



**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN STUDY
ABROAD: SOCIAL, CULTURAL,
AND IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS**

VASILICA MOCANU

6 monographs

P U V
UNIVERSITAT
DE VALÈNCIA

**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN STUDY ABROAD:
SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND IDENTITY-RELATED
FACTORS**

ERASMUS STUDENTS IN NORTHERN, SOUTHERN, AND
EASTERN-EUROPEAN ENGLISH AS A *LINGUA FRANCA*
CONTEXTS

INSTITUT UNIVERSITARI DE LLENGÜES MODERNES APLICADES DE LA COMUNITAT VALENCIANA (IULMA)

IULMA MONOGRAPHS

General Editors:

Diana González Pastor (Universitat de València, España)

Ana Belén Cabrejas Peñuelas (Universitat de València, España)

Editorial board:

Cesáreo Calvo Rigual (Universitat de València, España)

Miguel Fuster Márquez (Universitat de València, España)

Herbert Holzinger (Universitat de València, España)

Julia Pinilla Martínez (Universitat de València, España)

Julia Sanmartín Sáez (Universitat de València, España)

Scientific board:

Marta Albelda Marco (Universitat de València, España)

Mohammed Barrada (Universidad de Fez, Marruecos)

Begoña Bellés Fortuño (Universitat Jaume I, España)

Patricia Bou Franch (Universitat de València, España)

María Vittoria Calvi (Universidad de Milán, Italia)

Juan José Calvo García de Leonardo (Universitat de València, España)

Pascual Cantos (Universidad de Murcia, España)

Pilar Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (UNC Charlotte, EE.UU)

Abdelwahab El Imrani (Universidad Abdelmalék Essâadi, Marruecos)

Isabel García Izquierdo (Universitat Jaume I, España)

Pedro Gras (Universitat de Barcelona, España)

Ramón González (Universidad de Navarra, España)

Carla Marello (Universidad de Turín, Italia)

Ignasi Navarro i Ferrando (Universitat Jaume I, España)

Christiane Nord (Universidad de Magdeburgo, Alemania)

Françoise Olmo (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, España)

Barry Pennock Speck (Universitat de València, España)

Salvador Pons Bordería (Universitat de València, España)

Ferrán Robles Bataller (Universitat de València, España)

Françoise Salager-Meyer (Universidad de Mérida, Venezuela)

José Santaemilia Ruiz (Universitat de València, España)

Carsten Sinner (Universität Leipzig, Alemania)

Francisco Yus (Universidad de Alicante, España)

Chelo Vargas (Universidad de Alicante, España)

Steve Walsh (University of Newcastle, Reino Unido)

**LANGUAGE LEARNING IN STUDY
ABROAD: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND
IDENTITY-RELATED FACTORS**

ERASMUS STUDENTS IN NORTHERN,
SOUTHERN, AND EASTERN-EUROPEAN
ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA CONTEXTS

Vasilica Mocanu-Florea

Publicacions de la Universitat de València (PUV) is the publishing house of the Universitat de València (UV). We share the UV's mission to promote the dissemination and communication of scientific ideas, academic work and culture in the broadest sense.

This publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, or recorded in, or transmitted by any information retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether photomechanical, photochemical, electronic, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher. Please contact CEDRO (Centro Español de Derechos Reprográficos, www.cedro.org) if you need to photocopy or scan any part of this work.

PUV has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.



© Vasilica Mocanu-Florea, 2023

© This edition: Universitat de València, 2023

Publicacions de la Universitat de València

<http://puv.uv.es>

publicacions@uv.es

Layout & cover design: Publicacions de la Universitat de València

ISSN: 2605-4469

ISBN: 978-84-1118-195-2 (paperback)

ISBN: 978-84-1118-196-9 (PDF)

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.7203/PUV-OA-196-9>

Digital edition



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	10
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS	10
PREFACE	11
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	17
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	19
1.1. Background of the study	19
1.2. Study abroad and language learning – an overview	21
CHAPTER 2. STUDY ABROAD: SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND IDENTITY-RELATED DETERMINANTS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING	27
2.1. Program variables	28
2.2. Context-related determinants. The role of English as a Lingua Franca	28
2.3. Identity-related factors	32
2.3.1. Study abroad as challenging the self	33
2.3.2. Neoliberal subjectivities in SA	36
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	39
3.1. Mixed methods	39
3.1.1. Research instruments	44
3.1.1.1. The questionnaire	44
3.1.1.2. The interview	46

