The dissertation of Janice McGregor was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Dr. Carrie N. Jackson  
Associate Professor of German  
Dissertation Adviser  
Chair of Committee

Dr. B. Richard Page  
Associate Professor of German  
Head of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

Dr. Celeste Kinginger  
Professor of Applied Linguistics and French and Francophone Studies

Dr. Robert Schrauf  
Professor of Applied Linguistics  
Head of the Department of Applied Linguistics

Dr. John Plews  
Associate Professor of German, Saint Mary’s University, Canada

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School
ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I report on a multiple case study conducted with six American undergraduate students during their year abroad in Marburg, Germany. Using a communities of practice orientation to second language socialization, this study sought to investigate issues surrounding the participants’ identity negotiation and development through mutual engagement in communities while abroad (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Study abroad students face the immediate need to negotiate difference due to linguistic and cultural variation. Such critical encounters or, rich points (see Agar, 1994), often occur through participation in new communities, and can lead to instances of identity negotiation. I followed the participants for one year, looking at the communities that they participated in, and their levels of engagement within these communities. Data were collected via language history questionnaires, language proficiency evaluations, group conversation sessions, and oral recordings in which participants reflected on the rich points that they experienced throughout the year. I also conducted four individual semistructured interviews with each participant. These data were supplemented by observational notes regarding their daily lives in Marburg. I used these converging data sources to investigate participants’ own references to agency and access within their communities, as well as how they perceived and positioned themselves and others. I explored the relationships between community participation, levels of engagement, identity negotiation and identity transformation. The results show that many participants shifted their original goals in order to maintain emotional security and participate in a meaningful way in their communities during their year abroad. Those who reflected on their own and others’ salient identity issues learned to consider other perspectives, and as a result showed more signs of developing into transcultural speakers than those participants who were less reflective and less able to consider multiple perspectives. The analysis highlights the importance of sites of struggle as opportunities for reflection, compassion and ultimately, learning and
development. Sojourning students often have real and imagined desires vis-à-vis learning and language use in a study abroad context, and therefore, scholars, educators, and study abroad administrators interested in sociocultural approaches to second language acquisition should find this study relevant to ongoing discussions of second language learning, mobility and identity.
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1  Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Study Abroad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The Current Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Chapter Outline</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2  Literature Review</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Point of Departure</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Research Questions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 SLA and SLL: Then and Now</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Language Learning in Study Abroad Contexts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1 Early studies on study abroad</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 Investigating process and product</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3 Language use and learner outcomes</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.4 Learner perspectives, identity and study abroad</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.5 Implications for this study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Sociocultural Perspectives in Applied Linguistics</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1 Vygotsky and cultural-historical perspectives</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2 Bakhtin and dialogue</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3 Bourdieusian perspectives</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Language Socialization</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1 Communities of practice</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2 A communities of practice orientation to L2 socialization</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 The Intercultural Speaker</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Identity and Subjectivity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.1 Identity development</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Conclusions</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3  Methodology</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Qualitative Studies</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Case Study as a Research Methodology</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Role of the researcher</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Language history questionnaire, proficiency evaluation</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Oral reflections</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Semistructured interviews</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Group conversations</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5 Observational notes</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Chapter 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.4.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Coding and Analysis</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Analysis: transcription and coding</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires and Linguistic Data</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Katie</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Brad</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Sarah</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4 David</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5 Joe</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.6 Mark</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Language Proficiency Evaluations</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Group Conversation Data</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Conclusions</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral Reflection and Interview Data</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 In Katie’s Words</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 German vs. English</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Friends and language</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.3 Lisa and Katie</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.4 Stefan and Katie</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.5 Social life vs. academic life</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 In Brad’s Words</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1 Brad and depression</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2 The quest for German friends</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3 Muay Thai</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4 ERASMUS friends</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 In Sarah’s Words</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1 Being American and speaking German</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2 Expert status</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.3 Meeting German men</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.4 The European traveler</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.5 Conclusion</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 In David’s Words</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1 David and homesickness</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2 David and belonging</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3 Thoughts on German and English</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.4 Conclusion</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6 In Joe’s Words ................................................................. 172
  5.6.1 The introvert ............................................................. 173
  5.6.2 Academic pursuits.................................................... 178
  5.6.3 Urban, sociocultural and linguistic differences ................. 182
  5.6.4 Conclusion ............................................................. 185
5.7 In Mark’s Words ............................................................... 186
  5.7.1 Proficiency woes ....................................................... 186
  5.7.2 A time for change ...................................................... 189
  5.7.3 Meeting new people .................................................. 192
  5.7.4 Conclusion ............................................................. 195
5.8 Final Thoughts ............................................................. 196

Chapter 6 Discussion .................................................................. 199
  6.1 Discussion of Results ....................................................... 199
  6.2 Language Proficiency Evaluations and Group Conversations .... 200
  6.3 Imagination ...................................................................... 203
    6.3.1 Language desires ..................................................... 205
    6.3.2 Travel desires ......................................................... 209
    6.3.3 Friendship desires ................................................... 211
      6.3.3.1 Social desires pre-sojourn .................................... 213
      6.3.3.2 Social desires in-sojourn ..................................... 215
    6.3.4 Romantic desires ..................................................... 220
    6.3.5 Academic desires .................................................... 224
    6.3.6 Conclusion ............................................................. 227
  6.4 Emotion ........................................................................ 229
    6.4.1 Negative emotion ................................................... 230
    6.4.2 Emotional expression .............................................. 233
    6.4.3 Conclusion ............................................................. 236
  6.5 Discussion Summary ........................................................ 237

Chapter 7 Conclusion .................................................................. 239
  7.1 Discussion of Findings ..................................................... 239
  7.2 Implications and Future Directions ...................................... 246
    7.2.1 Implications for research: community participation, engagement, and identity development .......... 249
    7.2.2 Implications for language pedagogy, curricula, and program design ........................................ 252
  7.3 Limitations of this Study .................................................. 254
  7.4 Concluding Remarks ....................................................... 255

Appendix A Language History Questionnaire .................................. 257
Appendix B Language Proficiency Evaluation .................................. 263
Appendix C Instructions for Oral Reflections ................................. 265
Appendix D Sample Interview Questions ...................................... 266
Appendix E  Transcription Conventions.................................................................268
References...........................................................................................................269
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4-1: Number of turns in group conversation session 4a..............................................100
Figure 4-2: Number of turns in group conversation session 4b..............................................100
Figure 4-3: Length of German language turns in group conversation session 4a......................101
Figure 4-4: Length of German language turns in group conversation session 4b......................101
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4-1: Study Participants.................................................................86

Table 4-2: Language Proficiency Evaluation........................................93

Table 4-3: Language Proficiency Evaluations Scores. ........................93
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation advisor and mentor Carrie Jackson. Carrie’s ability to listen and give principled feedback and revision advice has helped shape me as a scholar and person. I am also very grateful to the other members of my doctoral committee and thank them for their thoughtful comments, guidance and overall support during my doctoral studies: Richard Page, Celeste Kinginger, Robert Schrauf and John Plews.

Many others have contributed in less direct but equally important ways. I would like to thank the staff and faculty in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures for years of support. A big thank you goes to present and past graduate teaching coordinators, Mike Putnam and Hülya Yılmaz, who have both put in many hours of hard work. Special thanks also go to our kind resident technical expert, JoElle DeVinney, who works hard to keep us all connected. Additionally, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) has helped fund my doctoral studies, and I am grateful for their financial support.

I am lucky to have a family that has been unconditionally supportive of all of my endeavours, and I could not have done this without their love and understanding. To Mom & Dan, Dad & Gail, Ali & Brian, Cameron, Grandma, Joan, and all of my aunts, uncles and cousins: I love you all! To my good friends from Toronto, Waterloo, State College, Marburg and beyond: whether we were at home, in class, in the cubes, at Zeno’s, or in the Mensa - you have been a true support system. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to thank the six participants of this study. They each made the decision to study abroad, and it profoundly affected their lives. Their stories are a constant reminder of my own experiences, and why I became interested in language leaning and development in study abroad contexts in the first place. Without these young men and women, I could not have produced this work. This dissertation is for them.
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Study Abroad

Studying abroad constitutes a particular kind of wandering experience. The length of many university-level sojourn programs is fixed institutionally, and the temporary nature of the study abroad experience does not call upon its participants to assimilate in the way that migrants are often expected to. The young sojourner chooses to study and live temporarily in a new and foreign context in a crossroads event that takes place between adolescence and adulthood. Studying abroad, therefore, is often influenced by a student’s familial expectations, academic requirements, professional goals, as well as other pertinent language learning, travel, and social hopes and desires.

Language learning and language use have long been viewed as major advantage of study abroad. In an American context, the Junior Year Abroad model has been the long-standing tradition for those majoring in foreign languages (Kinginger, 2008). In this model, the year abroad was seen as a coming-of-age year in which personal and linguistic gains were part of the larger overall education. The Junior Year Abroad is no longer the dominant model for study abroad programs in the United States, though the number of programs sending students abroad have grown (Kinginger, 2008). Sojourning students may now select from multiple programs, including private short-term and one-year programs or programs that are hosted through university exchanges. Due in part to the growing cost of education in the United States, many American students opt for short-term sojourns that do not alter the course of their post-secondary studies. Many of these programs offer to take care of students’ housing, course selection and extracurricular activities, such as weekend trips, thus adding to their appeal.
According to the Institute for International Education’s “Open Doors” report (2011), very few of today’s sojourners declare themselves to be foreign language majors. As such, it stands to reason that language learning may no longer be the primary objective of many who go abroad. Private short-term programs may also be unable to offer much more than minimal participation in local communities outside of the sojourn’s pre-planned programmatic events. Students who take part in one-semester or one-year programs like a Junior Year Abroad may have more freedom and time to participate and engage in local communities. However, today’s students live in a very different context compared to students from twenty years ago. My own observations show that it is quite common for sojourners to maintain constant connections to home via a laptop, wireless connection, and cell phone. They have constant access to vast amounts of English-language media online from anywhere in the world at their fingertips. The host country’s citizens may also prefer to address sojourning students primarily in English, making it a challenge for students to use and practice the host language in a routine way.

1.2 The Current Study

Carroll (1967), reporting on an early nationwide foreign language assessment project, discovered that studying abroad was a major source for improving one’s abilities in a second language (L2). Other large-scale studies have demonstrated that there can actually be quite a lot of variation in the L2 outcomes of sojourners, dependent on various learning factors (Brecht, Davidson & Ginsburg, 1995; Coleman, 1996). Many researchers have thus attempted to look beyond language proficiency with the hope of finding a better way to determine what students accomplish in a study abroad context. Kinginger (2009) writes that outcomes-based research is often complemented by case study and ethnographic accounts of experiences in order to investigate students’ varying goals, perspectives and experiences, as well as the access that
students have to various communities and groups in the local context. This dissertation responds to calls for more case study and ethnographic accounts by investigating how students participate and engage in local communities during their time abroad.

Over the course of one year, I conducted a multiple case study with six American undergraduate students during their year abroad in Marburg, Germany. This study uses tenets central to a communities of practice orientation to second language socialization (see Duff, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991) to investigate the communities that the participants took part in while in Marburg. I look at participants’ dispositions or stances toward study abroad, language learning, and the German language. I look at issues surrounding their identity negotiation and development through mutual engagement in these communities of practice. As study abroad students often face the immediate need to negotiate difference due to linguistic and cultural variation, I am especially interested in critical encounters, or rich points (see Agar, 1994). Rich points are potential moments of conflict where the student faces emotional insecurity through the need to negotiate linguistic and cultural difference. How participants negotiate, act, feel, reflect, and, ultimately, develop through such points of potential conflict can lead to instances of identity negotiation. I followed the participants for one year, looking at the communities that they participated in, and their levels of engagement within these communities. I investigated their own references to agency and access as well as how they perceived and positioned themselves and others within those communities.

In this study, I collected language history questionnaires and language proficiency evaluations at three separate intervals during the year. I also conducted eight group conversation sessions with the participants, two Universität Marburg students, and myself. I collected weekly oral recordings in which the participants recorded their reflections on moments where they negotiated or reacted to linguistic and cultural differences. I also conducted four individual semistructured interviews with each participant. These data were supplemented by observational
notes on participants’ daily lives in Marburg. The results will show that the participants who are able to reflect on their own and others’ salient identity issues and come to understand topics and themes from other perspectives were better able to adapt to their shifting beliefs, goals and desires and become transcultural speakers. The analysis highlights the importance of sites of struggle as opportunities for reflection, compassion and ultimately, learning and development. The findings of this study will thus be applicable to not only language educators, but also to other areas of sojourn preparation, in that they suggest a more critically reflective approach to teaching and learning of German and foreign languages.

1.3 Chapter Outline

The present study investigates community participation in a study abroad context, looking at issues surrounding identity negotiation and transformation through mutual engagement in these communities. The following chapter, chapter two, will be dedicated to mapping the terrain of second language acquisition and second language learning research more generally, as well as second language research that focuses on students in study abroad contexts. In chapter two, I will also introduce the theoretical underpinnings of the current study. In chapter three, I will outline the methodological approach of the multiple case study. I will also describe the process of data collection, transcription, coding and analysis used in this study.

Chapter four is devoted to presenting the participants’ biographical information including their histories and goals. Alongside these, I present participants’ linguistic findings collected in the language proficiency evaluation and turn counts from one particular group conversation session. In chapter five, I identify particular codes and themes to reconstruct the participants’ narratives, based on in their oral reflection and interview data. In chapter six I will summarize my findings and discuss these findings in light of two major themes that emerge from the data,
namely the theme of imagination and the theme of emotion. In chapter seven, I present the findings vis-à-vis the research questions of this study. I also discuss the limitations of the present study, as well as implications for future research with regard to community participation, engagement and identity development during a sojourn abroad as well as language pedagogy, curricula and program design more generally.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Point of Departure

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how concepts from a communities of practice (CoP) orientation to second language socialization (L2S) help to situate participants as complex, social beings with different goals, ideas, and perspectives within a sojourn context (see Duff, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991). I delve further into the relationship between the quantity (e.g., measured, language-related outcomes) and the quality (e.g., personal, social, and cultural experiences) of a year abroad and respond to the call for additional research investigating study abroad (SA), second language acquisition (SLA), and second language learning (SLL). In order to do this, I examine participants in a SA context through the lens of their personal histories and backgrounds in their particular sojourn environments. I look at participants’ dispositions or stances toward SA, language learning, and the German language. Through the analysis of these personal stances I can situate participants and their perspectives in their own individual SA contexts and, in doing so, discover how their perspectives influence and are influenced by the manner in which the participants frame their experiences. Issues I specifically explore include the linguistic and social development, that is, the language socialization of American undergraduate study abroad students in their various communities of practice while studying abroad (see Duff, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Ochs & Schiefflin, 2001; Schiefflin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b).

In the sections that follow, I consider how this situated learning theory allows for the investigation of identity construction among study abroad participants, including how these participants position themselves vis-à-vis Germany, German-speaking people, and the German language in a study abroad context by providing a background of recent research in SLA and SLL
theory. I also consider related issues regarding notions of identity and subject positioning as well as identity development over time, highlighting the relationship between language learning, proficiency, intercultural awareness, and individual histories. In what follows, I provide a short description of my study in order to discuss the theoretical framework and epistemology in which I am working, as well as to highlight what has been called the “social turn” in second language acquisition, as this has had a significant impact on my theoretical considerations (Block, 2003). I then present previous research in the area of study abroad and language learning in order to situate my study within this area of inquiry. Following that, I discuss the sociocultural theories that have informed the theoretical framework of my study. Finally, I highlight how the framework I use for this dissertation views language learning, the development of the intercultural speaker, and identity.

2.2 Research Questions

The current project adopts concepts from situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), commonly known as communities of practice to investigate how students construct, negotiate, and develop their identities as language learners, study abroad participants, and negotiators of potentially difficult rich points during a study year abroad in Germany. Situated learning theory views a community as a construct that is constantly being negotiated, and thus is always shifting. This theory understands learning “as a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced lived-in world” (Lave, 1991, p. 64). Using this framework, the present project deepens our understanding of issues surrounding identity negotiation and development through (mutual) engagement and participation in CoPs over the course of one academic semester or year abroad. Over the past twenty years, a growing interest in relating social practice theory to the puzzles of language and society that researchers attempt to better understand has taken place in
the field of second language acquisition (Block, 2007b). While traditional linguistic and structuralist approaches have not disappeared, in recent years, many have noted the increase in second language research that draws openly on social theory (Block, 2007a; Firth & Wagner, 1997). Adopting a communities of practice orientation to second language socialization allows for a better understanding of how American study abroad students position themselves and others in the sojourn context.

In my research, I ask the following questions:

- In what communities of practice do participants take part, and what are their levels of engagement in these communities?
- Is there an interaction between participants’ levels of (mutual) engagement in individual communities of practice and their identity negotiation (and vice versa)?
- Do levels of (mutual) engagement in communities of practice change over the academic semester or year, and does the amount and intensity of identity negotiation lead to identity development over time?

Looking at the individual experiences of six American undergraduate SA students and situating them in their own histories, presents, and futures as they attempt to engage in new communities as legitimate participants requires careful thought about data collection. First, I had participants record oral reflections and/or descriptions of any cultural encounters that stood out to them; these were collected throughout the year. As well, I conducted four one-on-one semistructured interviews with each participant to garner more general information and any extra comments regarding their oral reflections. I also conducted group conversation sessions, during which three participants, a Marburg University student, and I would converse casually in my kitchen. These conversations were also recorded. Finally, data collection included my own field notes of the participants in their everyday lives, their interactions in various contexts with fellow American exchange students, German students, other German or English-speaking international
students, and family and friends back home. This is a collection of ethnographic case studies, and I focus on the qualitative experiences of a few individuals within their various and particular communities. I am therefore interested in social theories of language learning, culture and identity in the field of SLA. These theories have influenced both the theoretical framework and the methodology of this study.

2.3 SLA and SLL: Then and Now

Claire Kramsch (2000) summarizes fairly traditional views of language and language acquisition, stating that they:

are predicated on a clear dichotomy between the individual and the social. Language, and the psychological processes of language *acquisition*, are thought to reside in the head; communication, and the social processes of language *use*, are thought to reside in social context. (p. 133)

Current research now views such long-established beliefs as too narrow and individualistic to capture the complexities and links between language, culture, and identity (Firth & Wagner, 1997). Still, there are many who understand SLA in more psycholinguistic terms (Block, 2007a; 2007b). Yet others have called for an expansion of SLA theory that would include both the psycholinguistic and social points of view (Block, 2007a; 2007b). Researchers have made a call for a more theoretically and methodologically balanced SLA, noting that three major shifts are necessary (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 285-288). These shifts include: (a) a significantly enhanced awareness of context and interaction, (b) an increased emic (participant) sensitivity, and (c) the broadening of the SLA base (p. 286). One of the main criticisms of SLA theory is the common consideration of the language learner as *only* a learner, which Firth and Wagner note comes “at the expense of other potentially relevant social identities” (1997, p. 288). In their conclusions,
they consider the disparity between cognitive and social orientations to language once more, criticizing the view of the FL speaker as a deficient communicator who reaches toward native-speaker like proficiency, their ultimate target (p. 285). The authors state that this leads to a “skewed perspective” of language acquisition (p. 285). Firth and Wagner consequently suggest that future research should strive to reconceptualize SLA in an attempt to narrow the aforementioned gaps.

