study abroad papers also under LID and TEC[1], in other words more than half of the available strands or sub-fields.

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[1] RWL Reading, writing, and literacy; LCS Language, culture, socialization, and pragmatics; BIH Bilingual, immersion, heritage, and language minority education; LLC Language and learner characteristics; SLA Second language acquisition, language acquisition, and attrition; DIS Analysis of discourse and interaction; SOC Sociolinguistics; LID Language and ideology; TEC Language and technology

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Definitions usually emphasise the educational context, for example:

> extended L2land residence as an integral component of a university degree
> programme involving one or more foreign languages (Coleman 1997, p. 1)

> a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes
> (Kinginger 2009, p. 11)

Collentine and Freed (2004, p. 156) adopt a more restrictive definition to include both in-class and out-of-class language learning:

> [in] the study abroad (SA) context… a hybrid communicative-learning context.
> Students attend formal classes and thus employ the L2 in learning contexts

while a European study looks more broadly:

> students who enrol in university courses, participate in work placements or simply
> undertake language courses abroad (Orr, Schnitzer, & Frackmann 2008, p. 130).

Additional European definitions reviewed by Carbonell (2011, p. 7) include "any form of international mobility which takes place within a student's programme of study in higher education" (Sussex Centre for Migration Research 2004, p. 11), and "crossing country

borders for the purpose of or in the context of tertiary education" (Richters & Teichler, 2006, p. 78).

For present purposes, I propose to define "study abroad" as simply undertaking all or part of university education abroad. It must be borne in mind, however, that the lack of consensus on the precise dimensions of the phenomenon means low comparability across studies, and constitutes an obstacle to generalization.

The matrix

Study abroad is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which I initially tried to visualise as a multi-dimensional space populated by disparate studies. By identifying a matrix of relevant coordinates, and ideally locating them within some form of Linnaean taxonomy, it should be feasible to locate the findings of each individual study within the space. It soon became apparent that just one corner was so far densely filled – US students on foreign-language study abroad, who in fact represent just 3% of mobile students.

Locating coordinates requires defining dimensions, and in successive attempts at painting the big picture I enumerated separate features of the learning *context* (Coleman, 2006a, 2007, 2009) together with variables concerning language gain pre- during- and post-sojourn (Coleman, 2007, p. 46). The most recent iteration of the matrix (Coleman, 2009, p. 183, see Appendix 1) listed twenty contextual variables, but the table, comprising over a hundred cells, is rendered virtually unusable by the smallness of the font. In an attempt to acknowledge the very different nature of the variables, I abandoned "taxonomy" and "matrix" to borrow from Herring (2007) the term "faceted

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classification". A librarian's term since expanded to assist data retrieval in complex domains, a faceted classification lists, in an unordered, non-hierarchical, open-ended way, facets which have been shown, independently or in combination, to condition variation in at least one study. Categories are heterogeneous but each can include a range of values or a null value. The resulting list is an aggregation rather than a powerful and coherent theoretical definition, and in study abroad, as in all real life, the sum of the parts is greater than their individual contribution, so a truly valid analysis would need to take account of the interactions among discrete facets, as well as the particular context.

The faceted classification of study abroad included

- Within-programme or whole-programme

- Learning objectives and outcomes

- Age

- Programme at home university

- Home country and L1

- Previous language learning/pre-departure proficiency

- Preparation, institutional support, debriefing, follow-up, assessment

- Type of group (if any)

- Host country and L2

    - institutional L2

    - societal L2(s)

- Accommodation type, shared with…

- Host university courses (if any)

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- language courses

- non-language courses

- courses taught by…

Because one of the few constants across definitions is the educational setting, one key to classification would clearly be the learning objectives or learning outcomes. Defining and measuring outcomes was already a principal feature of the Study Abroad Evaluation Project involving the American Junior Year Abroad, European Joint Study Programme (predecessor of Erasmus) and German and Swedish programmes in 1983-86 (e.g. Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; Opper, Teichler, & Carlson, 1990). An alphabetical list of over-arching categories, derived originally from the Government-funded UK Residence Abroad Project (Coleman and Parker, 2001), comprises

- Academic

- Cultural

- Intercultural

- Linguistic

- Personal

- Professional.