3.1.2. Procedure	47
3.1.3. Analysis	49
3.2. Contextualization	51
3.2.1. The Erasmus program	51
3.2.2. Location	53
3.2.2.1. Oulu - Finland	54
3.2.2.2. Bucharest - Romania	55
3.2.2.3. Lleida - Catalonia	56
3.2.3. Participants	58
3.2.3.1. Quantitative data	58
3.2.3.2. Qualitative data	62
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS	65
4.1. The role of the host context	65
4.1.1. Linguistic panorama: minor languages and linguas francas	65
4.1.1.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad	71
4.1.1.2. End of the sojourn abroad	79
4.1.2. Language attitudes and beliefs	93
4.1.2.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad	101
4.1.2.2. End of the sojourn abroad	106
4.2. Social, cultural, and linguistic contact	119
4.2.1. Local communities	119
4.2.2. Transient communities	125
4.2.3. Beginning and end of the sojourn abroad	126
4.3. Identity-related factors: motivation, investment, and neoliberal rationales	149
4.3.1. Motivation and investment	150
4.3.2. Neoliberal rationales	153
4.3.3. Personal benefits and outcomes	154
4.3.3.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad	154
4.3.3.2. End of the sojourn abroad	159

4.3.4. Professional benefits and outcomes	170
4.3.4.1. Beginning of the sojourn abroad	171
4.3.4.2. End of the sojourn abroad	175
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS	183
5.1. Social, cultural, and linguistic context-related differences .	183
5.2. The role of social, cultural, and linguistic expectations and outcomes	185
5.2.1. Linguistic investment and outcomes	189
5.3. Identity – a key factor	193
5.4. Limitations and further research	198
REFERENCES	199
APPENDICES	207
Appendix 1: PRE-Questionnaire	207
Appendix 2: PRE-interview guiding questions	215
Appendix 3: POST-interview guiding questions	217

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ELF – English as a lingua franca
FL – foreign language
L2/SL – second language
MMR – mixed method research
SA – study abroad
SLA- second language acquisition
TL – target language

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

- / - indicates the minimal but clear pause between phrases/ sentences in normally-paced speech
- ... - indicates pause of significant length (more than 0.5) seconds
- :- indicates elongated vowel
- “ “ – indicates that the speaker is overtly voicing her/ himself or someone else
- XXX – indicates incomprehensible speech
- ? – indicates rising intonation (including questions)

PREFACE

Research on second language learning in study abroad can be divided into two periods, according to the nature of the studies that were published from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s, and those that came to light afterwards. The first was concerned, for the most part, with assessing linguistic gains in SA (for instance: Carroll, 1967; Willis *et al.*, 1977; Magnan, 1986; Dyson, 1988). In the 1990s, language learning in study abroad underwent a change of direction towards a more socioculturally oriented framework.

Barbara Freed's (1995) edited volume can be regarded as the starting point of the second period in the history of SLA in study abroad. Apart from synthesizing the research field of study up to that moment, Freed tried to approach unaddressed issues, for instance, the need to compare the effects of the study abroad and the *at home* settings, as well as the acquisition of pragmatic competence. Many of the studies that came after had a clear shift towards the sociolinguistic facet of study abroad: the majority were qualitative in nature (e.g., Kinginger, 2009 and 2013; Jackson, 2008; Pelegrino Aveni, 2005). However, another strand of studies continued focusing on language-related gains, most of them of a quantitative type (Borràs & Llanes, 2020; Köylü, 2021 Serrano *et al.*, 2011).

Nevertheless, research on study abroad has rarely combined the study of social, cultural, and identity-related aspects with the analysis of perceived language-related gains. Similarly, there has been a lack of studies integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in SA research. At the same time, a combination of different contexts in which major languages, minor languages, and English as a lingua franca interfere and interact has rarely been considered (Tracy-Ventura and Köylü have recently put the spotlight on this, see Tracy-Ventura & Köylü, 2022), and most often, the origins of the participants showed very little variation. Thus, the present volume responds to the need to triangulate social, cultural, and identity-related aspects with perceived language-related gains, qualitative and quantitative methods, three different European contexts, and participants from almost every corner of Europe for a deeper understanding of the study abroad phenomenon on the European continent.