Given this history, it should come as no surprise that there has been a marked increase in SLA and SLL publications discussing issues surrounding language, culture, and identity. Before Firth and Wagner’s (1997) article, research that attempted to move the field in a new direction did exist (see Larsen-Freeman, 1997; Savignon, 1972). However, the appearance of and reactions to Firth and Wagner (1997) created a space for larger debates about the direction of the field, and consequently, palpable shifts in research foci began to occur. The current scholarly dialogue highlights the move toward a “social turn,” a noted trend in the social sciences in general that has seen a rise in the use of biographical interviews as a favored method of data collection for those interested in the intersections of history and sociology, society and individuals, and access and agency (Block, 2003; Block, 2007a, p. 867). This recent interest in socially situated views of language and language learning goes beyond structuralist viewpoints that emphasize more static, universal ways of talking about human behavior and social phenomena toward poststructuralist views that look to “more nuanced, multi-leveled, and, ultimately, complicated framings of the world around us” (Block, 2007a p. 864). This shift allows for language learning to be viewed “not as the acquisition of a new set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological forms but as a struggle of concrete socially constituted and always situated beings to participate in the symbolically mediated lifeworld of another culture” (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 155). Similarly, others have called for more ecological approaches to language and language learning that attempt to understand the situated nature of language learning as occurring within an entire complex
ecosystem in which macro- and micro-contexts cannot be viewed in isolation of one another (e.g., Kramsch, 2002; Larsen-Freeman, 1997; van Lier, 2004). Language education, in this view, aims to teach students how to become translingual and transcultural speakers, or to have the ability to communicate while simultaneously reflecting on one’s own cultural origins and thus be capable of operating between languages (Kramsch, 2010). In this view, encouraging reflection of one’s own language and culture is paramount in order to circulate “values across historical and ideological time scales” as well as “the negotiation of nonnegotiable identities and beliefs” (p. 18).

In order to contribute to such understandings that call for more nuanced and multi-leveled framings, it is necessary to situate second language research within a theoretical framework whose concepts and constructs are useful for discussing more ecological understandings of language and language learning. I am interested in the interactions of students in a study abroad environment within varying social networks and communities, and have therefore adopted tenets of CoP such as participation and engagement (see Duff, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991) for the present study. CoP understands learning and development as situated and sees human agency and language socialization as primary components in “the activity of second language learning and use” (Whitworth, 2006, p. 54). I will elaborate more on both of these and other sociocultural theories in Section 2.5.

2.4 Language Learning in Study Abroad Contexts

In general, there has been a steady rise in popularity of study abroad programs and student opportunities to study in a foreign country are greater than they have ever been (Block, 2007b; Jackson, 2008). As more of these opportunities become available, research interest in the SA experience increases as well. Early studies published in the area of study abroad and language
learning (see Carroll, 1967; Schumann, 1980; Schumann & Schumann, 1977) showed that compared to earlier decades, studying abroad had become a possibility for a greater number of students, as well as a topic of interest for researchers. Currently, entire journals are dedicated to research on study abroad and language education, and there are numerous volumes, a Modern Language Journal monograph, and a general rise in scholarly interest regarding this topic. Why?

As mentioned elsewhere, language instructors know of the widely held assumption that the optimal language learning experience includes some combination of formal classroom learning and a sojourn abroad. Yet research in the area of SA and language learning demonstrates that students who study abroad may have varying levels of linguistic gains (Brecht, Davidson & Ginsburg, 1995; Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth, 2005; Kinginger 2008). A student may view achieving fluency as their primary objective; however, simply going abroad may not bring about this assumed result (Block, 2007b; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004, 2008, 2009; Wilkinson 1998; 2002).

We also know that the nature of the study abroad experience is constantly and profoundly affected and altered by technological advances and a more globalized economy (Kinginger, 2008). College students who study abroad are now part of what is called the digital native generation, which describes a generation of children and young adults who have been exposed to various media sources for 7-11 hours a day on average since the age of eight (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Among children between the ages of 8-18 a typical day of media exposure totals about 11 hours; a typical day of media use totals just under eight hours (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). Prensky (2001) notes: “Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach” (p. 1). As such, we simply cannot assume the study abroad experiences of our students will mirror our own. In recent years, native English speakers who study abroad in European countries (and in many other parts of the world) have also often been surprised to discover that they do not need to speak the
language of that country as often as they had thought due to the global spread of English as a second language (Block & Cameron, 2002; Kinginger, 2008). Likewise, new technologies enable them to stay in touch with their compatriots at home much more easily, thus potentially aiding them in sustaining a significant English-language environment even while they are studying abroad.

As language instructors, we urge our students to go abroad for a host of reasons, the most obvious of which are related to language learning. While many language educators recognize from personal experience that sojourners may or may not improve their language proficiency for various reasons, linguistic gain is still often one of the main reasons cited when encouraging students to study abroad. However, students may receive little pre-sojourn guidance regarding how to recognize new contextual and experiential changes and reflect upon them; that is, they may know little about how to view oneself differently in this new place. As such, their expectations of the study abroad experience may not be challenged until the day they set foot abroad. The common disconnect between the pre-sojourn expectation and the during-sojourn reality that many students experience informs us of the need to improve our understanding of the SA contexts that our students encounter, especially as they negotiate life in a new culture and context. Students negotiate difference (Papastergiadis, 2000) when the past and present “encounter and transform each other,” and where never-before-seen fissures and gaps that students face are discovered (Block, 2007a, p. 864). While facing new gaps is not something that is limited to a sojourn abroad, we know that it is a salient issue for SA. How a person proceeds when facing such difference and newness is something that needs to be explored and discussed, as this has important implications for the development of intercultural speakers (Byram & Zyrate, 1997). The need to negotiate difference often results from active participation and (mutual) engagement in new contexts (Kinginger, 2010). As such, I echo many publications in the field that emphasize the need to improve our understanding of SA contexts and what American
students do there (see Jackson, 2008 Kinginger, 2008). What do students do while abroad? Who do they meet? What communities do they take part in? How engaged are they in those communities? How do they negotiate difference? Does it change them?

2.4.1 Early studies on study abroad

Scholars who conduct research in the field of SA often come from various disciplines. They may draw on theoretical frameworks from such fields as second language acquisition (SLA) and foreign language learning, education, psychology, anthropology, geography and sociology (Coleman, 1996). Before the 1990s, SA research was limited to a few studies published by only a handful of scholars. In addition, many early studies viewed language competence as a tangible product to be attained (Lafford, 2004, p. 202). As such, research designs aimed to assess students' linguistic outcomes post-sojourn. For example, Carroll (1967) used Modern Language Association (MLA) proficiency tests to find out whether students’ four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) improved overall after having been abroad. Magnan (1986) and Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsburg (1995) sought out links between the length of the sojourn and scores that their participants attained on the ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages) oral proficiency interview (OPI). Such early studies reflected how various language skills were assessed in the United States. Specifically, the OPI has often been presumed to be a decontextualized tool for the assessment of oral skills and therefore many similar studies have used it as an instrument to look at the oral proficiency of students who return from a period of study abroad. Current studies still make use of simulated versions of the OPI as a way to measure oral proficiency gains post-sojourn (e.g., Hernandez, 2010; Lindseth, 2010). In the United Kingdom, studies undertaken by Coleman (1996) have also guided discussions on appropriate proficiency assessment tools.
A different approach relying on personal diaries was adopted by Schumann and Schumann (1977), bringing out the subjective dimension of the language learning experience in a way seldom done before. The authors kept diaries of their experiences learning Arabic in Tunisia and Farsi in an American classroom and then in Iran. In this study, the authors were interested in the social-psychological and personal variables that were just starting to be discussed as factors in the language learning process. In their conclusion, they suggested a metaphor for language learning, saying that “[l]anguage learning [is] analogous to the operation of a pinball machine” (Schumann & Schumann, 1977, p. 248). Kinginger (2009) criticized this view of the language learner as a non-agentive being, who, like all language learners, is led down a path determined by outside variables. This can no longer be good enough to capture the complexities of the individual learner and her/his personal experience. The Schumann and Schumann (1977) study was one of the first to consider the language learning process in a study abroad context, though it also represents “the epistemological limits of the social-psychological model while also tentatively raising the curtain on a more critical approach,” pointing to new and interesting links between language, identity, social distance as well as social practices and learning opportunities (Kinginger, 2009, p. 37).

A few years later, F. Schumann (1980) published another analysis of Schumann and Schumann (1977). In it, she reconsiders and reflects upon the difficulties she faced as a woman learning Farsi in Iran. She situates her language learning experiences in their specific contexts, discussing such issues as nesting patterns, transition anxiety, and the role of the ex-patriot community in hindering a newcomer’s second language learning. Schumann (1980) begins to position herself not just as an acquirer of language or a helpless pinball; rather, she positions herself as a person of will and agency, unfortunately constrained by issues of access and other contextual factors. F. Schumann takes a critical stance vis-à-vis Schumann and Schumann (1977)
and, through her reexamination of her own language learning process, hopes to answer some
general second language learning questions (Schumann, 1980, p. 56). She states,

Now I realize that what I have learned is how I learn second languages. This is certainly
significant in and of itself (...) but to generalize beyond the individual it will be
necessary to find techniques for aggregating the data from several studies. ( p. 56)
Her critical re-evaluation of the process of the language learning experience and the fact that she
situated activities in their particular sociocultural context pointed to future studies that could
examine the links between the social context and learning and development.

2.4.2 Investigating process and product

One of the first studies to look at linguistic development through out-of-class contact of
SA students was Freed (1990). In this study, Freed looked at the informal contacts that students
made outside of the classroom while taking part in a six-week summer study abroad program in
order to investigate whether or not those who had the most informal contacts achieved the
greatest proficiency gains (Freed, p. 460). She looked at the quantity and quality of the students’
out-of-class contact. The pre- and post-testing measures used were a discrete point grammar test
and the OPI. Freed found that the more advanced learners tended to search out both interactive
(time spent speaking with French friends and family) and noninteractive (time spent reading
books, watching TV, etc.) out-of-class contact. However, interactive contact was only
linguistically beneficial for the less advanced learners. In fact, for the more advanced learners,
more noninteractive contact correlated to higher proficiency scores. Freed takes a critical stance
on the OPI in testing short-term sojourns abroad, saying:

The OPI which utilizes one global holistic score for various aspects of language
use is not sufficiently refined to capture growth in oral skills, particularly in a six-week period. Except for students at the very beginning level, there was little variation in OPI scores. We therefore found it difficult with this type of analysis to demonstrate any effect of out-of-class contact. In order to demonstrate change, future studies will have to utilize more finely-tuned analyses; those which will reveal, with specificity, development in students’ lexical breadth, syntactic complexity, stylistic sensitivity, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, and cohesion and coherence in language use (p. 475).

While this study focuses primarily on proficiency gains, the author also took a more critical stance on potential problems posed by traditional testing measures like the OPI, as shown above. This study was also different in that it investigated the quantities and qualities of individual students’ out-of-class (interpersonal, intercultural) contact in order to investigate proficiency gains. It would be interesting to know what the students said or did in and around these out-of-class interactions, including the larger contexts in which these interactions were situated, as simply measuring the quantity and quality of out-of-class contact only provides a partial picture of the kinds of experiences that her participants’ were having. Considering the socially and historically-situated nature of her participants’ experiences would allow for more insight into the complex processes at work.

In the mid-1990s, the field of SA appeared to undergo a greater methodological expansion, shifting toward the desire to better understand the intersections of linguistic, intercultural, social and/or personal development in a study abroad context by looking at various competencies and communicative settings. An interest in collecting learners’ accounts of their language learning experiences also became apparent, since learner “stories illustrate aspects of the learning process not easily encapsulated in most studies of second language acquisition, where human experience comes catalogued as a series of neatly packaged causal variables”
One of the first books dedicated to the field of SA was Freed (1995), a landmark volume that helped pave the way for the field (Block, 2007b; Jackson, 2008). An important shift seemed apparent within this edited volume by including research that was the result of more logico-scientific traditions (e.g., Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1995) to chapters that employed more interpretive methods (Polanyi, 1995). In Brecht et al. (1995), the authors looked at 658 American undergraduate and graduate students who studied in four-month ACTR (American Council of Teachers of Russian) programs in the former Soviet Union between the spring of 1984 and the spring semester of 1990. The authors found that gender was a predictor for whether or not students showed language gains, with men scoring significantly higher on average on the OPI than women. The authors entertained a few possibilities as to why this might be so, including a possible “gender bias in the testing instruments”, or “a skew in the sample of men and women.” The authors concluded, however, that there may be in-country limitations for learning opportunities that might have had an impact on women’s ability to improve their language skills (p. 56). They discounted the notion that the testing instruments contained gender biases, saying that any biases should have revealed themselves in the preprogram scores (p. 56). The authors did not delve further into the second issue, the concern about a skewed sample, or the third reason, the concern about in-country limitations. They stated that these issues would either remain “unexplored” for the time being, or that their chapter was not a place to discuss such issues (p. 57).

In the same volume, Polanyi (1995) wrote in reaction to the findings of Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsburg (1995). She looked at a sample of the American SA students’ language learning stories as they studied abroad in Moscow and Leningrad in 1990 and 1991. Polanyi said that the findings of the Brecht et al. were disturbing in that they show that many young women do not improve their listening and speaking skills compared to their young male counterparts while studying abroad (p. 272). She also argued compellingly that “the distress of women students as
merely incidental to the experience of study abroad” can no longer be dismissed (p. 272).

Through these learners’ stories, Polanyi showed that the women were continually positioned as sexual objects by Russian males, while the men tell quite different stories of romance and fun. Polanyi concluded by criticizing those who assume that either the SA context or the OPI testing measures are gender-neutral. This study, albeit a sharp response to Brecht et al., highlights the necessity of context in order to understand personal perspectives. By attending to context we can begin to emphasize the whole of the SA experience and what it means for language learning and testing.

Siegal (1996) explored learner subjectivity in the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by looking at the language learning beliefs and perspectives of Mary, a language learner and English teacher in Japan. Mary was a Japanese high school teacher and master’s degree candidate from New Zealand. A white, professional woman in her mid-40s, Mary had previously lived in Japan for one and a half years, and returned to teach Japanese on a government scholarship. Mary was paid to teach and wanted to “work on her Japanese proficiency and investigate some pedagogical techniques for Japanese” (p. 359). Siegal points out that for native English speakers, learning to speak Japanese appropriately can be difficult because language use depends on the context and one must change registers depending on the situation to avoid losing face (p. 357). Mary reported that she adopted her own way of communicating with her advisor, to “create a demeanor” that represented what she felt was polite (p. 361). However, Siegal found that Mary’s adopted style included many face-threatening acts, such as taking charge of most of the talk and overgeneralizing the use of the word desho, something typically reserved for women to show reserve and politeness and to promote general conversational harmony (p. 367-368). In most cases, Mary used desho in place of honorifics, which Siegal argues “exemplifies possible face-threatening usage” (p. 369). When Siegal asked Mary’s advisor later why he never attempted to correct her, he positioned Mary as someone who was unable to
grasp certain nuances of Japanese customs, reflecting a commonly held belief that western language learners neither possess nor need the linguistic capital that a native speaker may have, for example, a nuanced understanding of the various registers of politeness in Japanese (p. 375). Siegal concluded by lobbying for more classroom discussion about language use in context and stating that instructors cannot ignore the complex relationships between language, culture, society, history, and the learners’ positions within society.

Lines of inquiry that emphasize both the learning process and product in the early 2000s include studies by DuFon (2000) and Shardakova (2005). DuFon observed how beginner and intermediate students of Indonesian learned various address forms while studying abroad in East Java. She collected learner journals and naturalistic tape-recorded data in various speech events like mealtimes and service encounters. One student who began with no prior knowledge of Indonesian managed to develop a particularly complex repertoire of address forms. This student wrote about her interest in how one expresses respect through language in her learner journal. Having learner journal data allowed DuFon to better understand this student’s investment in her learning process and the implications that this had for her socio-pragmatic development. Her findings emphasize that a learner’s interests, goals and investment in the process may have a greater effect on socio-pragmatic development than objectively-tested proficiency levels.

Shardakova (2005) also found that gains in proficiency or advanced proficiency alone may not have the desired effect on students’ socio-pragmatic development. Shardakova investigated four groups of students with intermediate and advanced levels of Russian proficiency, including some who had studied abroad and some who had not. She looked at one kind of speech act, Russian-language apologies by US students, and elicited them using a discourse completion task. First, her groups rated offenses in the discourse completion task for severity and distance and power differentials. Shardakova found that Americans and Russians rated the offenses quite differently, as they oriented to social distance and power differentials in
varying ways. She also found that a combination of advanced proficiency and exposure to Russian culture gave students the opportunity to behave more native-like and thus develop their socio-pragmatic competence. Importantly, both DuFon (2000) and Shardakova (2005) exhibit a shift from looking at objective linguistic proficiency levels and gains as a way to understand whether or not students use certain socio-pragmatic practices in a native-like manner. Both attempt to gain a better understanding of the access students have to the host culture and emphasize the importance of considering learner beliefs and agentive practices. In fact, each of the studies mentioned in this section have led to new possibilities for understanding the multifaceted relationships and questions of agency and access in study abroad and language learning contexts, and specifically DuFon (2000), Polanyi (1995), and Siegal (1996) contribute to highlighting the complexities of the experience by considering learner perspectives.

2.4.3 Language use and learner outcomes

Many studies continue to inform us of how and whether learners’ linguistic abilities improve or change after using the language in its native context. For example, many researchers look at how various aspects of language learning (i.e. pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, oral language skills or pragmatics, to name a few) improve in order to ascertain whether or not studying abroad has significantly contributed to any gains. Barron (2006) investigated how Irish foreign language learners acquire sociolinguistic competence while studying abroad. Her study is a longitudinal report of the development of these learners’ usage of the address system in Germany; that is, how they learn to say you in German. Barron collected data three times at seven month intervals using production questionnaires and a free discourse completion task that prompted sequential facets of offers and refusal of offers. The author notes that the social consequences of making an inappropriate choice of address form are far less serious than they
would be in reality and that, consequently, the degree of avoiding using a certain address form may differ from a more natural setting. The learners’ use of you in German did undergo some changes over their study abroad period, seen mostly in the increases in reciprocal address behavior and in the fact that learner-specific switching between the informal and formal forms of address decreased. Overall, however, Barron found that the study abroad context was certainly no remedy for eliminating all pragmatic errors. The author cites a lack of appropriate input in the L2 context as one potential cause of this.