The categories are expanded in Coleman (2007, pp. 40-41). Similar lists have been developed in the USA, for example by Engle and Engle (2003) and Bolen (2008), and Huebner (1998) reviews not only goals but also relevant research approaches. Although more than ten years have elapsed since the six alphabetical categories were defined, they have proved remarkably robust, and there seems no reason to revise them as a convenient

classification which embraces all research studies and all pedagogical approaches. Learning objectives or outcomes offer a broad perspective. Through students' academic activities, study abroad research relates to studies of higher education policies, practices and the economics of a global market. As future workers, often in international careers, the study abroad period may be crucial in developing learners' employability and professional skills. Cultural and intercultural insights can parallel accelerated personal development, leading to enhanced self-esteem and capability to operate effectively in new linguistic and cultural contexts.

But there are serious objections. Firstly, the study abroad experience never has just one single outcome or objective. Secondly, objectives – what you hope to gain – are unlikely to correspond exactly to outcomes – the changes which actually take place. Thirdly, the narrowly educational objectives and outcomes will not map neatly on to learners' *personal* objectives, which will include fun, tourism and novelty, or *personal* outcomes which include aspects of identity.

A mixed method study (N = 2325) conducted by the Residence Abroad Project (Coleman, 2003) found, for example, that personal concerns tended to outweigh issues of linguistic or academic progress, cultural or work-related insights. And googling "Erasmus Orgasmus" or a look at the lively thirdyearabroad.com website will soon convince that to define sojourners principally as "learners", let alone the even narrower "language learners", is to restrict the perspective to a single lens, which can only result in distortion. Linguists, who focus principally on study abroad as a language learning activity, although more recently they have broadened their concerns to embrace identity and social network issues, need to acknowledge that for educational researchers, as indeed for students

themselves, the foreign language is just one aspect of a complex phenomenon with multiple outcomes.

A wider issue with Coleman's faceted classification concerns the fact that a taxonomy of *contexts* fails to capture three other crucial elements of study abroad research. The first is variation across individual studies (research method, number of participants, measures and scales used). The second is individual variation within each study (see next paragraph below), which is virtually the only constant finding of study abroad research. The third is the societal or political objectives and outcomes which underpin all study abroad schemes, even those run for commercial reasons; this dimension emerges clearly from statements of aims, for example of Erasmus at

http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm

or UNESCO at

http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/what_is/mobility_wche.shtml. In announcing its Erasmus for All programme, the European Commission (2011a) asserted that evaluations show "significant systemic impact, far beyond the benefits to individual participants", in the form of international higher education cooperation, curriculum development and transparency, while its *Draft conclusions on language competences to enhance mobility* (European Commission, 2011b) reiterate the link between student mobility and the grandest political ambitions, which include a mobile workforce, understanding between peoples, a competitive economy, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and a dynamic labour market. Joseph Nye, who coined the term "soft power," sees international academic exchanges as promoting US values and interests (2005).

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Dörnyei (2005, p. 2) neatly encompasses the issue of individual variation: "Many researchers find individual differences detrimental to social sciences and this also applies to the domain of educational studies." Yet individual trajectories are in fact the essence of recent study abroad research, in which the focus has shifted from quantitative to qualitative, from product to process, from a search for generalizability to a recognition of complexity and variation. The recent literature offers many in-depth studies of individual trajectories, among them Murphy-Lejeune (2002), de Federico de la Rúa (2003), Papatsiba (2003), Ehrenreich (2004), Pellegrino Aveni (2005), Isabelli-Garcia (2006), Dervin (2008), Jackson (2008), and Kinginger (2008). Despite varying theoretical perspectives, they share a focus on social networks and identity, and several other concepts:

- A rejection of essentialized notions of "culture"
- Awareness of the continuing risk of essentializing "context"
- An acceptance that contexts, like culture, identity, agency, beliefs and motivation are fluid, dynamic, situated, and constantly reconstructed through interaction
- An attempt to capture the whole context (lifewide learning) and the whole individual, not just the "language learner", but the cognitive, affective, physical and social being
- Complementarity of cognitive and sociocultural approaches.

Rethinking the research paradigm

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Why are we still so far from capturing the reality of the study abroad phenomenon? "A review of study abroad research literature shows general inconsistencies and inconclusiveness on certain issues, particularly on study abroad outcomes and their factors", asserts Wang (2010, p. 50). If forty years of research have brought so few certainties, is there perhaps something wrong with the definitions, underpinning theory and/or research design?

"That researchers and practitioners in the study abroad field continue to ask these basic questions, and strive to organize and classify studying abroad in ways that are systematically observable, shows that there is little consensus still on how to best define studying abroad and how to best study its effects", concludes McKeown (2009, p. 106).