This volume contributes to shed light on the social, linguistic, and cultural facets of study abroad by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods at every stage. Therefore, interpretations are made, and conclusions are drawn based on results obtained from both quantitative and qualitative data and through the combination of both methods. By doing so, the present study brings to the field increased confidence in findings, improved accuracy and completeness, and it informs and contributes to overall validity of the results (McKim, 2017: 203).

Probably the most important contribution of this publication to the study of social, cultural, and identity-related determinants of language learning in SA is that participation in an Erasmus study abroad program impacts identities, language attitudes and uses, and employability, as perceived by the international students in three different European contexts. This impact is visible both at a quantitative, statistical level, and at a more fine-grained, qualitative level. This volume demonstrates that participating in an Erasmus sojourn abroad, independently of the context, triggers a destabilization and hybridization of identity. Spending at least one semester studying at a foreign university through the Erasmus program provides an environment where individuals are confronted with cultural, symbolic, and material differences. These enhance awareness of how things work in different places and open the minds of the participants to their sense of belonging and their position in the world. Living with difference for a prolonged period may lead to a feeling that the differences are few, increasing tolerance, openness, and an expansion of personal horizons. However, this study shows that it can also prompt in certain cases an increased sense of nationalism which nevertheless combines with an openness to navigate difference.

In this volume, the reader will discover that a sojourn abroad without moving from the European continent, even for a period as short as one semester, can expand the array of options for participants' future careers. There are substantial implications here for education policies that aim to improve the willingness of university graduates to become mobile workers in the future. Furthermore, since it also has implications for the overall state of economy, training Europeans to expand their identity horizons through study abroad should be a matter of concern for both public and private stakeholders.

This volume will show the disparity between students who choose certain contexts for their stay, in terms of participant expectations, and

the areas that most interest students in each group. These results provide a means to orient students when they choose the setting for their Erasmus stay and inform them about each region to avoid unrealistic expectations and potential disappointment. Since the decision to resist or accept the target language and culture could affect the outcomes of the experience, this volume reveals a need for stakeholders in the Erasmus program to promote willingness among the participants to integrate into local societies to avoid unpleasant experiences and consequent disillusion. An Erasmus stay should not be understood as a homogeneous identical experience for everybody regardless of the context, since different gains are achieved through stays in different contexts.

As regards second language learning, the evidence presented shows that for the Erasmus students in all three contexts, the ability to speak English is more important in identifying with a given group of people than being European, and the Erasmus stay had no effect in this respect. These results indicate that for Erasmus students, language, in this case English, is a much more powerful identity connector than an alleged European identity. We should therefore consider the possibility that promoting English, and more concisely, English as a *lingua franca*, may contribute to stronger identification among young European higher education students. The reader will also discover that Erasmus students prefer to spend most of their stay with other international students, followed by local people, then native speakers of English. While the desire to spend their stay with other international students and with local people is high, there is little interest in learning the local languages (Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan). The exception is Spanish, which appears to hold a very different and more desirable status.

Expectations and outcomes also differ in this respect. At the end of their sojourn, the participants report having spent significantly less time with local people, as well as with native speakers of English and significantly more time with people from their own countries. These networks, together with the hybridization of identity reported above could contribute to the creation of flexible forms of citizenship which allow an opportunistic response to the flux of markets and neoliberal politics brought by late capitalism. The participants in this study give reasons to believe the Erasmus stay could open the way to a more flexible and dynamic identity where an individual's life project becomes perpetually adjustable. On the other hand, that participants spent more time than expected with students

from their own countries could have created a critical perspective towards Europe and increased closeness to their own nations.

The study of expectations and outcomes from the sojourn abroad reveals that overall, the highest hopes concern the personal. Personal aspirations and benefits are the only ones that show no significant difference between the degree of expectation and the degree of accomplishment while professional and academic benefits are lower than expected overall. At times personal and professional expectations are intermeshed, and the participants struggle when it comes to separating personal outcomes from others that may be obtained in relation to professional skills.