Hernandez (2010) looks at the relationship between motivation, interaction, and L2 oral proficiency development of students studying abroad in Spain for one semester. The study used a pretest/posttest design to look at whether these three constructs inform one another. Hernandez used a student questionnaire to address the issue of motivation, a language contact profile to garner information about the students’ interactions and a simulated OPI to test oral proficiency pre- and post-sojourn. Hernandez’s findings confirmed the significance of motivation and interaction for students’ oral proficiency development. A major pedagogical implication was that teachers should do more to encourage and foster students’ integrative motivation pre-sojourn, and that study abroad coordinators should continue to work to encourage that motivation to remain high throughout the sojourn. The author also suggested that teachers provide many opportunities for students to come into contact with native speakers, in order to increase their L2 input outside of the classroom.

In a recent study measuring students’ oral proficiency, Lindseth (2010) conducted pre- and post-sojourn OPIs with participants who studied abroad in Germany for one semester. Data were collected in each of three consecutive years. The author found that 80% of the participants in her study did improve their oral proficiency, though none reached the Advanced level. Lindseth summarizes her results, noting that expecting students to attain an average outcome of Intermediate High/Advanced Low is unreasonable, especially when they enter at Intermediate
Low or below (p. 256). The author points to one curricular implication in particular, namely that students should get a wealth of L2 input in their upper-level courses back home.

These studies point to motivation and L2 input as key factors that explain why larger linguistic advancements may not have been attained. While having access to a wealth of input before and in-sojourn may certainly help a student improve, this implication suggests that all sojourners have equal access to such input as well as the desire to search out opportunities for L2 input. Learners in a study abroad context are complex beings who approach various opportunities to speak, the people with whom they connect, general conversation and language practice in very different ways from each other, regardless of their self-reported motivation levels. We must ask: Who are SA participants and what are their goals? Do they actively attempt to meet new people? Do they even want to meet new people? Do they search out opportunities to speak their L2? Do they want to? Do they reflect on their own perceptions of the linguistic and cultural difficulties that they face? Do power dynamics beyond their control keep them from gaining access to desired communities? In what follows, I highlight studies that attempt to address learners’ own subjectivities, beliefs, and goals and collect multiple perspectives of their experiences. The following studies attempt to peel back the complex layers of the student and her/his experience in order to find out what the individual faces and how s/he deals with learning a language while living abroad.

2.4.4 Learner perspectives, identity, and study abroad

Much research has shown how collecting learners’ perspectives can provide the kind of insight into the complexity of the SA environment that helps us to view language not just as acquisition, but as a process of socialization. Kinginger (2009) notes that research in study abroad has had tensions similar to those found in SLA in general, specifically in the question of whether
to orient toward a product or process. Recent SA (and many SLA) studies have preferred to look not just at linguistic outcomes but also at learners’ stories and how learners’ personal communicative repertoires are validated, appropriated, and developed through engagement in sojourn communities. Such studies are representative of more ecological views of the language learning process, in which the micro (internal) and macro (external) contexts cannot be examined in isolation or as separate from one another.

Murphy-Lejeune (2002) was one of the first studies undertaken within a European context that looked at SA, language learning, and identity. Murphy-Lejeune collected various data from ERASMUS (European Regional Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) students in different European countries and found that a majority of students possessed a fair amount of mobility capital, or forms of knowledge, education, understandings and advantages that a person has gathered due to regularly crossing European borders and having grown up in multilingual contexts. Through their experiences, the ERASMUS students also expressed a great desire to travel more. She noted that her participants did not identify issues surrounding national identity. Murphy-Lejeune’s participants tended to display more of an emerging pan-European identity representing the growing social, political, and economic integration that is taking place for some in the European Union. The prospect of living and working across European nation state borders is a part of this identity. In this view, studying abroad was located and fully integrated in the entire lives, experiences, and history of those who took part. Though Block (2007b) writes that “ERASMUS students are likely to need more than just a year to move them into more profound and lasting identity work” (p. 180), Murphy-Lejeune noted in her study that participants did in fact show that they had gained cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competence to varying degrees. Regardless of these different degrees of cross-cultural awareness and competence, the challenges that participants faced were all eventually
perceived as significant moments, or as enriching their SA and life experience with the potential to be valuable in the future (Murphy-Lejeune, p. 230).

Dolby (2004) provides a thought-provoking look at American SA participants in a post 9/11 era, as it investigates critical encounters and the effects that these have on American students' experiences and how they confront their own views and selves as Americans. Dolby investigated how American students negotiate their sense of being “American” while studying abroad in Australia. The author highlighted ways in which identity negotiation can occur independently of language learning per se. In this study, Dolby interviewed participants once before their SA experience and once afterwards. She also collected reflection data via email at the mid-point of their sojourn. Dolby found that for most of the participants in her study the critical encounter they had was with the “American” self and that such encounters had a significant impact on students’ experiences. As they found themselves faced with different perspectives regarding the United States and even different ways of defining the term “America,” some students retreated to an identity of conflating nation and state, rallying around “an ethnocentric nationalism” (p. 171). Dolby notes that in her study no students truly embraced an identity that was detached from a larger affiliation, like being American (p. 151). Though negotiating bilingual or multilingual identities is not discussed here, issues related to national identity are still salient.

Kinginger (2004; 2008) conducted two studies that collected data from a number of participants during their study abroad experiences in France. The first was a longitudinal case study (2004). The second identified various narrative subject positions and themes while investigating the relationship between language development and experiences abroad among 24 American students studying in France (2008). Kinginger (2008) analyzed the individual students’ experiences and showed that subject positions emerging from the narratives took on gendered and national/patriotic qualities. Davies and Harré (1990) define the term subject position as a “conceptual repertoire” and “location” of linguistic privileges for those using that repertoire (p.
A person often sees the world from subject positions that are assigned to them; the individual may begin to conceptualize images, metaphors, and story lines in ways that make sense to her/him “within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned” (Davies & Harré, p. 46). For example, if learners in Germany are positioned as “outsiders” (i.e., non-German, non-European, short-term dwellers, or Americans, etc.) in the community in which they live, they may begin to see that community through the subject position that they have been assigned.

In Kinginger (2008), gender positioning played a role in two participants’ narratives, though in different ways. Deirdre thought French women were “snotty” and too worried about physical appearances (p. 96). Deirdre also believed French women were overly tolerant of what she saw as flirtatious, harassing French men. She believed these men and their actions to be completely disrespectful (p. 96). As a result of dismissing these French gender norms, Deirdre pulled away from the year abroad, convinced that linguistic “competence is too difficult to obtain and that familiar cultural norms and material circumstances are in every way superior to those of the host country” (p. 97). During these more difficult times, Deirdre claimed to have no intention of getting to know people or places during her sojourn. This shows that her more superficial levels of engagement in her study abroad context may have been a contributing factor to her own language socialization process. Her lack of interaction with the target culture led Deirdre to rely on familiar frames of reference in which her national identity was enhanced. However, another participant, Bill, had an entirely different way of discussing gendered French subject positions and issues of national identity. Like Deirdre, Bill noted differences between French women and American women; yet, he celebrated French women and their assertiveness and denounced American women for having “absolutely no opinion about anything” (p. 91). Bill aligned with Deirdre in his opinion of French men, however, telling stories of how he had to protect his American girlfriends who were being harassed (p. 91). A business student in a business-related program in France, Bill wanted to learn about French family community life. In contrast to
Deirdre, he searched for ways to get involved in the community (p. 89). He joined a computer club, football team, went to church each Sunday and became involved in the international student organization *Melting Potes* (pp. 89-90). Unlike Deirdre, Bill was open to French opinions regarding the war in Iraq and their opinions on post-9/11 discourse. He even commented that he was glad to be in France during this time as he got “a different opinion of everything” (p. 90). Bill’s views led him to have deeper levels of engagement in his study abroad context, more meaningful interactions and thus deeper levels of understanding of the differences that he was negotiating.

In contrast to Bill’s experiences, Deirdre began to withdraw from her study abroad context upon facing the need to negotiate difference. It was therefore much more difficult for her to have the kinds of meaningful interactions and see the kind of linguistic and sociocultural development that Bill did. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that Deidre’s French proficiency did not increase over the course of her semester abroad; her posttest score on the *Test de Français International* (TFI) was 20 points lower than her pretest score. In contrast, Bill had a TFI posttest score of over 100 points higher than his pretest score, although his pretest score was significantly lower than Deidre’s, providing a larger space for improvement. The fact that Bill made attempts to be a part of the community and was open to multiple viewpoints likely played a major role in his progress. Deirdre, on the other hand, made few attempts to be involved in the community, and was constantly homesick. Her observations also led her to revert back to the comforts of an “ethnocentric nationalism” (Dolby, 2004).

Kinginger (2004) also undertook a longitudinal case study that chronicled the experiences of an American student in France, Alice. Alice was a very motivated student who had a significantly different upbringing and background than a typical American SA participant. Homeschooled for most of her life, she finished high school at the age of 16 and moved in with her boyfriend at the time. Pregnant before the age of 20, she realized she wanted to turn her life
around. Alice decided to give the baby up for adoption and returned to university in order to study French. After three years of hard work and an intensive French course in Quebec, she headed off to France. Kinginger (2004) collected diary entries and conducted one-on-one interviews in order to document Alice’s development from her university studies through to her time in France and then as she returned again to the United States. Through accessing Alice’s perspective, Kinginger (2004) showed that Alice had an idealized view of France, the French language, and French people in general. Alice found her first three months in France very difficult; however, toward the end of the year, her social networking improved and she showed signs of becoming an intercultural speaker. That is to say that she was developing the ability to communicate while simultaneously reflecting on her own cultural origins. Whereas Alice avoided all philosophical and political discussions earlier in the sojourn, later she learned how to engage in discussions about world events and felt more politically aware (p. 238). Despite all of Alice’s misfortunes, Kinginger shows that Alice found a space for herself in France. Through mutual engagement in the local context, Alice succeeded in “re-orienting herself in the world” (p. 240). Alice’s ability to reflect upon her own position within that particular context afforded her many new subject positions or ways of viewing herself. Both of Kinginger’s studies show how unique SA experiences are and that the collection and analysis of learners’ perspectives, stories, and narratives can help us to shed light on linguistic outcomes by understanding the more complex qualities of the sojourn. Such data also chronicles the process of a person’s attempt to become an interculturally competent speaker.

In another recent study, Jackson (2008) looked at issues of language and identity with Hong Kong English-major students as they embarked on a five week sojourn to England. She reports on four students, and attempts to link student engagement, willingness to communicate, degree of participation in the host community and the development of the ability to perform appropriately when in contact with the host culture with the idea of “moving closer to a broader,
more international/intercultural persona” (p. 215). Jackson highlights how these issues were salient for the four students, especially in the host-sojourner relationship. The two students with positive home-stay experiences were best able to create a “space” for themselves in the second language. The two participants who had less than positive home-stay experiences felt more homesick and were often worried about making mistakes; they also were suddenly more aware of the uniqueness of their Chinese heritage upon returning home. This was in contrast to their feelings prior to leaving home: as Hong Kongers they had tended to be less inclusive when speaking of a mainland Chinese identity before the sojourn abroad. The two participants who had excellent home-stay experiences, however, aligned themselves more toward an international, intercultural identity after their sojourn abroad (p. 216). It should be noted that the participants had learned about ethnography prior to going abroad and were expected to undertake their own ethnographies while in England. They were also well read in post-structuralist literature on identity and language learning. As such, the participants in this study are atypical compared to the study abroad participants in other studies reviewed here and their prior knowledge likely had an impact on the way they wrote about their experiences and subject positioning. Nevertheless, the findings in this study suggest that if participants have deep levels of mutual engagement in local communities, they may be more likely to begin developing as translingual and transcultural speakers.

Most recently, Willis Allen (2010) examined in-sojourn language learning motivation through an activity theoretical perspective. She found that her participants were motivated to learn French for two different reasons: Some went to France purely for the purposes of language learning while others were interested more in their career goals and saw improving their French as a way to bolster their resumes. Willis Allen found that heightened language learning motivation emerged to varying degrees for participants who had “linguistically oriented motives for learning French [and] who viewed SA as a language learning experience” but the same did not
happen for participants who were learning French and studying abroad for career-oriented motives (p. 27). The four participants who viewed SA as a language learning experience were satisfied with their experiences and reported a changed relationship to the French language. The two participants who were motivated more by the notion of resumé-building than the experience of learning a language reported speaking less French in their homestay environment compared to the others. They also reported they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their experiences. A major finding of this study was that an activity theoretical framework shows that motivation is neither a stable nor an internal characteristic of individual students, but instead is something that fluctuates and shifts (p. 45). Willis Allen stated that we cannot just “see students as possessing either ‘low’ or ‘high’ motivation” and maintained instead that curricular intervention, such as reflective blogging, would encourage and support students in investing in their study abroad and language learning experiences and cause reflection on their own motives as well (p. 46).

2.4.5 Implications for this study

In the first part of this chapter, I have provided a review of some influential research on study abroad, language learning, and identity that attempt to emphasize the process and complexities of the whole experience. Early research came in the form of outcomes-oriented studies that focused on findings that could be generalized to a larger population and this kind of influential research continues today. Significant diary studies appeared in the 1970s; these were part of a newer methodological approach in both SA and even SLA, though they still attempt to come up with definitive answers regarding the language learning process. Nonetheless, the notion of accessing learners’ stories would become significant thanks to these diary studies; they have had a major influence on the future direction of the field of SA (and SLA in general). More recently, researchers have looked at the complexity of the SA experience by highlighting the
language socialization process and how participants are socially and historically situated beings that have unique stories to tell. As such, scholars have looked more closely at issues surrounding identity and language learning. Research in this area is growing and my dissertation is a response to the call from others (e.g., Block, 2007b; Kinginger, 2009) for more longitudinal studies that consider the study abroad experience not just as a context for language learning, but also as a context for enhancing self-awareness and becoming translingual and transcultural speakers. Such conceptualizations allow us to see how a student understands her or his relationship to her/his local context and the world. Language is never neutral, we must always strive to view and understand language along with its references to its social meaning (Norton, 2000, p. 5). In exploring how a person understands her/his situation in the local context, looking at where and how participants face and deal with difference is an important place to begin, as all study abroad participants must be immediately prepared to do so. Previous research has not looked directly at such rich points, or moments of negotiating difference, and how participants negotiate, act, feel, reflect, and, ultimately, develop through such points of potential conflict. In this dissertation, I identify such moments, and examine the relationship between how participants deal with these new and potentially traumatizing sites of struggle and their identity negotiation and development. In what follows, I will discuss the various sociocultural lenses that have influenced the current study and how they frame language and identity development.

2.5 Sociocultural Perspectives in Applied Linguistics

In the following, I highlight some of these key perspectives that inform the theoretical framework of my study and explain why I decided to use that framework. Particularly in the field of applied linguistics, the works of Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Pierre Bourdieu have emphasized socially situated, sociocultural approaches to language acquisition. These
perspectives have contributed to sociocultural theory (SCT), activity theory (AT) as well as Communities of Practice (CoP) orientations to language socialization, whose theoretical tenets I make use of in this study. Sociocultural theories view the context of the interaction and the activity in that interaction as central to the process of language learning. These theories have a “social, cultural, interactional and cognitive orientation to language learning” and they all “acknowledge the key role that is played by interlocutors, peers, relatives, caregivers, or teachers in helping novices reach their goals and potential by means of scaffolding or guided assistance” (Duff, 2006, p. 312). All of these frameworks have metaphors for addressing development. For example, SCT and AT uses the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) metaphor (Lantolf, 2000; Vygotsky, 1987), and there is also the notion of “apprenticeship” in SCT, AT, and CoP (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991). One speaks of “mastery” in CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and or routinization and the role of the expert/novice relationship in language socialization and CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schieffelin & Ochs, 2001). As such, many of these theories have similar points of departure. Perspectives from Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and Bourdieu have informed other disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and education. As such, the interdisciplinary nature of these perspectives also informs the tenets of the framework that I employ in this dissertation.

2.5.1 Vygotsky and cultural-historical perspectives

Lev Vygotsky, a developmental psychologist, believed that cognitive development and certain higher psychological functions, like language, are determined through social interaction (1981). According to Vygotsky, higher forms of human mental activity are always mediated through symbolic tools and artifacts, such as language, number systems, music and art, and he viewed human learning and thinking processes as inherently connected to social and cultural
practices available to learners, as well as how meditational processes affect learning in those situations (Lantolf, 2000). Traditional theories of language acquisition have framed things in a dichotomous manner, in that a clear division between the individual and the social, as well as the internal and the external, exist (Kramsch, 2000). However, Vygotskian sociocultural theory takes as one of its basic tenets that human mental functioning is mediated by culturally constructed and thus socially and historically situated systems and tools (Lantolf, 2000; Leontiev, 1981a, 1981b; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1981; Wertsch, 1991). As such, a fundamental aspect of SCT is that learners agentively transform their own world, and do not simply conform to it (Donato, 2000, p. 46). SCT also concerns itself with the microgenesis of mental functions and processes, that is, the development of these internal functions and processes over shorter amounts of time (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Though SCT views language as constructed in the social world and as referential and constructive of social reality, it is important to note that the term Sociocultural in this framework might be misleading and Lantolf (2004) cautions that,

[SCT] is not a theory of the social or of the cultural aspects of human existence […] it is, rather […] a theory of mind […] that recognizes the central role that social relationships and culturally constructed artifacts play in organizing uniquely human forms of thinking. (pp. 30-31)

Indeed, in SCT, the foregrounding of sociality over individuality is explained in a way that is different from other theories. Wertsch (1991) states that as a tool in this process, “language […] is developed as embedded in cognitive development” (p. 98). This statement points to a central claim of SCT, namely that development happens first on the social or interpersonal level and then moves on to the internal or psychological level (Wertsch, 1993). This shift from the social or interpersonal level to internal, intrapersonal level between novice learners and expert members is said to occur in a “domain of development called the zone of proximal development or ZPD” (Wertsch, 1993). The ZPD represents the difference between what the novice learner can
do on her/his own without expert guidance, and what s/he could do under the apprenticeship of an expert member (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Thus, in a dialogue consisting of experts and novices, there is a clear inequality of interlocutors. Vygotsky understood dialogue as communication between a teacher (expert) and a learner (novice) within his metaphor for development, the ZPD. SCT’s notion of the ZPD assumes a fairly asymmetric relationship between expert and novice; intersubjectivity is realized so that the novice might ultimately move “up” to the expert’s level (Nguyen, 2004). The role of the expert’s guidance is thus paramount to novice development in this view. Rogoff (1990) makes use of a similar concept to describe this metaphor, using the term “guided participation.” Many studies that take a sociocultural perspective highlight the significant role of the ZPD metaphor and what it can tell us about the language learning process (Nguyen, 2004). While Vygotsky’s writings have been very influential for SCT and AT, his work has also informed other understandings of language learning as social interaction, cognition, and language development, such as frameworks including CoP orientations to language socialization, where mutual engagement in communities encourages learning and moving toward full participation. Vygotsky’s research thus makes important contributions to the ways in which I view participation, engagement, and development in this study.