It is not hard to reiterate the deficiencies of some linguistic studies: unvalidated proficiency measures; ceiling effects; tests too blunt to reveal subtle changes in sociolinguistic or advanced morpho-syntactic competence; reliance on mechanical measures of what can be straightforwardly quantified, i.e. classroom skills such as syntax, fluency and vocabulary rather than advanced pragmatics or prosody; self-reporting; the varying (and at times unreported) extent of formal language classes while abroad; the fuzzy definition of proficiency levels ("intermediate", "at least two semesters"); the absence of delayed post-testing and long-term follow-up.

Language learning through study abroad relies on the expectation that massive exposure to the L2 will lead to L2 acquisition, exposure both in interactions with native and expert speakers of the L2 and non-interactive input from the L2 environment. But any overview of research findings shows the process is fallible: "the SA students had many opportunities to engage in a diverse array of extra-curricular Spanish language

activities, but not all students took advantage of them" (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004, p. 191).

Individual variability of course comprises a number of cognitive, affective, and biographical variables, each of which can itself can be infinitely sub-divided, and each of which is fluid and context-dependent. Affect, for example, includes language anxiety, which varies from one individual to another, from classroom to naturalistic use, from task to task, and from moment to moment.

A second step must be to recognise the heterogeneity of the study abroad environment occasioned by the factors listed in the taxonomy. Charitably, one can interpret references to "*the* study abroad context" (singular with definite article) as accidental slips, although in such cases as Pellegrino Aveni's (2005) book, Schauer's (2009) book and (2007) article, or Davidson's use of the phrase twice in introducing a journal special issue (2010a, p. 3) and eight times in his own article (2010b, p. 7), the phrase appears deliberate.

A principal concern with virtually all study abroad research is the matter of time, or more precisely of historical date as a contextual feature. Until recently, the dimension of time has not been adequately considered in study abroad research, especially in literature reviews. Within the scientific or positivist paradigm of experimental research which so much applied linguistics research seeks to ape, the date at which a study is conducted has little bearing. It is simply one element of the bibliographical reference. Planets, genes, carcinomas or *drosophila melanogaster* will behave the same in 2008 as in 1998. Not so with humans in a social context. The question of developing communication technologies (Coleman & Chafer, 2010) is just one aspect of the rapidly

and profoundly changing social context of study abroad, albeit one with considerable impact on social networks and identities, and with profound implications for the degree of immersion and engagement with the target language community which study abroad can offer to the facebooking, skyping, tweeting students of today.

Kinginger (2009, pp. 25-26) reminds us too that successive fashions in theory and related research methods have not been static, describing the story of study abroad research as "one of increasing emphasis on particularity (van Lier, 2005) in which efforts to arrive at generalizations raise more questions than they answer."

The experimental paradigm is time-limited, and research funding constraints have meant that far too few studies have sought to explore the long-term impact of the always challenging and often life-changing experience of study abroad. Humans are the longest lived of all primates, and the impact of significant life events is not restricted to the immediate aftermath, or even a post-test delayed by a few months. A list of studies of the long-term impact of study abroad (e.g. Akande & Slawson, 2000; Alred & Byram, 2002, 2006; Dwyer, 2004; Opper et al., 1990; Parey & Waldinger, 2007; Teichler, 1997) is woefully short. Do we not need more studies which address both lifewide and lifelong outcomes?

One problem which can be traced to the scientific method is that of comparative studies, in which the "treatment" (study abroad experience) of an experimental (SA) group is contrasted with that of a control group (AH for At Home or IM for domestic immersion). This is a form of misrepresentation. Not only can the study not be double-blind as the Cochrane protocol requires, but participants cannot be randomized, and SA groups are typically wealthier, whiter, more female, and better educated than non-SA

groups in both the USA and Europe. And while recognising that, by some valid and reliable measures, motivation towards language learning of SA and AH groups can be equal (Allen & Herron, 2003; Allen, this volume), to equate their overall motivation seems illogical: some do and some don't. Do virgins and promiscuous students have the same motivation towards sex? Segalowitz and Freed themselves acknowledge the non-identity of SA and AH groups as regards attitudes and strategies, albeit in a footnote (2004, p. 196).

My attempts at a study abroad taxonomy were triggered partly by dissatisfaction with those studies which ignore the wider dimensions and conflate research from very divergent contexts, a process to which even the most eminent researchers can be susceptible. For example, Dufon and Churchill (2006) equate Collentine's (2004) study with that of Howard (2001), while DeKeyser (2007) lists together two studies showing increased fluency by objective measures following study abroad, namely Segalowitz and Freed (2004) and Towell, Hawkins and Bazergui (1996). But how informative is it to compare near-beginners (2 semesters of Spanish) on their first educational trip abroad with near-native speakers on their nth visit to L2land after up to nine years of specialist language study? Are the same processes at work, and can conclusions legitimately be generalised across dissimilar groups?