A further contribution of this study relates to language expectations, attitudes, investment, and outcomes in study abroad in Europe. It shows that from the start the local languages Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan, are given similar importance, while Spanish clearly stands out from the rest. These results indicate that Erasmus participants are well aware of the perceived economic value of each language, which has an outstanding role in Erasmus sojourns. All three groups feel significantly less motivated by the local languages (Catalan, Romanian, and Finnish), while significantly higher motivation for Spanish is reported in the Lleida group. A sojourn abroad can contribute to decreased student motivation to study local languages, which are perceived to have little importance in the market. Conversely, there is increasing admiration for languages perceived to have high economic value. This might suggest that feelings of being rejected by the host culture or a certain degree of superficiality in the relationship with the host members can lead to withdrawal and reduced success in second language acquisition. However, the positions that the learners adopt when encountering sociocultural and linguistic differences may also play a role in restricting or facilitating their access to the target communities. In fact, a more negative attitude towards the local languages, Finnish and Romanian, also become apparent at the beginning of the sojourn, which relates more to the economic idea of investment in Flubacher *et al.* (2018). This study found a tendency among Erasmus students to report a significantly lower use of both English and the local languages and a significantly higher reported use of their own languages at the end of the experience.

Regarding the perceived language-related outcomes of the sojourn abroad, overall, the low level of improvement in Finnish, Romanian, and Catalan is similar among the three respective contexts signaling that there

is no direct relationship between study abroad and linguistic immersion but a much more complex relationship, where there is a substantial economic role. This study shows there is room for language learning in study abroad, except for local languages whose economic value is perceived to be low. A different outcome would probably be obtained if participants were migrants intending to settle down in the host environment rather than a short study experience.

As for communicative skills, there is a significantly higher perception of the participants in Bucharest that the mobility stay impacted positively on their communicative skills than in the case of the participants in Oulu. Furthermore, in relation to the impact of the sojourn abroad on a willingness to learn other languages, there is significantly lower motivation to learn foreign languages as a result of the sojourn abroad of those students who had Finland as a destination than the ones who were in Lleida and Bucharest. The interviews show that the linguistic expectations of the participants are closely related to the contexts they had chosen for the Erasmus experience. At the end of the sojourn, participants in Oulu improved their English level but, in some cases, remain unsatisfied by their level of acquisition. Hence, some participants affirm that their English level has opened some professional doors for them. Bucharest provided a good environment for improving competences in English as a *lingua franca*. Many participants mention that their English progressed because they were able to develop communication strategies that enable them to manage in situations when English is used among non-native speakers.

This research will shed light on those social, cultural, and identity-related factors which might affect study abroad experiences and the ways in which they interact with foreign language learning in SA in three European contexts where English as a *lingua franca* predominates between Erasmus students. Furthermore, it is the first study (as far as I am aware) that contrasts and compares social, cultural, and identity-related factors affecting second language learning in SA across three European countries located in strategic positions in the North, East, and South of the continent. It also considers a substantial number of nationalities (N=26). Accordingly, it is a straightforward answer to claims for further research in the area in which the study is situated, for instance, that of Kinginger (2013: 354): “future research should attempt to address these gaps, representing the experiences of a broader range of students, questioning students’ motives for particular language-related choices, and

attending aspects of identity that are of clear relevance but have remained unexamined”. Furthermore, the longitudinal nature of the study, as well as the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods breaks new ground by bringing to the forefront both a broad and an in-depth image of study abroad.

By taking into account speakers of English as a lingua franca as representative of the Target Language community in the Erasmus experience, this volume contests the idea that input from native speakers and contact with communities of native speakers are the only rationales for foreign language learning in study abroad: “[i]t seems generally true to say that second language acquisition is characterized by a drive towards approximating native speaker behavior and accommodation to native speech norms” (Regan, 1998: 77). This idea has recently attracted interest and has been explored in studies, such as Llanes (2019), Llanes *et al.* (2022), and Köylü & Tracy-Ventura (2022).