2.5.2 Bakhtin and dialogue

For Mikhail Bakhtin, it is the concept of dialogue that is central to the imaginative nature of our reality, which, like SCT, is a view that places a large emphasis on the social domain (Jackson, 2008). A philosopher, literary critic, and cultural theorist, Bakhtin stated that nothing is unitary, not even language (1981, p. 288). He continues by noting that the word dialogue is not meant to refer to just talk; in fact, he comments that:
Language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups of the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth. (p. 291)

His view of the dialogic in language, then, is that the word belongs to and is connected to both the speaker and the interlocutor, the past and the present, which contributes to the notion that speaking is not just the simple transferring of words but is at all times connected to performance, positioning and historicity. Bakhtin conceptualized language as “on the borderline between oneself and the other,” and thus viewed dialogue as authentic in contrast to monologic understandings (p. 293).

This view informs the framework of this study, a CoP orientation to language socialization, in that through the dialogic nature of language, one recognizes the process of becoming, or movement toward full participation. While many view dialogue as involving at least two interlocutors who may have different knowledge, expertise, and ideas, Bakhtin’s (1981) work on dialogism did not problematize a disparity in status and power; rather, he highlighted the valuable contributions made by both interlocutors. For Bakhtin, dialogic experiences inform and are continually informed by previous experiences. Vygotsky’s work, on the other hand, focuses more on different kinds of potential power relations (if any) in participation and collaboration, and discusses these potentially varying power relations in language via the notion of the expert and novice relationship. Central to both scholars’ work, though, is their understanding of context and history and the significance of these in their theories of development. Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin saw culture as the outcome of social processes or human interaction. For these scholars, dialogue was also important for development. Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories tend to move past structuralist notions that view identity as an essential, static part of individuals and contribute to more dynamic, fluid understandings of identities that shift on various timescales. Bakhtin’s
interest in notions of identity are evident in his discussion of dialogical relations with an other, equal self, and also how it fights back against the restrictions or constraints that are made possible by official hierarchies (Jackson, 2008, p. 21). Bakhtin (1981) notably pointed out that the word “becomes ‘one’s own’ [...] when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (p. 293). In his view, identity is something that can never be final; we shape and reshape our sense of self, our expressions – thus our identity – from childhood and it continues throughout our lives (1981). Bakhtin did not believe that this developmental process proceeded in a linear way, rather, he saw it as taking place on multiple time scales (Bakhtin, 1981). In general, Bakhtin’s writings have been important for understanding language learning as a dialogic endeavor. His works have influenced many theoretical frameworks including CoP orientations to language socialization, which views learning and development as occurring via participation, that is, in dialogue. To this end, Bakhtin’s work influences the ways in which I understand language, identity, learning, and development in the current study.

2.5.3 Bourdieusian Perspectives

Status and power disparities are not necessarily brought to the fore in Bakthin’s work on dialogism, however Pierre Bourdieu, a sociologist, intellectual, and political activist, has produced a significant number of conceptual tools including the following concepts and constructs: field, habitus, capital, and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1978; 1991). These have contributed greatly to our understanding of language as intertwined with culture and context, and most especially issues of power. Like Vygotsky and Bakhtin, Bourdieu (1991) also understood the inextricably connected nature of language and the social plane, noting that linguistic utterances, as forms of practice, are to be understood as the product of the relationship between a
“linguistic market” (a certain social situation that regulates the value of linguistic utterances) and a “linguistic habitus” (set of socially learned linguistic dispositions) (p. 17). This is important for the current study, as I look at the participatory practices of students in various communities. Bourdieu also brought attention to questions of language and power. Bourdieu (1991) specifically rejected structuralist notions of language development and use, criticizing that they do not take sociopolitical conditions into consideration. Jackson (2008) states that Bourdieusian theory understands a “field” as referring “to a social arena in which individuals (‘social agents’) maneuver and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources” (p. 23). Thus, a field is comprised of a system of social positions and relations that are internally structured based on different hierarchies of power. This focus on and consideration of language and unequal power distributions connects the work of Bourdieu and Vygotsky (i.e., the hierarchical expert/novice relationship) and Bourdieu and Bakhtin (i.e., language and symbolic power). Unequal power dynamics are also crucial in CoP theory in understanding how a peripheral participant reifies community routines and mutually engages with community experts in order to move from the periphery toward full participation. Such considerations have been especially valuable for poststructuralist identity research, as attempts are made to understand how these as well as a person’s individual agency “facilitate and constrain interactions with others in the different communities of practice with which individuals engage in their lifetimes” (Block, 2007b, p. 27).

Bourdieu’s notions of cultural, social, and symbolic capital have also influenced research in second language learning and socialization that emphasizes translingual and transcultural competence. Block (2007b) highlights how notions of capital can be conceptualized within a CoP perspective, noting that

in order to participate in particular communities of practice, the individual needs to have acquired or accumulated sufficient and appropriate cultural capital, that is, the
educational resources and assets, necessary to be a fully functioning participant in a particular community of practice. (p. 25)

As outlined in the preceding sections, Vygotskian, Bakhtinian and Bourdieusian perspectives are crucial for situating and contextualizing language and language learning by foregrounding issues such as dialogism, subjectivity, power, politics, and social context. To this end, these three perspectives all strongly influence how sociocultural theories view language, language learning, and identity. These perspectives make large contributions to my study in that they guide how I view language, subjectivity, power, context, learning and development, and as such, provide the critical underpinning of this dissertation.

2.6 Language Socialization

Language socialization (LS) has been influenced by Vygotsky’s early research that highlighted language as a socially constructed phenomenon, as opposed to internally constructed phenomenon, and, like SCT and AT, LS is based primarily on cultural-historical or socio-historical theory research (see Halliday, 1978; Hymes, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978). Language socialization has its roots in the ethnography of communication, as well as in linguistic anthropology, both of which attempt to understand a broader view of competence than more traditional areas of linguistics and language acquisition (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002). LS emerged based on assumptions made about the intimate ties between social context, interaction, and learning. LS research has often concerned itself with the microgenesis of communicative competence that goes beyond linguistic competence as conceptualized by generativists; it also involves the practical knowledge that is needed in order to use language as a social tool and to engage in talk as an activity (Wertsch, 1985).
Perhaps the greatest difference between Vygotskian socio-cultural theory and language socialization is that while SCT is interested in both external and internal planes of cognitive development, LS takes as its starting point the interrelated development of language and social competency (Duff, 2006). In addition, LS theory has a different focus than SCT in that it does not look at “development in problem-solving tasks per se, but at the simultaneous and interrelated development of language forms, cultural values, and knowledge of social roles, status and emotional expressions” (Nguyen, 2004). In its origins, one of the central claims of strong versions of linguistic relativity was that “the structure of anyone’s native language strongly influences or fully determines the world-view he will acquire as he learns the language” (Kay & Kempton, 1984, p. 66). Such a rigid view was bluntly criticized for its linguistic determinism; however, “anthropologists have not been able to let go of the basic tenet that culture and language are deeply tied to one another” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a). Watson-Gegeo (2004) highlights this basic tenet, writing, “there is no context-free language learning, and all communicative contexts involve social, cultural, and political dimensions that affect which linguistic forms are available or taught and how they are represented” (p. 340).

LS is defined as socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language, in which people are socialized to become able to participate as interlocutors in social groups (Ochs, 1986; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1996). LS considers both the macro and micro-contexts in which one learns and uses a language (Duff & Talmy, 2011). Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a) also note that the process of “language socialization begins as soon as there is social contact in a person’s life” (p. 164). LS concerns itself with the ongoing process that brings individuals, and particularly novices, into various domains of knowledge, beliefs, affect, roles, subject positions, and social representations via linguistic and social practices and interactions (Duff, 1995, p. 508). LS is interested in how these novices access and construct knowledge, beliefs, affect, roles, subject positions, and social representations within these new domains as well (Duff, 1995, p.
In this way, LS explores the interrelated development of language forms, cultural values and norms, as well as the understanding of social roles, status, and emotional expression, among other things (Nguyen, 2004). The domain of development in LS is consequently social competence, which takes the following into consideration. First, it considers a person’s capacity to identify and infer the social activity in which one is involved. Second, it considers that one can construct the role relationships of the people that are involved in a particular social activity. Finally, developing social competence involves a person being able to interact according to both: that is, the ability to identify and deduce social activity as well as to construct role relationships with those involved in that activity. Key to the notion of gaining social competence, which includes language, is the fact that this competence develops via participation in routinized and repeated interactional practices (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a; Duff, 2007). In this way, the idea of an interactional routine is central to LS theory (Duff, 2007). Such interactional routines are defined as “a sequence of exchanges in which one speaker’s utterance, accompanied by appropriate nonverbal behavior calls forth one of a limited set of responses by one or more other participants” (Peters & Boggs, 1986). As Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) comment, language socialization is a developmental process that is:

far more than a matter of a child learning to produce well-formed referential utterances; it also entails learning how to use language in socially appropriate ways to co-construct meaningful social contexts and to engage with others in culturally relevant meaning-making activities. (p. 342)

According to LS theory, the novice can develop through routine, guided instruction and support, as well as through observations of the social practices (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2001). Most of the LS research mentioned above has focused on first language socialization (L1S). This is logical, considering the fact that children learn about language and social competence for the first time at the same time. Second language socialization (L2S), however, is also interested in another
layer of complexity, that is, “dealing with children or adults who already possess a repertoire of linguistic, discursive, and cultural traditions and community affiliations when encountering new ones” (Duff, 2006, p. 310). Highlighting the similarities between L1 and L2 socialization, Ohta (1999) showed that L2 learners acquired certain interactional routines using the same mechanism as children (p. 1496). In her study, she found that over three academic quarters, one Japanese learner who made use of her teacher’s instruction by practicing “alignment expressions”\(^1\) in class, was later able to use this type of expression fluently and regularly outside the classroom (Ohta, 1999). L2 adults or even children may share many similar practices as those being socialized in their L1, such as imitation. However, they differ significantly in that L2 learners have added complexities that stem from the fact that they already possess a linguistic and discursive inventory that is inextricably connected to cultural and community traditions. As such, L2 learners may experience varying degrees of access and recognition, or even accommodation, within the new and foreign communities compared to their L1 counterparts (Duff, 2006, p. 310). That is to say, while L1 children are (for the most part) socialized without question as a process that is seen by society as natural and necessary, we conceptualize L2S in a slightly different way. L2 learners, unlike L1 learners, are already equipped with a first language; they have and are being socialized through this language and culture. As such, current views of L2S understand history and context as integral to language learners and the construction of their identities (Duff, 2006). Whitworth (2006) notes that “the language socialization of learners occurs in communities of practice” (p. 51). Issues such as subject positioning, goals, cultural and historical context, agency and access (i.e., implicit/ explicit inclusion or invitation) to CoP are all crucial when considering and understanding challenges that L2 learners have to deal with (Whitworth, 2006). All of these intricacies may come together in such a way that sees learners “warmly embraced

\(^1\) In Japanese, ‘alignment’ is a formal linguistic feature that can be marked with affective particles (Ohta, 2001).
and supported by their new communities” (Duff, 2006, p. 310). On the other hand, they may be only partly welcomed at first, or they may not be welcomed at all. Perhaps the learners might even wrongly interpret a CoP as being welcoming or unwelcoming. Any and all of these situations may also happen to a L2 learner while in a study abroad context. For example, it could be that the political system in which SA participants now reside is set up in such a way that it either explicitly or implicitly keeps them on the periphery no matter what they try to do. This was seen in Polanyi (1995), where college women who studied abroad in Russia felt they had fewer or more limited opportunities and contexts in which they could speak, simply because they were not men. In other words, for legitimate peripheral participants, access is rarely automatic and sometimes it is not even expected from one or both sides.

Recently, Duff and Talmy (2011) noted that current L2S conceptualizations posit that socialization should be viewed as bi- or multidirectional in order to focus more on the complex nature of the LS process in bilingual and multilingual contexts (p. 101). Such conceptualizations allow for an understanding of language socialization that underscores the complex and multidirectional nature of the learning process and moves away from the more linear, unidirectional view of language socialization. It is this framework that I use in the current study. In looking at how learners negotiate moments of difference and become legitimate members of communities while in Marburg, Germany, it is important to understand that learning is rarely linear, rather learning occurs on multiple time scales. These considerations inform my understanding of learning and development and are important for how I investigate the amount and intensity of identity negotiation and what that means for identity transformation and development.
2.6.1 Communities of practice

Lave and Wenger’s situated learning theory (1991), also known as Communities of Practice, provides a framework for understanding the dynamic, complex nature of participation and learning. Situated learning theory views community as something that is constantly being negotiated, and thus always shifting. A CoP is defined in relational terms, not just in membership terms or practices alone (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This relational understanding thus foregrounds the “fuzzy” or constantly-shifting boundaries of communities (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p. 347). This theory sees learning “as a social phenomenon constituted in the experienced lived-in world” (Lave, 1991, p. 64). CoPs are characterized by the participants’ social engagement, as opposed to just location or population, “and thus describe social collectives that are meaningful to those participating in them, rather than, say, the analyst’s more abstract categorization” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2007, p. 27). Wenger (1998) defines CoP through three points that characterize the relationship amongst members of a given community: (1) mutual engagement, in (2) a jointly negotiated enterprise, through (3) a shared repertoire of negotiable resources (p. 76). Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) comment further that CoP:

seeks to address explicitly the theoretical tensions between group and individual agent that are generated by such pairings as structure and agency, collectivity and subjectivity, power and meaning, practice (as socially constituted ways of being engaged with the world) and identity (as a function of the mutual constitution of group and self). (p. 347)

As such, “learning and a sense of identity are inseparable” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115). Langman (2003) goes on to argue that as an individual is socialized into a given community or group, s/he practices activities that are important for the group (p. 183). Through these practices, members develop “an identity within the community, be it as a novice, an expert, or a central or peripheral member” (Langman, 2003, p. 184).
Just as community boundaries can shift over time, individual status and competence shifts can happen as well. Members of a CoP begin as legitimate peripheral participants and can move toward full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In CoP, legitimate peripheral participants are defined as “newcomers” to a given community, who “inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). In order to participate legitimately, the notion of ‘joint enterprise’ or mutual engagement in activity by so-called “oldtimers” and “newcomers” is central, as it is the basis for the learning process. This view highlights the understanding that experience and a sense of belonging in communities are integral parts of learning and development as well as identity construction (Duff, 2006). The notion of expert-novice scaffolding is a central part of both SCT and LS in general. However, CoP differs from SCT and LS in that it does not take child development as its point of departure, rather it focuses primarily on adult participation and learning. CoP also examines the development of membership and identities with regard to “mastery” within the community, and, like LS, is not concerned about internalization and cognitive development per se, whereas SCT takes a different path, as a theory of mind. CoP, however, like LS, views learning and development as taking place on the social plane, through the skills, knowledge, and practices that constitute any member of a certain CoP’s identity (Nguyen, 2004). Lave and Wenger (1991) call the term “internalization” into question, expressing their belief that “given a relational understanding of person, world, and activity, participation, (…) the core of [their] theory of learning, can never be fully internalized as knowledge structures nor fully externalized as instrumental artifacts or overarching activity structures” (p. 51). This is also a clear departure from SCT, as Lave and Wenger (1991) reject the inside/outside dichotomy, criticizing the assumed-to-be “unproblematic process of absorbing the given, as a matter of transmission and assimilation” (p. 47). Lave and Wagner further claim that participation is at all times rooted in
“situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world,” further demonstrating the shifting, process-oriented view the authors have of learning as participation (p. 51). In this study, I emphasize this process-oriented view of learning as participation to better understand community participation, engagement, and identity transformation.

2.6.2 A communities of practice orientation to L2 socialization

A CoP orientation to L2S is useful for looking at the study abroad context and how students participate and develop in various communities. If the participants in question want to move toward full participation (and, crucially, if they are invited to do so) because they wish to take part in a given social practice, they must begin to learn certain parts of the routines common to that particular community. Peripheral participants lean on ‘experts’ for help and encouragement in a ‘joint enterprise’ or ‘mutual engagement’. In order to become full participants, L2 learners must make use of this encouragement and continue to master such routines. According to L2S theory, it is in these repeated, socially situated activities where language development occurs (Nguyen, 2004). Lave and Wenger (1991) see this as a form of “apprenticeship”, but they also note that a learner’s agency in these activities will likely have a major impact on how socialization takes place (p. 62).

Duff (2007) provides an example of a CoP orientation to L2S, looking at a diverse group of domestic and international students, as they were socialized within a Canadian university community. She showed how some Korean undergraduate students in her study who originally desired membership in Anglo-Canadian communities with local Anglo-Canadian students, eventually resigned themselves to the fact that this was not an attainable goal, due largely to issues of access and concerns about differing social, linguistic, and cultural values as well as racial attitudes and prejudices. Duff concluded that the Korean undergraduate students’
socialization was not unidirectional toward the norms of just Anglo-Canadian CoPs as they had originally envisioned but, rather, these students’ socialization became multidirectional, or oriented toward many Korean and non-Korean groups and languages (p. 316). This research demonstrates just how non-linear the socialization process is. Instances of subject and other positioning are significant here, including how one is positioned by others. Both real and imagined positioning can impact one’s participation in particular communities and, thus, the path of one’s LS process. Duff’s study shows how important it is to consider not only the local perspectives but also the macrostructures that illuminate the power dynamics at work; gathering emic (subjective) and etic (objective) perspectives are also paramount to understanding exactly why the socialization process unfolds in the way that it does.