Looking at the contextual variables and the individual variables separately underplays the complexity of what is happening. One significant theoretical attempt to combine individual differences and environmental features is Cynthia White's learner-context interface (White, 1999), which places at the centre of language learning "the

individual learner's capacity to construct an effective interface with target language sources in the learning environment" (White, 2003, p. 86).

But both individual and context are unstable, so a still more promising approach, which supersedes any taxonomy or faceted classification, must be the environmental approach of van Lier (2003), Bronfenbrenner's nested ecosystems (1993) or that of complex dynamic systems (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008), already applied to questions such as language learner motivation (Sade, 2011). Larsen-Freeman (e.g. 2011) sets out twelve principles of complex dynamic systems, which Mercer (2011) summarises thus:

> Complexity theory […] replaces cause-and-effect, linear models with organic, complex, holistic models […], in which the emergent properties of the system as a whole represent more than merely the sum of its parts. […] In a complex system, context or environment is seen as an integral part of the system rather than as an external variable. […] Everything within the system is considered to be in a constant state of flux which can lead to changes in the system as a whole and to the ways in which the components of the system interact with each other. (p.337)

The generic objectivity of study abroad research reports has too often erased the most significant elements of the sojourn. Ask any applied linguist confidentially, in the corner of a bar, about their own time abroad as a student, and the emphasis will never be on enhanced TL lexis and mean length of utterance, but rather on romance, on discovery of self and others, on people and places. As study abroad research moves from a

simplistic and inadequate model of causality and controllable (in)dependent variables – which has unsurprisingly produced contradictory findings – to a recognition that each variable interacts with every other variable, both singly and in combination, to create individual trajectories in which both person and context are in constant interaction and flux, we need to focus on individuals and their trajectories, identifying patterns but not adopting a determinist perspective. Before exemplifying such an approach, we consider the crucial factor of study abroad social networks.

Social circles

Students on study abroad are not, as some research might suggest, isolated entities whose body is no more than a means of transport for taking the acquisitive brain from interaction to interaction. Not only are the cognitive and affective processes of the brain inseparable from each other, but both are intricately interwoven within each intellectual, sensual, physical and social individual.

As Kramsch has often underlined, SLA researchers have tended to pay "more attention to the processes of acquisition than to the flesh-and-blood individuals who are doing the learning" and have divided learners' "minds, bodies and social behaviors into separate domains of inquiry and studied how language intersects with each of them" (Kramsch 2009, p. 2).

The nature and extent of interactions with native and expert L2 speakers has been a key focus of research within both cognitive and socio-cultural paradigms, and there is wide recognition that the social networks a student establishes, maintains and develops

while abroad are crucial to learning outcomes, since they can determine access to linguistic and cultural input, and the quantity, nature and functional coverage of target language interactions. The issue of social isolation or integration has long informed debate about choices between studentship, assistantship and other work placement (e.g. Doble & Griffiths, 1985, p. 203; Wilson & Everett, 1989, p. 72; Byram & Alred, 1993, p. 30), and in study abroad research has been linked with Schumann's model of acculturation, "the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language group" (Schumann, 1986, p. 379). Both group and individual acculturation have predominantly been studied in the context of migration (see e.g. overview in Berry, 2005) and of temporary sojourners (e.g. Ward & Kennedy, 1999), but studies of the psychology of acculturation have themselves been criticised for adopting a positivist, quantitative approach rather than a multi-method, multidisciplinary approach (Chirkov, 2009).

Researchers and practitioners have also long recognised that socialising with co-nationals is both a natural response to the challenges of a sojourn in an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic setting, and a potential obstacle to achieving the immersion which is necessary for the learning objectives to be attained (e.g. Teichler, 1991).

de Federico de la Rúa (2003, 2008) links the thinking behind the Erasmus programme to Allport's (1954) "contact hypothesis", whereby interaction between members of different social groups should foster understanding and solidarity. But she points out that incoming Erasmus students have more to gain from interactions than do locals (unless the latter are linguistically motivated), and that the expected outcomes are frequently not realised – a frequent finding (e.g. most recently for the UK in Brown and Richards, 2012). While virtual networks with family and friends at home may meet some

practical and psychological needs, incoming Erasmus students, in order to counter isolation, also quickly establish local networks. These comprise the "three types of friendship ties" which de Federico de la Rúa labels local people, compatriots or fellow countrymen, and people from other countries. She traces graphically (2008, p. 97) the growth of networks, in which multinational groups predominate – one of many features of Erasmus life captured by the romanticised film *L'auberge espagnole* (Cédric Klapisch, 2002) which, incidentally, should be compulsory viewing for study abroad researchers. But de Federico de la Rúa does note that, over time, friendships with local people increase:

> Once the immediate needs were satisfied with same nationality or Erasmus friends, students seem to have been more and more able to access locals in a slower rhythm of friendship renewal, and the security provided by sharing familiar norms and the same mother tongue may have become less important (2008, p. 101).