All in all, this research contributes to the bulk of studies on social, cultural, and identity-related factors that determine language learning in SA by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods at every stage of the study, thus responding to research questions that could not be fully answered by other methods. Further, it sheds light not only on the similarities between qualitative and quantitative types of data, but also on the paradoxes and contradictions that might arise from combining surveys and interviews, achieving a more detailed picture of the study abroad phenomenon, and leading to a better understanding of the impact of study abroad and sociolinguistic processes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the editing committee of Institut Interuniversitari de Llengües Modernes Aplicades de la Comunitat Valenciana, for the trust that they deposited in the publication of this volume, and most especially to Prof. Diana González Pastor (Universitat de València) for her helpful remarks on the outline and initial proposal for this book. Similarly, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers of earlier versions of the manuscript for their priceless work. Any further flaws are my responsibility.

A very special “thank you” goes to Prof. Francisco Ivorra Perez (Universitat de València), for inspiring me to publish this volume; to Prof. Gwyn Fox, for revising earlier versions of the manuscript; and to Prof. Enric Llorca (Universitat de Lleida) for being the guiding hand that led me on this path.

My deepest gratitude to my family, Mirela, Ion, and Estrella for their ongoing support in the writing process of this manuscript; and to Alberto, for all the little things that matter the most.

The research was funded by the Agència de Gestió d’Ajuts Universitaris i de Recerca, Generalitat de Catalunya (ref. 2016 FI_B 00624), SGR 2017-2020 (ref.2017-SGR-1522) and by Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades (Development of disciplinary literacies in English as a lingua franca at university – LIDISELF, ref. PID2019-107451GB-I00).

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This volume analyzes the social, cultural, and identity-related aspects believed to be determinants for language learning in the SA experience of university students participating in the Erasmus program in three European countries. The title calls for a need to inform the reader about the conceptualization of language, and language learning that it takes on. Heller's (2020: 125) claim is an appropriate starting point:

relativizing the autonomy of “language” potentially opens up new realms of inquiry, which allow for recentering the communicative dimensions of social process as part of understanding more broadly how social process works and what it produces – not just something that “linguists” (“sociolinguists,” “linguistic anthropologists”) do, over there, somewhere.

Connected to the above, the aspects approached here draw on sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and a considerable body of research on language and identity (e.g., Norton, 2013; Darvin & Norton, 2015; Mocanu, 2019 and 2022), and language and emotions (e.g., Diert & Martin-Rubió, 2018; Pérez-García & Sánchez, 2020) which share frontiers with current social psychological studies (e.g., Useem, 2020).

Building upon poststructuralist theory, it is connected to the work of Bourdieu, not a linguist but a sociologist who brought the social dimension into the study of language. Bourdieu (1977) introduced concepts such as ‘authorized language’, to indicate that communication is not just about speaking but also about the degree of power of a speaker to impose reception on a listener. He further claimed that “an adequate science of discourse must establish the laws which determine who (*de facto* and *de jure*) may speak, to whom, and how” (Bourdieu, 1977: 648). Of considerable interest are the *bourdieussian* concepts of ‘habitus’, ‘capital’, and ‘market’. These are instrumental in describing the complex and permanently changing relationship between the speakers’ position and that of their interlocutors. A couple of decades later, Bourdieu & Passeron’s (1990) theorization regarding reproduc-

tion in education, society, and culture showed how education serves the purpose of perpetuating the interests of the dominant power in society. The entire analysis is highly important for the understanding of the relationship between SLA and educational, social, and cultural systems (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990: 118):

no one acquires a language without thereby acquiring a relation to language. In cultural matters the manner of acquiring perpetuates itself in what is acquired, in the form of a certain matter of using the acquirement, the mode of acquisition itself expressing the objective relations between the social characteristics of the acquirer and the social quality of what is acquired.

The concerns of the present volume are not connected, though, with the social quality of what is acquired in the *bourdeussian* manner — the symbolic meaning of being able to use certain rhetorical devices, but with the symbolic meaning that being able to speak certain languages has (and certain other do not). In his description of the dynamics of the linguistic fields, Bourdieu (1991: 61) affirms that “the linguistic competence measured by academic criteria depends, like the other dimensions of cultural capital, on the level of education (...) and on the social trajectory”. In the same way, I would argue that certain languages, whose symbolic power is acknowledged worldwide, can provide membership to desired, privileged social categories. This assumption is one of the main forces driving the participants in this study to take part in a sojourn abroad and for this reason the present volume keeps an eye on neoliberal rationales for study abroad that can be considered a matter of social reproduction.