In this study, a CoP orientation to L2S provides a window into understanding the participants as socio-historical beings who go through the non-linear process of socialization through participation in foreign, dynamic communities. These may be communities that the participants simply find themselves in; they may also be communities that they search out as well as those that they abstain from taking part in. As foreigners and legitimate peripheral participants in new communities, the participants of this study face the need to successfully negotiate difference in order to become intercultural speakers and move toward full participation, if that is their wish. Negotiating who they are may shift their view of their own histories, since these histories are always being actively and jointly constructed even within the L2S process. Bakhtin’s (1981) theorization of “the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past” could not be more applicable than here. Communities and their participants are constantly being reproduced with new oldtimers and newcomers. The participants and the CoP itself engage “in the act of producing their own future” which must be affected by their socio-historical situation (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 58). Kinginger (2008) notes that the term “history” applies to the study of individuals’ evolving motives related to participation in study abroad” (p.
20). Indeed, students’ beliefs and goals regarding language learning and socialization as well as
how they negotiate rich points by situating themselves and their beliefs in various ways can vary
and shift significantly. One cannot deny the relation of these beliefs to both real and imagined
associations with certain communities of practice (Norton, 2000). Anything that study abroad
participants may underscore when speaking of their own experiences in a foreign context, and
also the ways they understand these new experiences, are ultimately entrenched in their own
history and habitus. Given that the socialization process is rarely straightforward, issues of
history, positioning, and power dynamics are crucial in understanding how and if the participants
move toward full participation in particular communities or, conversely, provide an explanation
for why participants move away from this kind of membership. Investigating how my participants
engage in communities and new routines and potentially move toward full participation in
communities during their time abroad may depend not only on how they view themselves in this
context, but the context itself.

A CoP orientation to L2S also emphasizes that participants are not just beings that float
around haplessly from network to network – they are agentive beings with their actions, goals,
and desires. How can one interpret a particular student’s involvement in communities abroad
without first understanding how they position themselves as people, students, language learners,
and intercultural communicators in this new setting? Who is to say whether students even
characterize themselves as just language learners, if their own goals and beliefs have not been
uncovered? They may conceive of themselves more as tourists or European travelers, students of
a particular discipline, cultural ambassadors, or even as teachers of English or American culture,
for example. Looking at how they position themselves in their imagined life in this new context is
illuminating, as it provides a way to understand participants’ own version of success and whether
that changes throughout the year, as well as whether they become or perceive themselves
becoming intercultural speakers.
2.7 The Intercultural Speaker

In order to successfully negotiate linguistic and cultural differences and develop as intercultural speakers while participating in communities in a foreign context, students must begin to reflect on their own cultures, histories, and identities vis-à-vis others’ salient identity issues. Agar’s term “languaculture” emphasizes the tightly interwoven nature of language and culture (1994, p. 60). CoP theory views learning and identity as inseparable, and in a foreign context, learning and socialization go hand in hand. Watson-Gegeo (2004) also notes that L2S asserts that “language learning and enculturation are part of the same process” (p. 339). In the understanding that language learning includes the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge at the same time, then study abroad participants may also develop as international, intercultural, or translingual and transcultural speakers. Plews, Breckenridge, and Cambre (2010) note that while international experiences can certainly support the development of linguistic gains and intercultural awareness, “these programs are also often laissez-faire, emphasizing exposure to another culture rather than reflective engagement with it” (p. 18). Byram (1997) writes about the process of becoming an intercultural speaker or “mediator”, expanding upon Hymes’s (1964) communicative competence construct. Byram (1997) discussed the notion of intercultural communicative competence in the following manner:

[s]omeone with Intercultural Communicative Competence is able to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language. They are able to negotiate a mode of communication and interaction which is satisfactory to themselves and the other and they are able to act as mediator between people of different cultural origins. Their knowledge of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately – sociolinguistic and discourse competence – and their awareness of the specific
meanings, values and connotations of the language. (p. 71)

The MLA Report (2007) developed and expanded this notion by stating that students should also find a way to understand that their interlocutors are a part of a foreign culture and society and that as Americans, they are viewed as members of a society that are foreign in the eyes of members of the foreign culture (p. 4). Both the MLA Report (2007) and Kramsch (2012) highlight the importance of “operating between languages” in order to become not just an intercultural speaker, or someone who can establish relationships, manage dysfunctions, and mediate between people of different origins and identities, but also a translilingual and transcultural speaker, or someone who has the ability to communicate between and across people of different origins and identities while simultaneously stepping back and reflecting on one’s own cultural origins. When a newcomer is in an L2 context, s/he may face conflicting views in which s/he may temporarily question issues s/he had never thought about before. Critical incidents such as these are exactly the moment where identity shifts or identity re-framings could occur. How participants situate others as well as themselves in and through these moments of conflicts can inform us about whether or not participants are becoming translinguual and transcultural speakers.

Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) highlights how people locate themselves vis-à-vis other people, or how they take up or are assigned new subject positions, and how difficult encounters may lead participants to conduct a critical inquiry and reflection within themselves, questioning things they had taken for granted. These shifts can bring about an awareness of other cultures that fosters mutual understanding and engagement, and perhaps even the critical distancing skills that would reflect a shift towards becoming a translilingual and transcultural speaker. Previous notions of how to document intercultural awareness and communication (usually one-time self-reports that test individual variables) look at how language is transmitted and even used or acquired, but may not do enough to consider the importance of specific historical, political, and sociocultural contexts; this is what LS studies attempt to do (Shi, 2006).
Indeed, newer ecological orientations to language and language learning, such as notions of translingual and transcultural competence, highlight the intersection of language learning, intercultural awareness, identity, and individual histories, as well as a person’s own reflexivity/subjectivity. The view of SA learners as becoming legitimate participants and being socialized into the routines and practices of new communities must also consider a person’s subjectivity and reflexivity, as both are clearly important parts of the larger/broader socialization process.

2.8 Identity and Subjectivity

Poststructuralist notions of identity in a L2 learning context understand a person as undergoing a renegotiation and restructuring of her/his identity over time, mediated through an L2 between multiple cultural identities (Block, 2007b). This emphasizes the view of identity as socially constructed, fluid, and relational. Block (2007b) notes that,

a survey of recent publications focusing on topics such as language learning, language socialization and multilingual language practices reveals how this poststructuralist approach to identity has taken hold, to varying degrees, as a common way of conceptualizing identity in applied linguistics. (p. 13)

In foregrounding the idea that language cannot be viewed in isolation from the social realm and vice versa, as LS does, one is already addressing the construct of identity. Poststructuralist notions of identity challenge the essentialist idea that identity is simply an “an act of individual agency” (Block, 2007a, p. 865). Considering identity work in terms of participation and engagement in CoP favors agency over structure, unlike previously used constructs, such as the notion of a speech community (see Gumperz, 2001). Bucholtz (1999) rightly points out that the concept of the speech community is not connected to any larger social theory and that it has been
an inadequate model due to its tendency to take language as central, to prefer investigating central or full members of the community instead of those at the periphery, to focus on the group at the expense of individuals, and crucially to view identity as a set of static categories (pp. 203-207). CoP theory represents one way to re-conceptualize identity in applied linguistics. Block (2007b) notes that CoP theory is “constitutive of and constituted by the social environment,” which harkens back to Bourdieu’s notion of “two-way action”, as well as Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism (p. 26). Langman (2003) also comments that through certain bilingual and bicultural identity practices, we can see how CoPs provide a way to look at the larger social structures as a whole (p. 196).

In general, proponents for poststructuralist views of identity tend to believe that identities are socially constructed, ongoing narratives that are performed, interpreted and projected by individuals. As Block (2007b) points out, the term identity often conjures up topics that may be more or less salient to different groups of people. It covers a range of topics that people may or may not associate with their own sense of self. This construct is thus necessarily multifaceted, difficult to capture, and much more difficult to make generalizations about. Researchers might talk about issues of race and ethnicity, national identity, migrant identity, gender identity, identity related to an individual’s socio-economic status, as well as language identity, depending on which issues come to the forefront in any given context (Block, 2007b). What this shows, is that identity is a complicated construct that can hardly be summarized, reified and pigeonholed. As such, identity and how individuals orient to and negotiate its multiplicity and fluidity has often been called a “site of struggle” (see Norton, 2000). That is, identity is seen as a site of struggle for those who must deal with the intersections of their own individual histories, subjectivities, and shifting stations, as they grapple with unequal power relations and attempt to become legitimate participants in new CoPs. The terms subject and subjectivity are used frequently in the social sciences, particularly in work that discusses self and individual identity. Kramsch (2009) aptly
states that it is language that “creates and shapes who we are, as subjects” (p. 17). In this view, the subject is a symbolic entity with emotions, feelings, memories, and desires that we are capable of recognizing and accepting; and through doing so, we develop a sense of self (p. 18). The *self* is often viewed as a psychological being that each person is given at birth. Kramsch continues by writing that subjectivity, in her view, is the mediation of the self, conscious or unconscious, through symbolic forms (p. 18).

The view of identity as a site of struggle is relevant for this project, especially as I am interested in the moments where participants face linguistic and cultural difference and how they negotiate these moments of difference. Kramsch’s view of the subject and subjectivity is also significant for this project, in that it allows for understanding people as symbolic beings with emotions, memories and desires who can mediate their sense of self through symbolic forms vis-à-vis taking up different subject positions. Changes in how individuals position themselves and others can greatly affect the taking up of new subject positions as well. These changes are central to the process of learning, development and transformation (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning theory takes as its point of departure that positioning is a discursive process in which people take part (Davies & Harré, 1990). The discursive process here should be understood as “the ongoing engagement with others as individuals participate in their day-to-day activities” (Block, 2007b, p. 18). Participants are located in conversations as observable and subjective people who co-construct storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990). In this view, individuals are constantly mediating through and being situated by their histories, communities, and other people, yet at the same time are actively situating themselves, their own histories and trajectories, communities, and other people. Davies and Harré (1990) understand the subject position as two things: 1) a “conceptual repertoire” and 2) a “location” of linguistic rights for those who make use of that repertoire (p. 46). Block (2007b) states that poststructuralist notions of identity “are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of the past, present and future” (p. 27). This is important,
because it too goes against a more reductionist or structuralist view of seeing identity as unchanging and static, or fixed at some cross-sectional point in time. Indeed, the understanding here is that human beings are constantly being shaped by their histories; however, they continually shape their own histories (and presents, futures) at the same time.

In recent years, identity and language learning scholars have also become interested in how learners often take on “imagined identities” or subject positions in “imagined communities” of native speakers (see Norton, 2000; Kinginger, 2004). For example, Norton’s work on identity and imagined communities has shown how some language learners will adopt subject positions that are embedded in such imagined communities of the speakers of that community (2001). Here, “imagined” is not meant to allude to misleading fantasy, it is rather a way that individuals may conjure up new possibilities for understanding their own orientation to various communities and relation in and with the world (Norton, 2001, p. 163). In Norton (2001), one of her participants, Felicia, is a wealthy Peruvian immigrant who does not identify as an immigrant but, rather, sees herself as a foreign person who lives in Canada by accident. Felicia avoids participating in various communities in order to maintain the integrity of her own imagined community, that is, of a wealthy Peruvian who just happens to be living as a foreign person in Canada (p. 165). In my study, participants are likely to imagine participating in communities that correspond to their own hopes and desires for the study abroad year. They may also imagine participating in communities that are very similar to or very different from those they have at home. For example, the communities that they imagine participating in may stem from a naïve belief that certain representations and stereotypes of the L2 language and context in American media and film are true or they may believe folklinguistic notions that they have heard from others back home. Indeed, how they imagine their own participation in various communities may determine the kinds of people they interact with. For these reasons, the construction of identities is very complex. The nuanced process of identity development must therefore consider multiple
perspectives and time scales when attempting to discuss issues of learning and development. Speaking in terms of linear development is not useful for processes as dynamic as identity renegotiations and transformations that occur in a study abroad context. Development may not always happen chronologically, in a step-by-step, linear fashion that leaves history squarely in the past. Identity construction and development is often multidirectional and on multiple time scales, or, may not happen at all. Lemke (2002) claims that developmental processes occur on different scale levels and that these “strongly interact with one another” thus making it impossible for a “single linear progression in development” to exist (p. 71). This understanding of development means that an event may be a part of many other processes on broader timescales at the same time (Lemke, 2002, p. 80). As such, it is clear that the relationship between identity, culture, and language learning is inherently intertwined and complex, as Norton and Toohey (2002) elaborate:

Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks it (…) Thus, language learners are not only learning a linguistic system; they are learning a diverse set of sociocultural practices, often best understood in the context of wider relations of power. (p. 115)

In sum, my view of identity looks at the whole, complex person, and contextualizes her/his social practices and identity constructions within the larger setting, considering power, history and the dialogic nature of language. Viewing identity in this way allows for understanding multilingualism as *desdoblamiento*, or “the multiplying of the self” (Pratt, 2002, p. 35). This way of conceptualizing the multilingual self, with all of the possible trajectories and paths, makes the temporal dimension a challenge (Kramsch, 2012). Differing trajectories of one’s multiplied self may develop on different scales of time. However, looking at mutual engagement as well as
conceiving of participation as learning can help us to discuss instances of identity negotiations and transformations as they occur over time.

2.8.1 Identity development

Developmental processes often take place on multiple timescales and are difficult to generalize. Poststructuralist notions of identity as a site of struggle are able to consider learner identities as constructed and thus non-static. Participants in CoPs take up various subject positions at any given time, in order to present themselves discursively, psychologically, socially and culturally through the use of symbolic systems (Kramsch, 2009, p. 20). When these identities, constructed through the taking up of various subject positions, work in a person’s favor, s/he will likely help these trajectories endure. Participation and belonging contribute greatly to a person’s sense of emotional security, and thus the relevant identities that we construct. When struggles and rifts are encountered, people often act to help shifts and changes to occur, in order to regain a sense of emotional security. If, however, access to such security is made difficult by power structures, human agency may be limited. Discussing these issues shows how identity, development, and power constantly intersect. To talk about one without the others is to contribute to the aforementioned essentialization of identity. It is far too reductionist to paint a picture of identity that removes questions of history, memory and power.

Narrative can provide a powerful way to consider history and memory with regards to identity negotiation, and as Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) comment, “the narrative process often extends beyond the boundaries of the here and now to embrace people and places in a historical and cultural past” (p. 353). Indeed, language learning, like other human activity, exists in a dialectical relationship with not only its social situation, but also its historical and institutional context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Looking at how certain structures endure over
time requires an understanding of the historically situated nature of language and culture, but this is clearly not all. It requires an understanding of the human participants, of their own agency and social and historical contexts. This is a critical part of understanding development. Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a) note that the gaining of competence and, thus, development, happens through routinization. Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss situated learning and development as taking place via mutual engagement in Communities of Practice in which individuals become legitimate participants and move toward full participations. Current L2S understands routine participation as being central to language learning and the development of social competence. Identity negotiation and development often occur through negotiating difference via identity struggles that learners face in new contexts with new routines and practices. It has been established that development is also inherently tied to the process of the joint enterprise or mutual engagement of the oldtimer, or expert, and the newcomer, or novice in a CoP (Lave & Wenger). I have also noted that identity is a relational construct, as is the development of the identity or identities. The newcomer moves toward full participation in a CoP by learning the routines of the oldtimer, or expert, who, in turn, apprentices the newcomer, or novice. This has a reproductive effect on the community. Being a newcomer (apprentice), however, does not mean that one has no agency, or that one is a non-agentive being. In fact, the newcomer is actively involved in the process of creating her/his own future, as well as the future of the community itself. As CoP conceives of identity, knowing, and social membership as containing each other, notions of identity must be connected to both the notions of the mutual engagement of the expert and novice. Through this engagement, the learner moves from a legitimate peripheral participant to a full participant. Likewise, issues of identity are also connected to issues of distancing from engagement, and thus moving away from full participation. Still, by “acquiescing, complying, contesting and resisting” the varying subject positions that may be available to them, “individuals gradually extend their repertoire of identities and adaptation tactics” (Shi, 2006, p. 13). As such, as mentioned elsewhere, the process of
development through participation and the expert/novice relationship is also understood as happening on more than just a linear time scale (Lemke, 2002).

How does one see participation and thus development happening? One might look at the participants’ explicit discussion and reflection of new and different routines and practices. When a person in an L2S context notices a key cultural practice that they have never seen before, a reaction or realization often follows. This realization may lead the person to take up this routine or practice themselves, which would appear in the data as layered “emergent meanings” of a new form (Kramsch, 2012, p. 22). Emergence of new meanings and forms may happen on different scales of time, thereby highlighting the need to explain any given phenomena longitudinally as well as cross-sectionally. The emergence of new reflections and practices is only one way in which we might “see” identity development progress occurring. It is important to note that in collecting emic perspectives, the intensity of a cultural encounter is also significant for identity development (Lemke, 2002). The degree to which an incident matters to the participants can be seen through collecting their accounts of what took place. By looking at oral reflections as well as interviews, I examine how my participants position themselves and others, and how they respond to being positioned by others. In such moments, their sense of identity may be particularly vulnerable and, thus, transparent, or even protected. These are also contextualized moments of identity struggle and negotiation that have the potential to show changes and/or shifts that could be occurring. Many of the notions of development mentioned here are also tenets of identity negotiation theory (INT), developed by Ting-Toomey (2005). This theory brings together parts of social identity theory, symbolic interactionism, the identity negotiation perspective, and relational dialectics. The first assumption of INT is that both group membership and personal identities are formed through symbolic communication with others (Ting-Toomey, p. 218). This tenet of INT is useful for describing moments where both identity negotiation and transformation is taking place. I will elaborate on this further in chapter 3.
2.9 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have chronicled scholarship in study abroad and language learning that highlights the methodological shift toward more holistic, ecological approaches. I have also elaborated on pertinent sociocultural theories and their origins, and how they have contributed to our understanding of situated learning and development. I have introduced the chosen theoretical framework for this study, a CoP orientation to second language socialization, and described its application to the current project. I have discussed international, intercultural, and translingual and transcultural speakers, and how as the latter provides a way to discuss the entanglements and ruptures bound to occur in the quest for cross-cultural understanding (Kramsch, 2012). I have also elaborated on how the construct of identity is defined in this framework, as well as how a CoP to L2S can help discuss participants’ identity transformation during a year abroad.