I have proposed the idea of three concentric circles to help us better understand the dynamic socialization patterns (social networks and language contact) of students during study abroad (Figure 1). This concentric circles model of study abroad social networks is more concerned with the dynamic nature of friendship groups and less concerned with the intensity of friendships than Dunbar's well-known Circles of Acquaintanceship (Dunbar, 2010), which, within his evolutionary-psychology view of social networks, moves outwards from intimates through good friends and friends to

acquaintances, all within the 150 individuals who comprise the maximum number for an effective human social network. My concentric circles concern the social groups within which friends are made. There is nothing new in identifying three overlapping study abroad social networks: Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977, p. 277) already discuss (albeit in a different order, and ignoring any longitudinal changes) "a conational network whose function is to express the culture of origin", "a network with host nationals, whose function is the instrumental facilitation of academic and professional aspirations" and "a multi-national network whose main function is recreational". But social models have arguably been under-emphasised in quantitative investigations.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The model – it is not a theory – emerges from extensive reading of those study abroad reports which cover socialization and friendships, as well as from the Senegal study described below. The progression from social networks comprising co-nationals, through wider contact with other out-group members (often other foreign students), towards the L2-speaking local community is not universal, automatic or uni-directional, but given motivation, time and effort, alternatively labelled agency, initiative or proactivity, movement tends to be centrifugal.

The model ignores individual and contextual variation, and over-simplifies reality. National cultures composed of like-minded and like-spoken individuals are mythical (Kramsch, 1995). Study abroad socialization may develop or fossilise. And other patterns exist: for example, pre-existing social networks involving co-nationals

have been shown, along with rankings and international openness, to influence the choices made by Chinese students as to where to study abroad (Ding & Li, 2010).

However, the concentric circles model may provide a helpful and not untypical way of conceiving socialization and acculturation patterns during study abroad – not least within a pre-departure preparation programme, or to inform individual and institutional strategies for optimising study abroad outcomes. For researchers, social networks are a major influence on the variability of the study abroad experience. And COLeman's Concentric Circles at least has the merit of a mnemonic acrostic, relating to Co-nationals, Other Outsiders and Locals.

Those with institutional responsibility for student mobility have long recognised the tendency for students on an international campus to clot together in homoglossic and/or culturally similar groups, and have sometimes taken deliberate action such as "mix and mingle" events to counter such ghettoization (e.g. Wilkinson, 2012, p. 20). It is standard practice to provide advice on the effort required to make native-speaker contacts, advice on loci of socialization (e.g. student restaurants rather than bars) and some strategies building on home activities (e.g. choir, hobby, sport, church – my greatest achievement was finding a suitable spot for an international-level synchronised swimmer) in order to get to know L2landers, a process which is nearly always easier outside university premises and away from clusters of other foreign students. Such advice could be regarded, together with homestays, work placements, or language partners as an attempt to short-circuit the natural process, to jump directly from the inner to the outer circle.

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Homestays, as the literature shows, interact with other factors and achieve mixed success, mostly allowing access to only a very narrow segment of the outer circle (Hoffman-Hicks, 2000; Jackson, 2008; Magnan & Back, 2007; Rivers, 1998; Wilkinson, 1998). Language partners may be identified by the host university; home institutions also often recommend (subject to security precautions) putting up a small ad to find an L2lander seeking conversation in the outgoer's L1. These and other routes may lead via contact with one L2lander to new social groupings. Sexual partners (cf. de Federico de la Rúa, 2003, p. 99) probably provide the ideal short-cut to the outer circle: this is one finding of the Senegal data, but, in general, study abroad research has eschewed engaging with what nonetheless seems to be a widespread acculturation strategy.

The concentric circles model, first expounded at the 2010 Bath conference mentioned above, and alluded to in Coleman and Chafer (2011, p. 73), has already found some echoes (e.g. Bray, Gill, & Randall, 2011, p. 269), but is too recent to have been explored much in research terms, although Meier and Daniels (2011, p. 20) "found that the concentric circle model and social capital theory allowed the analysis of the interview data […] and the categorization of the different relationships that students formed on their year abroad."