Furthemore, the present work examines language as a “common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness” (Weedon, 1987: 21). According to Weedon “language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet, it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, *is constructed*” (p. 21). Consequently, this volume departs from the hypothesis that there is a need to address the social, political, and economic discursive practices that shape language learning in study abroad. In Weedon’s (1987: 26) words:

how we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent.

Understanding the material conditions under which the participants in this study experience their sojourn abroad is, therefore, a matter of concern for the present work. Hence, this volume contributes to shedding light on the ways in which power relations shape human experience at an individual level, as well as in communities and groups.

1.2. STUDY ABROAD AND LANGUAGE LEARNING – AN OVERVIEW

In this volume, study abroad is understood as a period at a foreign university which can last for one or two semesters, where the study of or studying through a second language(s) is implied, even though it might not always be the main purpose of the sojourn. Study abroad became a matter of concern during the 1960s (e.g., Carroll, 1967) though it remained exclusively focused on the terrain of language gains until the 1990s (e.g., Magnan, 1986; Dyson, 1988) when it shifted direction towards a more socioculturally oriented framework (e.g., Freed, 1995). Studies conducted in the field of study abroad can be divided into those that have had a more linguistic orientation (e.g., Sasaki, 2007; Cubillos *et al.*, 2008; Llanes *et al.*, 2011; Kang, 2014; Juan-Garau, 2014) and those with a more sociocultural inclination (e.g., Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Kalocsái, 2014). The present volume is situated in the latter group.

Overall, the results of the research concerned with language gains show that SA seems to be a productive environment for language learning. As a matter of fact, in her review of research on study abroad, Kinginger (2009) makes the point that each modality of language use appears to benefit from sojourns studying abroad.

Studies oriented towards the social facet of the experience relate to the need to look at language learning as part of a complex life experience, in which language(s), identities, motives, desires, opportunities

to learn, circumstances, and the ways students react to these are deeply intertwined (e.g., Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Jackson, 2008; Benson *et al.*, 2013; Llurda *et al.*, 2016; Durán Martínez *et al.*, 2016). In this respect, research up to this moment points to study abroad as an opportunity for students to encounter and face cultural and linguistic difference. According to Pellegrino Aveni (2005) SA triggers what she calls a ‘deprivation’ or an ‘alteration’ of the self, due to the need to live in a foreign language. In another study, Murphy-Lejeune (2004) claims that Erasmus mobility opens the way for a particular form of migration as a result of international experiences that ultimately increase the participants’ willingness to live internationally in the future. Similarly, Jackson (2008) shows that, despite SA being a valuable and life-changing experience, there is a tremendous diversity in international students’ life journeys abroad. Llurda *et al.* (2016), looking at the development of Catalan students’ attachment to European citizenship during their Erasmus stay, concluded that the study abroad sojourn brought no positive impact in this respect.

All things considered, there is a perceived need for what Block (2014) has called an opening of SA studies which involve “different nationality combinations as regards sending and receiving countries” (p. 223) and for “research which might capture the specificity of the learner’s socio-linguistic development from the learner’s own perspective as well as in relation to the specificity of his/her opportunities for such development from a micro-perspective” (Regan *et al.*, 2009: 143). The present study responds to this need by considering a wide array of students from different nationalities and the three contexts where they spent their study abroad sojourn, thus “representing the experiences of a broader range of students, questioning students’ motives for particular language-related choices” (Kinginger, 2013: 354).

The present volume is concerned with SA within the European Union through the Erasmus Program (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) which started in 1987 with 3244 students from 11 countries (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). According to the European Commission (2020), in the academic year 2019-2020, despite the mobility restrictions triggered by the COVID19 pandemic, 312.800 student mobilities were achieved which was “a sharp drop from the previous year attributable to the pandemic” (European Commission, 2020).

This mobility is made possible by the Erasmus+ Programme, which has at its core fostering sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion. Furthermore, it aims to strengthen European identity and active citizenship. According to the European Commission (2023), the specific objectives of the programme are the following:

- promote learning mobility of individuals and groups, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training;
- promote non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of youth;
- promote learning mobility of sport staff, as well as cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies.