A similar project could certainly consider other theoretical frameworks. However, what is most appealing about a CoP orientation to second language socialization is that it provides a cohesive understanding of community that still allows for shifts and fluidity depending on the central goals of the community’s central participants. This theory also complements existing tenets that language and culture cannot be studied in isolation, and that learning and issues concerning identity are inseparable. Indeed, the interconnected notions of gaining linguistic and sociocultural competence are clearly relevant for study abroad, where issues of language, interaction, communities, culture, identity, development, history, power, intercultural awareness, and future goals constantly intersect and shift. The interdisciplinary nature of this and other social theories helps us to describe and understand our world, as we move from referring to language, community, identity, and structure as static and essentialized toward viewing them as historical, multi-faceted, fragmented, and constantly being re-negotiated, and thus constantly shifting. This
theoretical framework also allows for the researcher to look closely at the micro-dimension of community participation, that is, the day to day interactions and reflections while at the same time allowing one to consider current macro-structures that most certainly affect what takes place in the interactions. Understanding both gives a broader picture of micro and macrocontexts, as the various layers ultimately informs the other.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This dissertation project, which looks at American undergraduate students who studied abroad in Marburg, Germany for one year (two semesters), will be described in greater detail in this chapter. This is a qualitative study involving a variety of data collection methods, including questionnaires, oral reflections, interviews and group conversions, all of which were recorded and collected by the participants and/or the primary researcher over an entire academic year. The recordings focused on participants’ activities and interactions with German native speakers, as well as other members of the community, in a variety of settings. In my research, I ask the following questions:

- In which communities of practice do participants take part, and what are their levels of engagement in these communities?
- Is there an interaction between participants’ levels of (mutual) engagement in individual communities of practice and their identity negotiation (and vice versa)?
- Do levels of (mutual) engagement in communities of practice change over the academic semester or year, and does the amount and intensity of identity negotiation lead to identity development over time?

Through the analysis of these data I explore whether and how the study abroad (SA) experience is multifaceted and/or individual, to highlight the ways in which the SA experience is not easily generalized to the larger population. The SA context is inherently complex and thus makes language and intercultural learning an even more personal process than one might initially expect. Conducting a qualitative study can illuminate this. In what follows, I will discuss what it
means to do a qualitative study and why it suits my research questions. I will then explain why I have chosen case study as a research methodology, followed by participant recruitment and data collection procedures. Finally, I will discuss how the data were coded and analyzed.

3.2 Qualitative Studies

Where textual data is collected and examined using interpretive analysis, one is speaking of qualitative research (Croker, 2009). Interpretive analysis emphasizes the role of the researcher as an interpreter of the data, highlighting the self-reflective and subjective nature of qualitative research (Croker, 2009, p. 315). Over the past few decades, qualitative studies have become more prevalent due to an emerging constructivist worldview that called for “rigorous and systematic methodology to help researchers explore people’s worlds” (Croker, 2009, p. 7). Indeed, qualitative research is a research methodology that focuses on the social world and its participants, and views meaning as socially constructed. This kind of research methodology aims to understand how participants experience and interact with certain phenomena in particular contexts, including the multiple meanings these phenomena have for the participants (Croker, 2009, p. 7). Within the constructivist paradigm, a basic belief is that there are multiple, socially constructed realities as opposed to one knowable reality to rely upon (Mertens, 2010). This paradigm also encourages a balanced representation of views and aims to build community rapport as well as increase participants’ awareness. Where a postpositivist paradigm prizes objectivity, a constructivist perspective often involves the use of qualitative methodologies that call attention to the interactive link between the researcher and participants and also consider the fact that knowledge is historically and socially-situated. The observer is thus located within the world. There may also be an emphasis on the consideration of trust and power issues (Mertens, 2010). In this regard, qualitative research highlights and describes contextual factors as a means
to explore, interpret and make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research is complex and evolving, and its origins are found in a variety of fields including anthropology, sociology and philosophy, to name a few (Croker, 2009).

As explained in greater detail in section 3.3, my approach is methodologically qualitative and not mixed methods research in its fullest sense; however, I do use some quantitative measures, such as language proficiency evaluations and turn counts from a particular group conversation setting. However, neither the proficiency evaluations nor the group conversation turn counts are meant to answer my larger research questions pertaining to identity negotiation and development. Instead, these two measures provide a general idea of participants’ language proficiency levels and how often they spoke in the group conversation settings. These help improve my understanding of each participant’s study abroad story. In this study, I understand reality as something that cannot be understood in just one way. In my view, there are multiple socially-constructed realities that exist at any given time. I also assert that knowledge is historically and socially-situated and co-constructed in interaction. In order to discuss my participants’ engagement in various communities of practice, one first must take a closer look at which communities are important for the participants, and how they participate in these communities, which is something that the language proficiency evaluations and turn counts can begin to address. Whether and how they negotiate their own identity through participating in these communities is also something I understand as being socially and historically-situated, and constructed in interaction. This is also the way in which I understand and view how participants’ instances of identity negotiation interact with their levels of engagement in their communities, as well as how or if their identity changes during one year abroad.

A rich, or thick, description (Geertz, 1973) of the study abroad experience that presents the reader with ample details about the context so that they “would be able to understand the complexity of the research setting and participants” allows readers to evaluate the applicability of
the results to their own circumstances as well (Mertens, 2010). The qualitative case study allows for such rich description of the social world, its phenomena and the co-construction of new meanings and realities.

3.3 Case Study as a Research Methodology

Case study as a research methodology involves in-depth exploration and a thick description of the case and is thus useful for this project (Geertz, 1973). Case studies are not always qualitative in design. Stake (2005) notes that case study research is actually not defined by methodology but rather by the object of study. He notes that the rationale for conducting a case study increases “the more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system” (Stake, 2005, p. 436). One may, in fact, find that certain case studies make use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, leading to data collection and analysis methods commonly referred to as mixed methods research. As Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) aptly point out, mixed methods is “research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4). Mertens (2010) notes that “social researchers commonly mix methods to a varying degree at various points in their research” (pp. 9). Indeed, mixed methods can mean using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer research questions in a single study, as well as using both methodological approaches to answer separate research questions in a study.

Focusing on a particular object of study and constructing an understanding within a complex, social world is the goal of a case study and the reason why I employ this research methodology in my dissertation project. This project consists of multiple case studies conducted with six American undergraduate students in Marburg, Germany. In conducting these case
studies, I emphasize the importance of considering the intersections of both the quality and quantity of the SA experience. To this end, I collected questionnaires, language proficiency evaluations, language awareness interviews, oral reflections, group conversations and semi-structured qualitative interviews with each participant, all of which took place at various points in the year.

As Richards (2003) states, the larger goal of qualitative inquiry is “to understand better some aspect(s) of the lived world” (p. 10), and that aim is quite central to the present project. Case studies provide a way for researchers to explore the aspects of an individual person's experience, especially as they live in brand new contexts. There are a number of case studies in applied linguistics that investigate people who are in new contexts, learning a new language and trying to become members of new communities (e.g., Kinginger, 2004, 2008; Jackson, 2008; Norton, 2000). Mackey and Gass (2005) note that “[c]ase studies aim to provide holistic descriptions of language learning or use within a specific population and setting” (p. 171). Furthermore, an advantage of the case study is that it “allows the researcher to focus on individuals in a way that is rarely possible in group research” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 171). In a similar vein, the case study is an appropriate methodological choice for the current project because it allows me to investigate phenomena in participants’ current, real-life environments, and I understand investigated phenomena as being closely intertwined with context and thus inseparable (Yin, 1994).

3.3.1 Role of the researcher

Qualitative researchers know that completely unbiased objectivity is impossible and in fact reject such notions in favor of openly recognizing the role the researcher plays (Anderson, 1993; Mertens, 2010). As Duff (2008) points out, most qualitative researchers understand that
engagement in the world is inevitable and that meanings and realities are not just discovered but co-constructed. The qualitative researcher may be directly engaged in discovering and co-constructing both the meanings and realities in a particular research context. For example, Miller (1997) conducted action research in five elementary school classrooms over the course of four years, and noted that the continual disruptions of herself as a teacher, researcher and theorist could not be disregarded. As the primary investigator in the present study, I too am aware of my own roles and disruptions over the course of the year. Scholars (Cresswell, 2007; Duff, 2008; Mertens, 2010) contend that the subjectivity of the researcher is important to consider in that “when researchers go into research settings, they also take their own intellectual baggage and life experiences with them” (Mertens, 2010, p. 11). In this study, I am a graduate student, teacher, researcher and friend, and I recognize that my own roles are significant in that they shape the research process in numerous ways.

The way in which I interact with the participants as well as how I interpret their words is another significant piece of the story. While my graduate student status did allow me to build personal relationships with most of the participants, there is a difference in age and experience that must be noted. Still, these relationships were extremely positive in the sense that it encouraged very informal and relaxed interviewing contexts. Most participants told me informally that they felt comfortable divulging certain information to me during the interviews because I too was a student abroad, and/or because I was close to them. They interacted with me based on the shared history that we had constructed together in Marburg, Germany. Some shared jokes, personal stories, embarrassing moments; some also searched my counsel or wanted comfort when homesick. However, comfort and informality do not always mean that there are no absolute boundaries. One participant sometimes held back a little bit more. Perhaps, given that we were not as close as some of the others, he did not feel that it was appropriate to tell me a lot of personal information. Importantly, he may have viewed my closeness with other participants from
his college with whom he was well-acquainted as a reason to withhold information; perhaps my roles as both friend and researcher made him less likely to discuss more personal matters. Each participant knew that all data were kept private and that the study was strictly confidential, yet he may have worried about protecting his most personal stories and comments. My roles, then, may be seen positively in some instances, and perhaps negatively in others. Still, we know that establishing a rapport and working closely with participants always risks “disruptions in the field” (Miller, 1997). Our co-constructed living history in Marburg created a disruption of the objective researcher that I perhaps naively believed could keep more divided (Miller, 1997). Thus, I recognize that my role as researcher, as well as my roles as student, teacher, advisor and friend played a part in shaping the experiences of these students and the ways in which the students talked about their experiences. This knowledge helps to further understand the interactions I had with my participants, as well as the interpretations that developed out of these interactions. As Miller (1997) says, these disruptions are the surprises that come from the lived practice of attempting to understand, explore and reflect, address and discuss challenges.

3.4 Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures

For this study, I recruited participants from three different universities in the American Northeast. All three of these universities have exchange programs with the Philipps-Universität Marburg, in Germany. However, the final pool of participants were from only two of these universities, since one particular school, a large state school, had no participants in the Philipps-Universität Marburg German language exchange program in 2009-2010. Of the other two universities, one school is a mid-sized state university and the other is a small private liberal arts college that places great emphasis on its students studying abroad. In fact, the following mission statement can be found on their website: "Rooted in the values of peace and justice, our
institution promotes international understanding, awareness of global citizenship and academic scholarship through educational exchange. This likely accounts for the fact that although this college has just under 1500 students, more than ten students were studying abroad in Marburg during the 2009-2010 year, seven of which took part in the German language program and were there for the entire academic year. The others took part in the English language program for one semester or year. Overall, a total of 118 students from this college studied abroad during 2009-2010 overall, which is 7.8% of the total student population (personal communication). This contrasts with the mid-sized state university, which sent eight students abroad to Marburg in the German language program, from a total student population of about 9000 students. There were 90 students studying abroad during the 2009-2010 academic year from this institution, which is 1% of the total student population (personal communication). This is much lower overall compared to the small private liberal arts college. And yet my own institution, a large state university whose main campus alone has 43,900 students sent fewer than ten students to Marburg at some point in 2009-2010, and most of these spent a semester or less there. None of them took part in the German language exchange program, as mentioned. 1,648 students were studying abroad during the 2009-2010 academic year from this institution, which is 3% of the total student population (University Office of Global Programs International Profile, 2010). Of these students, many took part in English-language exchange programs.

Kinginger (2008) notes that the spread of English as the main language of global communication deemphasizes the relevance of learning other foreign languages, and that this de-emphasis is a growing trend. In fact, the majority of American students who study abroad in Europe “are increasingly likely to receive instruction delivered in English” (Kinginger, 2010).

Overall, of the three schools, the small private liberal arts college had the largest number of students in Marburg, Germany during the 2009-2010 academic year, as well as the largest

---

2 Withholding citation reference for the sake of participants’ anonymity.
percentage of students abroad overall. The large state university had fewer than ten undergraduate students in Marburg at any point in the year, and all of them took part in the English language exchange program. The mid-sized state university sent only 1% of its students abroad, with eight students spending a semester or year in Marburg, Germany. Of the three schools, my institution has the largest German department (based on number of full time faculty). However, the mid-sized state university also has a thriving German program whose faculty push the students to challenge themselves by going abroad. While the small liberal arts college has a thriving German program as well, it is just one division of a Department of World Languages. In that particular context, the push for students to study abroad for one year comes largely from the institutional level. There, a study abroad year is built into many departmental requirements and/or recommendations. One could therefore argue that this is perhaps a reason why such a large proportion of students from this institution study abroad.

As per the regulations of the institutional research board (IRB), the proper protocol regarding research with human subjects was followed, and all the participants’ names have been changed. Participants for this study were recruited once IRB approval was obtained. I asked the study abroad program coordinators from the two institutions if they could forward my email message to all those going to Marburg for the 2009-2010 academic year. Both study abroad coordinators agreed to forward my email message to their students and nine replied. I confirmed with those who replied, providing them with detailed information about what was going to be asked of them. The six who still wanted to take part were told that they would meet with me for the first time in Marburg, Germany in October 2009. The recruitment of these six participants took place in September 2009 (pre-departure) and initial proficiency evaluations and language awareness interviews were conducted with them upon my arrival in October 2009. All participants also filled out an initial language history questionnaire at that time. Then, they received an MP3 player which they used to self-record oral reflection data. These six participants
were involved in the project for the entire year. I also recorded interviews and group
communications twice per semester and noted my own observations in any other informal
environments where we were together.

In analyzing these data, I am interested in which communities of practice the participants
took part in, as well as their levels of engagement in those communities. I understand levels of
engagement as the reification of and participation in events and routines, as well as any references
to agency in and access to these communities. I also look at any instances of positioning of the
self and others in the various communities the participants participate in over time. This also
allows me to chart the participants’ level of engagement in various activities, uncover instances of
identity negotiation, and track the participants’ identity development over the course of the
academic year.

At the completion of the study, the participants received an honorarium for their
participation in the study. The honorarium consisted of a maximum of €100. Whether or not they
received exactly €100 depended on how many reflection files they turned in, as well as how many
interviews and conversations they took part in. If they turned files in on a weekly basis, and
attended all interview and conversation sessions, they received the full honorarium. The fewer
submissions or lower attendance they had, the less money they received. The aim of this
honorarium was to keep the participants motivated to participate consistently in this study over
the entire year. This seems to have been mostly successful as only one student did not fully take
part and thus received only €80. All students were also allowed to keep the MP3 players given to
them at the outset of the study.
3.4.1 Language history questionnaire, proficiency evaluation

In order to find out more about each participant's history with German, language learning in general and study abroad, participants were first asked to complete a detailed language history and general background questionnaire. I then had them fill out a proficiency evaluation in order to give me a general idea of their German language skills. I also conducted language awareness interviews based on the one developed by Kinginger (2008). Kinginger’s language awareness interview design was an early and exploratory contribution to the investigation of learners’ awareness of sociolinguistic variability in French, and how such awareness influenced and was shaped by students’ experiences abroad. In the present study, I used part of this instrument to investigate learners’ awareness of sociolinguistic variation in German. I used two of the six sections from Kinginger’s language awareness interview, specifically questions that addressed forms of address in specific situations and speech acts for leave-taking. I also added questions that addressed speech acts for greetings, because similar to leave-taking contexts, there are specific situations in German that call for certain formal and informal greetings. The results from the language awareness interview, including the questions regarding address forms and speech acts for greeting and leave-taking, will be the focus of a future project and, thus, will not be discussed in this dissertation.

3.4.2 Oral reflections

After the first meeting in which participants completed the proficiency evaluation, language history questionnaire, I gave them brand new MP3 players with voice recorders. This was done so that they would be able to self-record their oral reflections on a weekly basis. Participants were told that they could record in either English or German. They were also allowed
to keep the MP3 players after the study was finished as a reward for taking part in the study. Participants were explicitly asked to record personal stories or events including reactions, perceptions and thoughts about interesting encounters or rich points (Agar, 1994). I make use of Agar’s understanding of a rich point as a locus of conflict that has reflective significance for the person involved. Rich points may consist of cultural and/or linguistic encounters and, as such, may lead to incidents in which participants position and re-position themselves, other people, and groups, such as a community of practice in which they take part. The investigation of positioning provides a window into participants’ dispositions or personal stances and viewpoints toward themselves and others. In the case of the students studying in Marburg, I considered such rich points as encompassing positive and/or negative interactions with locals or other exchange students, new cultural experiences (good and bad), reactions to other students’ incidents and/or stories, or other general observations that stick out for them.

I chose to have the participants orally record these experiences because orally re-telling an event is a simpler process than writing it down. When I say simpler, I mean that writing or typing out events in a journal constitutes a medium change; it is likely that many of the rich points participants spoke of in their reflections occurred in conversational interactions, whether they took part in them or just observed them. Another reason for having participants orally re-tell such incidents and/or encounters is that through verbal recounting, a person may come to understand themselves and the event better through the telling of such stories about themselves (Bruner, 1990). As such, orally recording their own stories and reflections allows the participants to tell us who they are and what their relationship to the event or incident is. A final practical reason for having participants orally record their reflections is that they might be more likely to report on experiences immediately after they occur, as opposed to sitting down and taking the time to type something. I suggested that they place their MP3 player beside their beds and take ten to fifteen minutes to record every night before they went to bed. The idea was that this could
allow them to establish a simple routine, as well as assist me in getting as much data as possible. The participants sent me their recordings via email on a semi-regular basis, depending on the participant. Sending me files via email allowed them to turn things in quickly and easily. Some files were too large for email, and as I often saw many of the participants in the cafeteria anyway, they would sometimes transfer files to my computer using a thumb drive. I am aware that one cannot capture the complete individual experience, medium change or not; however, oral recordings have the potential to provide great insight into a person’s own first-hand experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly argue that we must view participants as having multiple voices and not as unidimensional beings (2000, p. 147). The participants’ verbal recounts are narrative constructions of “personal practical knowledge”, or: “that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practice” (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce & Steeves, 1995, p. 5). It is through such personal knowledge and experience that people come to use and develop a language for understanding what occurs in a particular context (Clandinin et al., 1995, p. 5). As such, it is vital to recognize that the knowledge that the participants constructed and experienced provides them with was in which to speak as language learners, students and Americans abroad.

3.4.3 Semistructured interviews

Doing qualitative interviews consists of more than just a series of questions and answers, it is a method of collecting data that allows for various ways of exploring the views and experiences of people (Richards, 2009, p. 183). They are “a professional conversation” (Kvale, 1996, p. 5). As Duff (2008) points out, there are a few ways of categorizing interviews. Typically, one speaks of the following three kinds of interviews: structured, open-ended, and semistructured.
Dörnyei (2007) calls the semistructured interview a compromise in that it draws to some extent from both structured and open-ended interview formats. Duff (2008) notes further that one may also categorize interviews as structured or semistructured in-depth interviews, focus group or group interviews, and oral history or life history interviews (p. 132). In this study, I use semistructured interviews to collect data regarding the beliefs and experiences of the research participants. I see the interview as a context where co-constructed dialogue, or conversation, occurs. The semi-structured interview is less rigid than the structured interview, and can be a way of encouraging a seemingly formal, hierarchical situation to inspire more informal, personal banter. The hope was to get to a deeper level of trust and camaraderie, and therefore more personal stories and perspectives.