The languages of the concentric circles

The concentric circles model also has implications for language socialization, use and learning. The inner circle, unless an agreement is in force to use the L2, will use the L1: part of the function of the co-national community is to relieve the stress and effort of

extensive target language use. The outer circle will use one or sometimes more L2s (French and Wolof in the case of Senegal). The middle circle will use a Lingua Franca or code-switch among Lingua Francas, but the principal choices will be the L2 and/or English. The internationalization of higher education is already leading to domain loss for languages other than English thanks to English-medium instruction within the classroom and lecture theatre (Coleman, 2006b): this Englishization is reflected in out-of-classroom middle-circle interactions.

Whole people and whole lives: the Senegal study

The Senegal study of graduates who, during a degree in French at a British university, undertook a work placement and sometimes university study in Dakar, the capital of the West African country, constitutes an attempt to broaden study abroad research to embrace whole people and whole lives. The Senegal study has adopted both quantitative and qualitative data elicitation methods, and addresses the same issues as in all study abroad, albeit in sharper focus because of the heightened contrasts between L1land and L2land.

A questionnaire comprising closed and open items was emailed from summer 2009 to all those who had participated in the programme, directed by Tony Chafer at the University of Portsmouth, UK, since its inception in 1985. Forty-seven individuals (36F, 11M) returned the questionnaire (82.5% response rate), as did three former language assistants (2F, 1M). Quantitative data were complemented by over 29,000 words of open

commentary. Five in-depth telephone interviews have so far been conducted, with others scheduled if external funding is forthcoming. The participants opted for the Senegal placement, and the research relies on self-report, with the range of graduation years (from 1988 to 2010) lending more or less reflective distance and adding more or less intervening experiences to the memories of the sojourn in Senegal. Interviewees, even more than questionnaire respondents, will perform constructed identities during recall, and perhaps especially when remembering experiences which have shaped their subsequent lives. Nonetheless, a comparison of questionnaires and interviews conducted a year or more later shows consistent and coherent accounts, incorporating both objective events and subjective interpretations, but little evidence of rehearsed narratives.

In reporting (an early analysis was published as Coleman and Chafer, 2011), all quotations are unchanged, and all names pseudonyms. The findings reflect both changing contexts, including electronic communication mentioned earlier (Coleman & Chafer, 2010) and the long-term impact on individuals' lives.

Space precludes detailed analysis here, but the shifting patterns of accommodation exemplify the variability of a complex dynamic system: most (28) shared with other foreigners, 10 began with homestay, but by the end, 8 were in homestay, 2 in a residence, 2 in their own apartment, and 4 sharing with locals. The choice of where to live often chimed with other aspects, including friendship patterns and language use.

French is an official language in Senegal, but Wolof the most widely spoken vernacular: 45% of Senegalese are Wolof native speakers, especially in Dakar and the North. Items based on the Language Contact Profile (Freed, Dewey, Segalowitz, & Halter, 2004) and additional items on Wolof elicited that participants used French seven

days a week, for a median of four hours a day, partly thanks to their work and the unavailability of any other Lingua Franca. Both participants and home-university staff believe that resulting proficiency gains in French were greater than for students who had spent an Erasmus sojourn in France. The vast majority learnt some useful words and phrases in Wolof, and one in twelve achieved a good basic level. In general, greater progress in Wolof was linked not only to a longer stay, but also to greater social integration, moderation of outsider status, less hassle and "bumstering" (locals begging or trying to sell small items or services to Europeans), and other adaptations such as adopting local dress and public transport.

All study abroad is a gendered experience, since socially constructed gender roles change with the change with the social, geographical, socio-economic and chronological context. In Senegal, gender interacted with ethnicity and the visibility of Europeans in sub-Saharan Africa. The UK women learnt to deal with sexual approaches and spontaneous offers of marriage; some took to wearing wedding rings and referring to non-existent husbands. Probably more difficult were the obstacles to social communication posed by gender in an Islamic society: "the girls were all kept locked away by their husbands and the guys would not understand the concept of 'friendship' and would want to marry me after a few hours", said Diane. Both men and women recognised that the former had more opportunities for turning acquaintances into friends, and were initially accorded more respect in work contexts. The fact that both males and females reported more gender-related incidents by the end of their stay may suggest that the experiences of both sexes led to a clearer understanding by sojourners of the cultural enaction of gender.