This volume aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which social, cultural, and identity-related factors are determinant in language learning processes through SA across three different locations in Europe?

RQ2: What is the impact on foreign language development of each of these factors as reported by international university students in Finland, Romania, and Catalonia?

The monograph is composed of four main parts and a final section that gathers the final remarks. The first part offers the theoretical background and reviews the relevant theoretical and research driven literature, establishing the gap that this research attempts to fill: understanding the social, cultural, and identity-related determinants of language learning in SA by considering three different European contexts, each of them with their particular linguistic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural peculiarities and taking into consideration students from 26 nationalities.

The second part comprises the research methodology. Mixed methods research is the paradigm in which the study is embedded, and the instruments and procedure are considered. In this section, the design of the

study is explained, offering a detailed account of the Erasmus program, the locations, and the participants.

The data was gathered using two instruments: a questionnaire—mainly composed of Likert-scale questions, and a semi-structured interview. PRE and POST versions of both research instruments were used for collecting data at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn abroad. Descriptive statistics were employed to examine the demographic data. A Shapiro-Wilk test was run for all the items in order to see if the data distribution was normal—the results indicated that the data violated the assumption of normality. Consequently, the responses have been analyzed by means of non-parametric tests. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used in order to ascertain any differences between the three contexts, firstly in the PRE and secondly in the POST-test. In those cases where significant differences were detected, Pair-wise tests were employed in order to determine the particular contexts in which the differences were significant. Finally, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to examine the evolution between the PRE and the POST-test. This test was run primarily for the combined sample, but in some cases, each group was considered separately.

The aim of the interviews was to deal with narratives voiced at the beginning and at the end of a sojourn studying abroad; therefore, thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis has been identified by Block (2010) as one of three distinct ways to deal with narratives, together with structural analysis, and dialogic/performative analysis. Because the main aim was to interpret meaning from text data, all the selected interviews were transcribed using basic transcription conventions (included at the beginning of the manuscript). Since the questionnaire was designed before the interview and since the latter was meant to corroborate, validate, or show contradictions with the former, first of all, information related to the different themes around which the questionnaire was built was searched for in the interviews. After this step, the transcripts were analyzed again to see if other relevant themes emerged. If this was the case, new themes were added to those of the questionnaire. Finally, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses were combined and compared.

The third part encompasses the results of the study. It focuses on the social, cultural, and identity-related factors that impact language learning in SA. In the first place, the role of the context is examined. Special attention is devoted to the languages that are encountered in each of these

contexts (e.g., Gallego-Balsà, 2014). Secondly, it focuses on the degree of contact with other speakers, considering both contact with the local communities and connection with the more transient communities of international students. Additionally, individual differences and the role of motivation and investment (Norton, 2013, Darwin & Norton, 2015; Duchêne, 2016) are studied. The connection between the sojourn studying abroad, language learning, and the concept of “employability” (Flubacher *et al.*, 2018; Courtois, 2020) is also explored in efforts to understand how language competencies are ultimately transformed into human capital and the purposes this capital is expected to serve.

The final section contrasts the most outstanding results of the study. It is intended to bring together and jointly discuss the results, as well as to triangulate the results with other findings from other literature on the same topic. It summarizes the most important findings of the study and their relevance to the field of applied linguistics, bringing to the fore-front certain implications for the implementation of institutional policies that would better approach the interaction between social cultural, and linguistic factors, with language learning in SA.

Study abroad has been a matter of concern in sociolinguistics for a few decades now. Nevertheless, research on study abroad has rarely combined the study of sociolinguistic aspects with the analysis of perceived language-related gains. Similarly, there has been a lack of studies integrating qualitative and quantitative methods in SA research. Thus, the present volume comes as a response to the need to triangulate sociolinguistic aspects with perceived language-related gains, qualitative and quantitative methods, in three different European contexts, and participants from almost every corner in Europe for a deeper understanding of the study abroad phenomenon on the European continent.

Vasilica Mocanu is an assistant lecturer of English Language and Linguistics at the University of Salamanca. Her research is concerned with multilingualism, identity, and diversity under globalization, language learning processes in situations of mobility and the potential of mixed-methods to investigate the implications for language and identity in situations of mobility and displacement across different cultural landscapes.