Regardless of the approach, I recognize that a research interview is a jointly-produced construction by both the interviewer and the participant (Duff, 2008). Scholars have also discussed the importance of reflecting about the relationship and power distribution that exists between the interviewer and the interviewee (Creswell, 2007). I recognize that these interviews are jointly-produced constructions while considering my roles as researcher, interviewer, graduate student, teacher, and in some cases, friend. I also understand that the interview is a type of data collection method that is helpful in understanding the social actor’s viewpoint and experience.

I conducted the interviews in English. In the first interview, I had a list of questions that covered topics that I hoped to discuss with the participants (see Appendix D for a list of sample questions). Participants were asked certain prepared questions directly, and they answered these in varying ways. Often, participants would answer a question that would ultimately serve as a point of departure for other comments that they wanted to make. I allowed for and even hoped for these types of elaborations. I also asked each participant follow-up questions tailored to events that they had mentioned in their own oral reflections. In later interviews, a similar protocol was followed. Planned, listed questions were still asked, and other new and pertinent questions and
issues came up in each interview, depending on the participant. In each interview I also followed up on issues raised in participants’ oral reflections and about individual issues that came up while speaking with them in more informal contexts. This allowed me to hear more about incidents that they perhaps had only just begun to reflect upon in their oral reflections, as well as those that perhaps they did not (yet) consider interesting or important. These semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant twice a semester (there are four interviews per participant in total). This was done in order to explore what happens in the lives of the participants over the course of a semester (once mid-semester and once at end of the semester) and academic year abroad.

### 3.4.4 Group conversations

Group data can be useful for the interpretation of case study data when there is a larger pool of subjects involved, because one can then see how the participants interact with one another and encourage mutual engagement and participation to continue (Duff, 2008, p. 135). Collecting group conversation data improves our understanding of a particular group context and contributes to our understanding of how identity negotiation interacts with participants’ engagement and participation in a given community. In this study, I conducted group conversation sessions with my participants and Universität Marburg students. The goal of these sessions was to collect naturalistic group data as well as allow me to continue observing and experiencing the perspectives and actions of the participants in their interactions with each other and Universität Marburg students.

These group conversation sessions were held twice a semester, and they were all recorded. For these conversations, the study participants were split into two different groups each time. Each group contained three participants, one Universität Marburg student and me. I asked
the group to hang out in my kitchen and casually chat for about an hour. The Universität Marburg student was instructed to try to keep the conversation in German as much as possible, though speaking in English was also allowed. This gave participants an opportunity and even a reason to discuss various topics in German (or sometimes English) with the Universität Marburg students, as well as among themselves. I thought it would be interesting to observe the participants in an environment where there was some pressure to speak mostly German. In most other observational settings (parties, gatherings), the participants would speak a lot of English with one another. As such, I hoped that this group conversation environment would become an important setting for the participants and Universität Marburg students. I also hoped that it would encourage the participants to speak German in a safe, non-judgmental space. In general, the group conversation sessions were meant to provide some interesting information about how the participants communicated and participated in what was a fairly new setting for them in Germany.

3.4.5 Observational notes

Duff (2008) writes that many case studies in applied linguistics make use of focused observation of their case participants in natural contexts (p. 138). In doing so, the researcher plays yet another social role in that context, for example as a student, teacher, co-worker or co-participant in that local culture in general (Duff, 2008, p. 138). In my study, I made observational fieldnotes in various informal settings in which the participants and I were together. This was often, as I was good friends with two of my participants, and very well acquainted with two others; the five of us all shared many common friends as well. Such closeness allowed for greater intimacy, but it was also difficult to be critical in some instances. It is possible that my words and actions influenced a participant’s words and actions as well. At other times, I purposefully refrained from acting for fear of influencing the study. Such points are important to consider. It is
also important to think about how these fieldnotes were recorded, used, and analyzed. In qualitative research, taking fieldnotes is more than just the process of recording lists of observable behaviors, though the mechanics are also important to consider (Richards, 2003). Taking observational fieldnotes is more than just recording lists, as this is rarely the only type of data collected. It is common to triangulate fieldnotes with other data (e.g. interviews) in order to better understand the perspectives of the participants by also observing their actions and behaviors (Duff, 2008, p. 141). In my study, I collected data from the participants’ perspectives as well as from my own perspective, with the goal of better understanding the context and experiences of the participants.

3.4.6 Conclusion

All of these data were collected in order to get a better understanding of who the participants were interacting with, and what activities they engaged in. To address my first research question I use oral reflection and interview data to identify the specific communities of practice in which the students take part. I use group conversation data to measure participants’ levels of engagement in the group conversation community. To address my second research question, I will rely on the oral reflection and interview data to investigate whether there is a relationship between levels of engagement in communities of practice and identity negotiation. Finally, collecting these three types of data continuously over the course of one year will shed light on my third research question pertaining to how linguistic and social development in a study abroad setting changes over time.
3.5 Coding and Analysis

3.5.1 Introduction

As described in detail in the previous section, I had five data sources for my participants, all of which were collected during the 2009-2010 academic year. The collection of such a variety of data chronicles the participants’ most important relationships and communities, and how they interacted both within and outside of these relationships and communities over the course of the year. Data collected from multiple perspectives strengthens the analysis of a study of this nature (Duff, 2008). Triangulation is the process of gathering data from multiple sources using multiple methods, as well as multiple theoretical perspectives in order to achieve richer and deeper analyses and knowledge of the topic of inquiry (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 323). As Stake (2000) notes, “seen from different worldviews and in different situations, the ‘same’ case is different” (p. 449). However, multiple perspectives and large amounts of data must be meaningfully condensed (Duff, 2008, p. 44). As outlined in greater detail below, I transcribed the oral reflections and interviews, reading through these transcriptions multiple times. While listening, transcribing and reading, I began to code the data. The first attempt at analyzing the data usually arises from the creation of a coding scheme (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). With a rich data set, I began categorizing the data, or identifying units of data that represent certain phenomena (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Codes and categories were born from existing theory and research such as situated learning theory (Communities of Practice) and positioning theory (see Davies & Harré, 1990; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Codes were used to look for intersections between positioning, levels of engagement in and routinization of CoP practices, identity negotiation, and participants’ overall identity development over the course of the academic year abroad.
Identity negotiation theory (INT), as developed by Ting-Toomey (2005), has two constructs that are useful for discussing the ways in which participants go about discussing, reconciling and negotiating their identity. INT brings together components of social identity theory, symbolic interactionism, the identity negotiation perspective, and relational dialectics in order to explore how people negotiate their identities (Ting-Toomey, 2005). This process is both discursive and semiotic in that it takes place both verbally and non-verbally (Jackson, 2008, p. 51). Indeed, participants who take part in a given community may discuss their (mutual) engagement in that community via references to successes as well as failures. They may also position themselves and others in familiar ways (using recognizable frames of reference) or in new transformative ways. Similarly, participants may avoid communities or may not be allowed access to specific communities. This may also be seen in instances of self and other positioning.

The first assumption of INT is that both group membership and personal identities are formed through symbolic communication with others (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 218). This assumes poststructuralist notions of identity, often defined by Norton as something used “to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands the possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2000, p. 5). It considers features of social identity theory in which social identity is primarily comprised of a reflexive knowledge of group membership and a specific disposition or stance as regards belonging to this group (Benwell & Stokoe, 2007).

Social identity theory itself is not enough, however, to explain personal identity development or transformation. INT also considers relational dialectics and experiences of identity consistency in the form of repeated cultural routines, noting that these may lead to personal transformation, or identity chaos (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 218). Ting-Toomey (2005) discusses the distinction between those who are oblivious to the identity negotiation process versus those who are mindful about the dynamics surrounding the process. The idea here is that
mindfulness is “a learned process of attuning to self-identity reactive issues plus engaging in intentional attunement to others’ salient identity issues” (p. 217). On the other hand, mindlessness is said to refer to a situation where a person relies on more familiar frames of reference, for example more routinized designs or categories, or things that they are already accustomed to doing (see also Jackson, 2008). Understanding how people notice, are mindful and ultimately take up new subject positions in a consistent way is at the crux of the analysis of identity negotiation and transformation. Considering all of these issues will help answer the research questions outlined at the start of this chapter, regarding participants’ levels of engagement in communities of practice and their interaction with instances of identity negotiation, while considering the implications for identity development over the academic year.

3.5.2 Analysis: transcription and coding

A key part of my data collection was the oral reflection data. I listened to each participant’s oral reflections multiple times throughout the year and transcribed them as I collected them based on conventions utilized in Kinginger (2008) (see Appendix E for transcription conventions). As will be explained in greater detail below, these reflections were then coded for references to communities and/or people they were friends with (whether explicitly or implicitly named), references to issues of agency and access, as well as instances of subject or other positioning. Interviews were partially transcribed using the same transcription conventions. In transcribing the interviews, I listened to each of the 24 interviews multiple times over the course of the year in Marburg, taking paraphrased notes each time. After returning to the United States, I went through each interview again, transcribing participant answers that I had previously paraphrased and taken notes on. Both the interview and oral reflection transcriptions were then coded for references to communities and/or people they were friends with (whether
explicitly or implicitly named), references to issues of agency and access, as well as instances of subject or other positioning.

I first coded for explicit and implicit references to communities that the participants were taking part in, avoiding or expressing a desire to participate in. I also coded for community, language or general study abroad goals to find more specific intentions they had regarding their communities – both real and imagined. Frequent references to communities, beyond simply highlighting how and why participating or not participating is important for the participants, can inform us about how participants situate themselves within their own study abroad environments, as well as whether or not they want to participate. The oral reflections and interviews were also coded for references to moments that highlight instances of individual agency, since identity is in part a self-conscious, reflexive project that is created and upheld by individuals (Block, 2007). According to Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001), participants are not “bundles of variables” or individual differences, rather, they are human agents who act with intent and make varied investments in their own language learning processes and do so for very different reasons (p. 143-6). They also argue that agency is a co-constructed phenomenon, and never a “property” (p. 148; 152). In this study, I am interested in how this phenomenon is mediated and thus co-constructed through community participation and language, and how it shifts throughout the year. The data were also coded for references to issues of access by looking for any references to successes and failures (whether linguistic, social, or connected to the undertaking of task) that each participant may have felt was significant or worth mentioning.

The contexts and communities that participants either take part in or desire to take part in enforce and encourage constraints on who can legitimately participate (Block, 2007, p. 26). Such power dynamics may alter and recreate how people view themselves and others, and how they want to act vis-à-vis that community. Overt and covert power structures are constantly at work within and outside of small and larger communities, and people often attempt to create
perspectives and beliefs that assist them in being viewed as credible (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 408).

Issues of access are also important to consider, since identity is not just about individual agents or “individuals making choices” but also about how people are received, welcomed and legitimized as engaged participants over time (Block, 2007, p. 22). Coding for references to a participant’s agency and access to the various communities in which the participants take part (or would like to take part) informs us about their levels of engagement, and allows us to see how they negotiate their own identities (Block, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Mutual engagement with other members, the participants' actions, negotiations and repertoire can bring about changes in negotiations regarding how people do things, how they think and talk about things, in summary, their practices (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464). Those who perceive their hosts as receptive or supportive may be more open and have more opportunities for personal, social and linguistic growth that leads to some renegotiation of their own identity (Jackson, 2008, p. 47). In my dissertation project, I have coded the oral reflection and interview data for explicit and implicit references to agency and access, as seen in particular objectives, successes and/or failures they may have mentioned or alluded to in the data. This is a way to find out why a participant started, continued or stopped taking part in a given community. Looking at participants’ references to these topics allows for an understanding about why engaging in particular communities is something that they do (even when they say they do not really want to belong to that community) or do not do (even when they express a great desire to belong to that community). I am particularly interested in whether these references to agency, access and levels of engagement will show instances of identity negotiation, or perhaps even lead to them.

I also coded the oral reflections and interview data for instances of positioning. Positioning Theory provides one way to discover which people, what communities and what practices may be important to the participants. For the purposes of the present study, I adopt the understanding of positioning as proposed by Davies and Harré (1991) in which they argue for a
“productive interrelationship between 'position', and 'illocutionary force’”, or the way in which the functional meaning of what one says was intended (p. 45). Davies and Harré note that the social meaning of what has been said depends on the positioning of interlocutors (1991, p. 45). Benwell and Stokoe (2007) identify positioning as the process through which speakers take on, resist, reject and offer certain subject positions that larger discourses or “master narratives” make available (p. 43). As an example of other positioning, a participant could get into cultural trouble and be chastised for violating a cultural norm. In this situation, s/he could be positioned by those who understand the cultural norm as laughable, naive, amusing, among others. However, the illocutionary force of this act of positioning, or the actual intention behind one’s utterance, may have far-reaching consequences for the participant. For example, after having been positioned in a certain way, a person may re-frame her/his own reaction or beliefs about this action based on his or her interpretation of the illocutionary force of an utterance (Block, 2007, p. 19). The illocutionary force of such an action could lead a participant person to believe that people now see her/him as unintelligent. An example of positioning oneself might be that a participant has a successful, and thus positive, cultural or linguistic exchange during a service encounter, based on having learned the hard way through past mistakes, and thus positions him or herself as fitting in, or as having been successful in figuring out some cultural norm. Positioning oneself or a German native speaker could happen even by observing interactions between Germans or other Europeans and realizing that different cultures go about things in different ways. All of these could lead participants to moments of re-thinking or re-framing their regular routines, or changing what they say they are used to doing back home with their family or friends. Likewise, these moments may also lead participants to pledge an even stronger allegiance to what they view as their core values, or their familiar frame of reference. However, it may also mean re-evaluating their current dispositions and re-positioning themselves and others in the world because of their new stances and experiences. Therefore, the data were also coded for instances of self and other positioning,
including explicit and implicit references to the self and others by coding pronoun usage, as well as any other names, references or inferences to themselves or others that were apparent in the recordings and transcripts.

Finally, I listened to two group conversation sessions that took place in June 2010 and counted each turn taken by each participant as well as the lengths of each of their turns. Turn-taking is a basic unit in conversational analysis (see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), and counting each turn provides a measure of how many times each participant took the floor during a group conversation session. Both turn counts and turn lengths may give us a basic idea of their level of engagement in this specific group that was organized for them. In a previous study, Peterson (2010) showed how counting turns can provide a window into the identity-significant discursive strategies used by participants in the 3D virtual world, second life. In my study, I view these turn counts and lengths as a window into understanding their participation and engagement in a group conversation community that I created. I am not interested in the changes in turn counts or length of turns in this particular community over time. Rather, I want to get a sense of how they communicated in this setting at a time when they felt most comfortable. Not only is there the potential for insight into how much the participants communicate in a given context, but we can also discover how that participation and engagement can be encouraged to continue.

3.6 Conclusion

Overall, the present study contributes to and augments current research on study abroad by expanding our understanding of issues surrounding community participation and identity development. I followed six American undergraduate students and investigated how they participated in various communities of practice over the course of one year abroad in Marburg Germany. I administered language history questionnaires, language proficiency evaluations and
language awareness interviews. I also hosted group conversations to look at how they participate in this specific group setting with fellow Americans and a German university student. In Chapter four, I will present my participants and discuss these data. I also collected oral reflection and interview data in order to better understand their own perspectives of the various cultural encounters that they may have faced in this new context and in communities that they either do or do not take part in. The results of the oral reflection and interview data will be presented in chapter five.
Chapter 4

Questionnaires and Linguistic Data

4.1 Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, I gathered data from the participants in a variety of ways in order to pursue the aforementioned research questions:

- In what communities of practice do participants take part, and what are their levels of engagement in these communities?
- Is there an interaction between participants’ levels of (mutual) engagement in individual communities of practice and their identity negotiation (and vice versa)?
- Do levels of (mutual) engagement in communities of practice change over the academic semester or year, and does the amount and intensity of identity negotiation lead to identity development over time?

The six participants in this study began by filling out an initial language history questionnaire and completing initial language proficiency evaluations. I used the same language history questionnaire and proficiency evaluations to collect the same data from the participants at the start of the summer semester in mid April 2010 and at the end of the summer semester in mid July 2010. I also collected data from the participants for the rest of the year by means of oral reflections and semistructured interviews. In this chapter, I will introduce each of the six participants and discuss their questionnaire data. The questionnaire data inform us of the participants’ histories, goals, desires and beliefs regarding learning German and language learning in general, as well as studying abroad. General information is synthesized in table 4-1 below. I will then present their language proficiency and group conversation data. These data provide a glimpse of who the participants are; they also give us an idea of their proficiency levels
and how they communicate in the group conversation community that I organized. All names used are fictional.

### 4.2 Participants

#### Table 4-1: Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Katie</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Joe</th>
<th>Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Mid-sized State 1</td>
<td>Private Liberal Arts College</td>
<td>Private Liberal Arts College</td>
<td>Mid-sized State 2</td>
<td>Private Liberal Arts College</td>
<td>Private Liberal Arts College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in Oct. 2009</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Primary Residence</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>PA</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned German at age?</td>
<td>14, school</td>
<td>17-18, self-taught and school</td>
<td>14, school</td>
<td>14, school</td>
<td>18, college</td>
<td>18, college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional FLs</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish (in Marburg), Italian (in Marburg)</td>
<td>Spanish (in Marburg)</td>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Spanish (in Marburg)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.2.1 Katie

Katie came to Marburg, Germany at the age of 20 and turned 21 during her year abroad.

Katie is a German major in her junior year at the mid-sized state university mentioned in the previous chapter. Born and raised mostly in the Northeast, her native language is English. She began learning German (her first foreign language) at age 14 and notes that her father, an
American-born high school German teacher, regularly spoke some German to her and her siblings growing up. Katie writes in her questionnaires that her father’s ability to help her with German was one of the main reasons for continuing with it more formally in a classroom setting. She enjoyed taking German in high school and consequently did well. Because of this, she continued to study German at the college level. Katie also writes that she always knew she would try to go abroad, not only because she felt that it was necessary to improve her language skills, but also because it was something her father had done and often spoke about. It was an experience that she also wanted to have, particularly as her reasons for going abroad were to become proficient and feel confident in her future career as a high school German teacher. After looking into study abroad opportunities at college, she was disappointed to discover that her university actually had no official exchange program with Germany. She soon learned that she would still be able to go abroad through another state school’s exchange program with the Universität Marburg. Prior to coming to Marburg in October 2009, Katie had never been outside of the United States.