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The Islamic context led all the respondents bar two already well-travelled men to reflect on religion, often for the first time. Noting (cf. Polanyi, 1995) that while any faith was acceptable to local Senegalese, atheism was inconceivable, respondents reacted sometimes with respect to a pervasive and family-friendly religion, sometimes with hostility to a force of social and psychological control linked (through the *talibés*, boys forced to beg for the benefit of their *Marabout* or Islamic teacher) to systemic child abuse.

Half the graduates had experienced initial homesickness, but for some it abated or evaporated completely while for others it worsened: the individual variation could sometimes be related to ongoing contacts with home through visits, absent partners, telephone and online communication. As the concentric circles model illustrates, initially most socialised with fellow-Brits, but as other locals and non-locals typically became more important, Brits became much less so. Most made both non-local and Senegalese friends, including at least one close friend. A majority were, at the date of the questionnaire, still in touch with friends made in Dakar.

Intimate friendships were also made, although nearly half had left a partner in the UK (not all relationships lasted). One in four students (12 respondents, 2M, 10F) found non-local partners, one in five (9 respondents, 1M, 8F) Senegalese partners, and of the three language assistants one (M) a non-local partner, and one (F) a Senegalese partner. The fact that 21 of 45 who answered this question (5M, 16F) formed a new intimate relationship during their stay abroad seems likely to have influenced the linguistic, cultural, intercultural and attitudinal outcomes of the sojourn. If seen less as an indexical

characteristic and more as a language learning strategy, sex perhaps deserves more attention in study abroad research.

As the UK belatedly follows North America in conceiving university study more as an investment than as an education, graduate employability is not only a *Leitmotiv* of EU language policy (e.g. European Commission, 2011b) but also a key trump card in seeking to persuade Government that a student year abroad deserves support. A 2001 Residence Abroad Project questionnaire study of 1117 UK former participants in the year abroad, graduating between 1959 and 1999 (Coleman, 2011), showed the importance of experiential learning abroad for subsequent employability. The same items in the Senegal study drew confirmation that the skills gained during the year abroad had been a factor in landing both first and subsequent jobs for a majority of respondents, a significant factor for up to half, and the determining factor for more than one in ten. Equally significant is the impact that the stay in Africa had on the nature of subsequent careers. All respondents without exception viewed their semester(s) abroad as a good investment, virtually all found the skills learned valuable in their employment, and more than three-quarters were in a job requiring cultural mediation. Full analysis and publication of results must await completion of the interviews, but eight out of ten viewed the stay abroad as a turning point in their lives, and the experience demonstrably had a huge impact on their subsequent trajectory in educational, geographical, personal and professional terms.

Conclusion

Researching whole people and whole lives

Academic researchers are whole people too. They know that quantitative studies can be quicker and neater to conduct than qualitative or mixed-method studies, and that a reputation is more often made through theoretical innovation than reiterated empirical investigation. A career orientation quickly settles the choice between off-the-shelf quantitative tools and fuller, more qualitative investigation of the complex dynamic system which is the study abroad experience for language learners; between what is easiest and what might be most valuable. Theories come and go, i + 1 is replaced by ZPD, and the justification for particular research instruments and methods evolves too. But the data remain, and the evolving phenomenon which they seek to capture. All data contribute to describing and understanding study abroad – but whoever boosted their citations and built an academic career with mere data?

Nor can researchers today shut themselves in a cupboard labelled "SLA" and disregard the social context of their research, which is itself embedded in the complex dynamic system which is higher education funding. In introducing "impact," both economic and societal, as a criterion in compulsory national research assessment for the Research Excellence Framework 2014, the UK Funding Councils remind us that our research addresses a wider agenda than that of academic specialists. And in a world where academic mobility is both a political and an economic reality, applied research can make a real difference. The recent position statement *Valuing the Year Abroad* (British Academy & University Council of Modern Languages, 2012) thus contributed to a campaign whose outcome was a capping of student fees for study abroad and the payment of fee compensation to home universities in England.

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Nor must we forget that for participants, language gains are just one aspect of study abroad:

> Learning mobility - meaning transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences - is one of the important ways in which citizens can strengthen their employability, enhance their intercultural awareness, creativity and personal development, as well as participate actively in society. (European Commission, 2011b, p. 6).

Understanding the study abroad phenomenon requires researchers to take into account the whole person and the whole context. "If structural and cognitive factors can be shown to account for no more than half of the documented variation in learning outcomes in the Study Abroad context", asserts Davidson (2010a, p. 4), "other individual and social variables, some of them unknown, are assumed to account for the balance."

"There can be no sensible generalisations from a variety of individual experience", argue Byram and Alred (1993, p. 59), though within a complex dynamic system we can conceive of the sum of unique study abroad experiences as sharing typical common features. As linguists and researchers, we do well to recall that study abroad language gain is embedded in real life, and that identity does not stop evolving on return from study abroad. Ema Ushioda's call with regard to motivation research applies equally well here:

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> A focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, a person with goals, motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, and multiple micro-and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of. (Ushioda 2009, p. 220).

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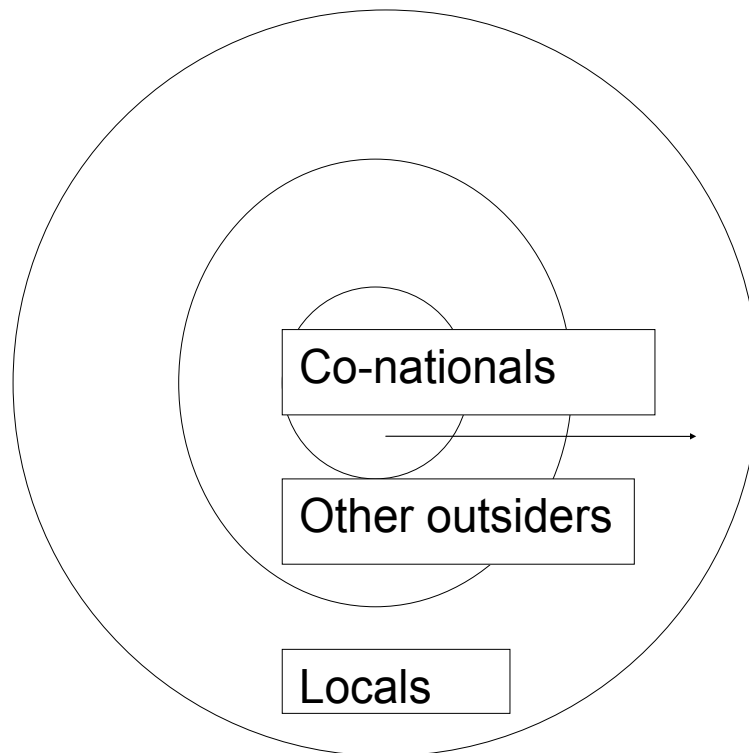
Researching whole people and whole lives

Figure 1. Coleman's concentric circles representation of study abroad social networks

Appendix 1: Twenty parameters for study abroad research (Coleman, 2009: 183).

	Parameter or category	Parameter settings (or variables within the category)					
1	Academic context	Within-program(me)			Whole-program(me)		
2	Learning outcomes	Academic	Cultural	Intercultural	Linguistic	Personal	Professional
3	Age	Secondary education (teenagers)		Higher education (young adults)		Adults (all ages)	
4	Program(me) at home institution	Specialist language degree		Other specialism or modular degree		Postgraduate	Teacher training
5	Previous language learning	Continuum from very little to ten years or more					
6	Proficiency prior to departure	Continuum from beginner through elementary, intermediate, advanced; CEFR A1 to C1					
7	Preparation	Integrated to previous study for a year or more	Program(me)		Briefing(s)	None	
8	Duration	Two to six weeks	Below one semester	One semester (including summer semester)		One year or two semesters	Full degree program(me)
9	Outgoing/incoming group	Large and coherent		Small, informal		Individual	
10	L1	X shared by all participants		Mixed but predominantly X		Mixed	
11	L2	English in L1-English host country		English in non-L1-English host country	Other international lingua franca	Other language	
12	Accommodation	Homestay	University residence with other foreign students	University residence (integrated)		School (for assistants)	Individually arranged
13	Accommodation shared by	Only locals		Only other L1-speakers	Other L1-speakers but in a local family	Other foreigners	
14	Program(me) of non-language courses followed	For the group alone	For foreigners only	Principally for locals (options selected by home institution)	Principally for locals but options selected by student	None	
15	Program(me) of language courses followed	For the group alone	For foreigners only	For both locals and foreigners (e.g. translation)		None	
16	Program(me) taught by	Home institution staff		Host institution staff		Mixture	
17	Program(me) taught in	L2		Lingua franca (usually English)		Mixture	
18	Professional content	Work placement	Teaching / assistantship	Volunteering		None	
19	Institutional support	Bilateral		International office	Home institution only (island model)	None ('free mover', 'spontaneous mobility')	
20	Assessment	By home institution		By host institution		By host but 'interpreted'	