On the first two questionnaires, Katie writes that she identifies most with American culture. However, by the third questionnaire she just writes “it depends.” Another notable point is that she writes across all three questionnaires that she would prefer to speak English in the four given situations (at home, at work, at a party and in general). Both of these issues are important for Katie’s story, and I will discuss them in greater detail in this and the next chapter.

4.2.2 Brad

Brad, a 20-year-old male communication major in his junior year, came to Marburg in September 2009. He was born and raised in the Northeast like Katie. Brad studies at a small private liberal arts college in the Northeastern USA that has an official study abroad program in Marburg. He says he learned German at first on his own, citing a “German girl he liked” as
having been a big motivation for doing so (Questionnaire 1, winter semester). Brad started learning German independently around age 17, and started taking formal German classes at age 18 in school. He was allowed into the class even though he had not fulfilled the pre-requisite courses because of his success learning independently. Before beginning German, Brad had taken some Latin in school. He also reports taking courses in Spanish and Italian (Spanish at college and in Marburg, Italian just in Marburg). Prior to coming to Marburg, Brad had been to Germany once during the previous year for a two week trip with his father. This time, he wanted to go to Germany for one year to get away from his state and as he put it, his “boring college” (Questionnaire 1, winter semester). Brad also sees studying abroad as a way for students to deepen their understanding of language and culture.

When asked if he identifies with American or German culture, he notes twice in the first two questionnaires that there are aspects of both with which he identifies. However, by the third questionnaire he just writes “American.” As will be shown in chapter five, after a few months, Brad begins to define Germans in new and interesting ways, and the fact that he self-reports that he identifies most with American culture in the final month of his sojourn is likely related to his ways of positioning Germans.

4.2.3 Sarah

Sarah is a 20 year old international business major who studies at the same institution as Brad. She too came to Marburg in her junior year. Sarah started learning German at the age of 14 in school. The only other foreign language that she has taken is Spanish, which she began learning while in Marburg. Interestingly, although Katie and Sarah attend completely different universities and are in Marburg through completely different exchange programs, both happen to be from the same hometown and high school. Both report that they were not particularly close in
high school; however, they do have mutual friends. They were both shocked to find out that they would be studying abroad in the same town when they discovered this fact prior to arriving in Marburg via a social networking website. Before coming to Marburg in September 2009, Sarah had been to Germany once before for a five-week program during the summer of 2008. She was required to study abroad in her junior year, but states that she would have gone abroad to Germany even if it was not required.

In her first interview, Sarah noted that she believes everyone should learn another language when traveling, as it is not fair for people to assume that everyone can/should speak English. Here, interestingly, it is already clear that the study abroad year for her is at least in some way conceptualized as a travel year. She does not seem to frame it as a year that emphasizes study or even as a way to participate locally in a German town. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Sarah consistently writes that she identifies most with American culture.

4.2.4 David

David came to Marburg, Germany at the age of 20 and turned 21 during his year abroad. David is a German major in his junior year at the mid-sized state university in the Northeast described in the previous chapter. He reports taking German classes since he was 14 years old. He has also studied Latin since he was 15. Like Brad and Sarah, David has also been to Germany before. He spent two weeks in Germany with a host family three years ago. One reason for learning and majoring in German, he notes, is having German ancestry. David also states that he finds German to be “a very expressive language in a way that English isn't” (Questionnaire 1, winter semester). Here, we note that David projects himself as an authority figure or linguistic expert rather than as a language learner, believing that one language allows him to express himself better than the other. This is interesting given that as we will see in chapter five, he
completely changes his own views about both the English and the German language during his time abroad. His goals for studying abroad are clear from the first questionnaire: he wants to use a lot of German as well as “learn German culture.” He also writes that he wants to become more independent and see more of the world. Initially, David is heavily invested in all things German and this leads to many ups and downs during his year abroad, as I will illuminate in greater detail in chapter five.

Given his early reports of having a great interest in the German language and culture, one would expect that he would begin to identify more with that culture. However, David consistently reports that he identifies most with American culture.

4.2.5 Joe

Joe is a 20-year-old chemistry major and is in his junior year at the same private liberal arts college as Brad and Sarah. He also arrived in Marburg in September 2009; however, he did not come to Marburg directly from the United States like the others. Joe had already been in Europe for two and a half months prior to arriving in Marburg, having completed an internship in Prague, Czech Republic. This stay in Prague was his first sojourn away from the United States. Joe started learning German in his freshman year of college at the age of 18. Prior to coming to Europe, he had never formally learned a language other than German, though through his internship he had some basic exposure to Czech. In his first questionnaire he writes that he and two friends decided to take German in their freshman year so that they could learn as much as they could in order to go abroad and get away from their college. Its small size and rural location are both things that many of my participants who study there frequently lament. Joe also notes that it is fulfilling to know a language that many Americans do not. In the first questionnaire, he also notes that his primary goal is “survival” and he hopes to learn as much as possible though
“not at the price of passing a class.” As will become clear in chapter five, these are important themes from Joe’s experience. In the same questionnaire, he writes in the extra comments section that he feels that his German skills are woefully inadequate, though he is happy to be in the sciences where he feels they have less of a language barrier as a lot of the materials are already in English, and they are often working with materials in laboratories. Joe’s area does not require final research papers that must be written in German, and he notes that if he were in the humanities or social sciences, he would be “screwed” for this reason (Questionnaire 1, winter semester).

Joe consistently claims that he identifies with American culture, which is perhaps not surprising given that he initially views survival as his goal for using German in Marburg. On the first questionnaire, Joe notes that he is not sure if he would recommend studying abroad so zealously as he had originally thought, but he still states that he will not regret having come to Marburg. Yet, much later, he makes plans to return. As will be shown in chapter five, Joe’s views of study abroad and language learning shift as the year unfolds.

4.2.6 Mark

Mark is a 20 year old chemistry major in his junior year at the small, private liberal arts college in the Northeast described in the previous chapter, and thus studies at the same college as Brad, Sarah and Joe. He arrived in Marburg in September 2009 and this was his first time ever traveling to Europe. He credits exchange student friends in high school for having motivated him to consider studying abroad, though he only started taking German in college. As for other languages, Mark has also taken classes in Spanish and French. He took Spanish for a short time in high school, and started taking French while in Marburg. As will be shown in chapter five, he became quite friendly with a number of female French exchange students early on in the year,
and this may have influenced his decision to take French courses. Mark makes the following comments regarding study abroad, saying that he does not like to stay put in one place, so traveling “suits him best” (Interview 1, winter semester). Here, we see that Mark, like Sarah, conceptualizes the year abroad as a time of travel rather than considering himself even a short-term participant in local communities. Mark notes further that he wanted to get away from his home and school for a year, and that he likes the social system in Germany. In fact, he notes on the first questionnaire that the education system in Germany seems superior, which is something he has in common with Joe. He writes further that he believes the social system in Germany to be superior and that he wishes he lived in a society like Germany’s.

Regarding identifying with American or German culture, he writes in the first questionnaire that he does not really identify with either. In the second questionnaire, he comments that he identifies somewhat with both. By the third questionnaire, however, he states that he identifies more with American culture. As will be shown in chapter five, Mark’s initial desire for change and to appear unconnected to one particular culture does not last. Instead, he begins to value his own system of beliefs and routines much more than before.

4.3 Language Proficiency Evaluations

A language proficiency evaluation (in the form of a cloze test) was administered three times during the year along with the questionnaire. The same language proficiency evaluations and questionnaires were administered each time. Information and scores for the language proficiency evaluation can be found in Tables 4-2 and 4-3.
According to the language proficiency evaluation, most of Katie’s linguistic gains occurred between the first and second evaluations (between October 2009 and April 2010). In the first evaluation she scored consistently with a low elementary level. By the second evaluation she improved her score to a high elementary level. The increase in test score of almost 25 points is notable. The third evaluation sees her improving only marginally, keeping her cloze test score around a high elementary to low intermediate range. Katie did not take the pre-semester language course, so it is unknown what level she would have attained on the Sprachenzentrum Einstufungstest (language center placement test).

Brad’s language proficiency evaluation scores show that, like Katie, his largest linguistic improvement occurred between the initial and second questionnaires, though he did make improvements on the final questionnaire as well (see Table 4-3). Such slight improvements may be attributed to the fact that by the final session the participants had seen that particular language proficiency evaluation three times already. They could have become somewhat familiar with it,

---

**Table 4-2: Language Proficiency Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cloze test levels (German)</th>
<th>Cloze test levels (English)</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grundstufe 1 – Grundstufe 2</td>
<td>Elementary 1 – Elementary 2</td>
<td>up to 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grundstufe 2 – Grundstufe 3</td>
<td>Elementary 2 – Elementary 3</td>
<td>up to 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grundstufe 3 – Mittelstufe 1</td>
<td>Elementary 3 – Intermediate 1</td>
<td>up to 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mittelstufe 2 – Mittelstufe 3</td>
<td>Intermediate 2 – Intermediate 3</td>
<td>up to 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberstufe</td>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>up to 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muttersprachliches Niveau</td>
<td>Native speaker level</td>
<td>over 120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-3: Language Proficiency Evaluation Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Katie</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>David</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Joe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Oct. 2009)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (April 2010)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (July 2010)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
though they were conducted months apart. Brad took part in the pre-semester language course and informed me that his scores placed him in the B2.1 level on the *Sprachenzentrum Einstufungstest*.

Sarah made very few linguistic improvements each time she took the language proficiency evaluation, therefore achieving no major advancements (see Table 4-3). All other participants scored a lot higher on the second language proficiency evaluation; Sarah, on the other hand showed only a very modest increase in her score. Her small improvements could be attributed to re-test effects across sessions. Or, her scores may accurately represent the fact that she spoke very little German while in Marburg. Sarah took part in the pre-semester language course, but never informed me of her scores. However, I know through other comments that she was in the same course as Brad at that time, which places her at the B2.1 level as well.

On David’s language proficiency evaluations, he consistently scored much higher than the other participants (see Table 4-3). The scores also demonstrate that David’s linguistic abilities improved considerably during his first six months in Germany. His score improved by over 30 points, which was also the greatest gain of all the participants at any given time. His third evaluation shows no gains, but also no losses. David simply maintained his advanced proficiency level. David is the only participant that reported his scores from the AP German test, probably because he was one of the few to take it. He notes that he achieved level five, informing me that he also scored “600-something” on the SAT subject test in German. David did not take part in the pre-semester language course.

In the three language proficiency evaluations, Joe’s main linguistic improvement happens between his first and second submission (see Table 4-3). This is similar to the other participants (with the exception of Sarah). In the *Sprachenzentrum Einstufungstest*, Joe writes he was placed first in B2, but upon realizing that his spoken German was not at that level, he personally
requested to move down one level into B1 because he could not keep up with the class when it came to speaking German.

The results of Mark’s language proficiency evaluations show that he consistently scored the lowest of the group (see Table 4-3). Some linguistic improvement did take place, especially between the first and second evaluations. However, Mark continued to score quite low compared to others. Mark writes that the only language test he has taken is the *Sprachenzentrum Einstufungstest*, and his placement as a result of that was level B1.

These two sets of data, the language history questionnaires and language proficiency evaluations, provide a basic understanding of the participants’ backgrounds, beliefs and goals for the year abroad, and their L2 German proficiency and how these change over the year. As stated earlier, these data do not tell the entire story. Katie emphasized becoming fluent in German, and yet as will be highlighted in chapter five, she shifted these goals almost immediately. On paper, her language proficiency scores were at best at a high elementary level, demonstrating that perhaps her goals of becoming fluent were indeed not being met. However, as will become clear in chapter five, there are other ways in which Katie showed dramatic changes during the year abroad as a result of her local community participation. Brad’s language goals were far less explicit than Katie’s, as he focused more on looking for change and new experiences. He was not a German major, and this may have been a reason for it. Still, in comparison to Katie, Brad not only scored higher on the language proficiency evaluation, but he was also more comfortable speaking German than Katie. The linguistic opportunities he sought in-sojourn, then, were perhaps different from Katie. David’s initial data showed that he was an extremely motivated German major who prized German language and culture above his own. His very high language proficiency evaluation scores and the gains he made provide an example of his major investment in the language. For language educators, it appears that David is an exemplary case; a study abroad success story. And yet, as we will see in chapter five, his great desire, clear goals and high
proficiency levels could not keep him from experiencing major homesickness and depression during his first few months in Marburg. Clearly, where and how he eventually participated locally is of great importance. Joe, for his part, never wavered from his goal of maintaining his perfect grade point average. Learning and using German was never going to come first for him. Whereas others, like Katie, shifted their original goals, Joe maintained and reached the academic goal he set out for himself. His proficiency gains were small, but noticeable, particularly between the first two evaluations. However, Joe made his year abroad truly about studying abroad, emphasizing little else. This is something that no other participant did.

Other participants, like Sarah and Mark, emphasized the year abroad as one of great travel opportunities. They focused on new experiences through trips away and initially did not discuss goals with regards to participation in local communities, other than the commonly mentioned desire to meet Germans. Though Mark’s proficiency scores remained much lower than the rest of the group, he did show major gains after the first language proficiency evaluation. This demonstrates that he must have been using German somewhat. But how and with whom was he communicating? Sarah, on the other hand, saw virtually no linguistic gains during her year abroad. For someone who initially emphasized the feeling of satisfaction she had as an American who took time to learn another language, this is especially interesting.

4.4 Group Conversation Data

Another data collection procedure consisted of group conversation sessions with my participants and a few regular students at the Universität Marburg. Group conversation sessions were held twice a semester in my kitchen and aimed to look at who speaks or participates and how much in this particular setting. Turn counts and turn lengths give us this information in a very basic way. The participants were divided into two groups. In each group, there were three
participants, one or two Universität Marburg students, and me. For each group conversation session, the two groups were mixed differently. In the beginning, the students did not know the Universität Marburg students very well, if at all. As for the participants, some knew each other fairly well, while some had only known each other for a couple of months and were not particularly close. Katie and David knew me better than the others prior to the first group conversation, given that I saw them on a nearly daily basis at that time. Most of the others were, at that point in October, people I seldom saw outside of the study.

In the first semester, each group session consisted of two Universität Marburg students, three participants, and me. By the second semester this arrangement appeared to cause a split in the conversation. I noticed that the Universität Marburg students would often converse more amongst themselves in an effort to keep the conversation going. My participants would either become quieter or talk amongst themselves in English. By the third group conversation, I changed the set-up to one Universität Marburg student, three participants and me. This worked well in that it seemed to encourage one conversation instead of two or three smaller ones. It is important to consider, though, that by this point, the participants were also extremely comfortable with the group conversation situation. They all knew me much better and were accustomed to spending afternoons recording in my kitchen. They knew the Universität Marburg students better as well and probably felt more comfortable speaking with them. They had also been in Germany for about nine or ten months, and were likely more at ease speaking German in general. In fact, I believe it was a combination of the two – having just one Universität Marburg and feeling comfortable in the group conversation context – that led to more conversation in this second semester.

Still, in the beginning of the year abroad, the group conversations created an immediate community for my participants, though its significance likely differed for the individual participants involved. I did not necessarily expect it to become a key community for my
participants, but I was interested in how they would communicate in this group conversation community and what would develop from these interactions throughout the year. In the early part of the year, they were simply fulfilling the requirement of my study that said they had to take part in all interviews and group conversations to receive the full honorarium. By the second semester, while this was surely still a large incentive, personal relationships had developed between my participants outside of my study, and this also changed the kinds of interactions they had. For some, these interactions became more meaningful. For example, Katie was very close with one of the Universität Marburg students involved in these group conversations, Stefan. For Mark, on the other hand, participation in these group conversations remained a requirement for taking part in my study and thus the conversations may not have been as meaningful for him.

In the current study, I investigate the fourth and final group conversation sessions to find out how my participants were taking part in these conversations at the end of the year. By June, when the final group conversation was recorded, the participants were comfortable, relaxed, and less nervous about being recorded in German and by me in general. My kitchen was a welcome place for them. This is why, in analyzing a group conversation, I chose this particular point in time to investigate their overall number of turns, their turn lengths and whether these turns were in German or English. I analyzed the data in this way in order to get a very basic understanding of how and how much the participants were taking part in the group conversation community. In this particular study, I am not considering changes in turn counts or length of turns in this particular community over time; rather, I am interested in how they communicated in this setting at a time when they felt most comfortable. This is helpful for my research questions regarding community participation as it highlights how my participants communicate with the other members of this particular community. Counting turns and turn lengths can reveal basic information about how my study participants participate in this group that they have come to know over the course of the year abroad. This can also be a way of pointing to identity-significant discursive strategies used
by participants in this particular community (Peterson, 2010). However, these findings do not provide information about how they communicated in any other communities of practice. Still, it is a useful way to gather basic information about their participation and engagement in this particular setting, as well as their particular communicative strategies.

Group conversation session 4a from June, 2010, consisted of Cho, a Taiwanese-born full-time Universität Marburg student who had lived and studied in Marburg for nine years by the time that this study began. Cho had also spent one year of her studies as an exchange student in the northeastern United States. None of my participants got to know Cho outside of this particular study setting. Participants Brad, Mark, and Sarah and I were in this group conversation 4a. Group conversation session 4b consisted of Stefan, a Universität Marburg student who was born and raised in Marburg, and who had been an orientation leader for international students that semester. As such, at this point in the year, most of the participants knew Stefan fairly well from more informal contexts. Stefan had also studied abroad in Portugal and the Netherlands. Group conversation 4b included David, Katie, Joe and me.

The participants were informed that they should try to speak in German as much as possible, though speaking English was permitted. In both group conversations 4a and 4b, the Universität Marburg student and I attempted to encourage the conversation to continue in German when there was a lull by introducing new topics of discussion or asking questions about things that we knew were pertinent to them at the current moment. The overall turn counts and the length of these turns are presented below in Figures 4-1 through 4-4.

In the group conversation 4a, Cho engaged the participants by asking a lot of questions in German about their time in Germany as well as their plans once they went back home. In this group, both Cho and I took the most turns. However, one of the participants, Brad, took almost as many turns as the two of us and, in fact, he had the 20 turns that were 21 words and more – this was by far the highest of any participant. Both Sarah and Mark had significantly fewer and
shorter turns than Brad. Brad also took the most English turns. By contrast, Sarah took six English turns in total and Mark took zero English turns. However, since Brad’s overall turn count was much higher than Sarah’s, by comparison, he spoke less English in the recording than she did. Mark took 60 turns and none of them were in English. Cho and I took almost no English turns.

Figure 4-1: Number of turns in group conversation 4a.

Figure 4-2: Number of turns in group conversation 4b.
In the group conversation 4b, Stefan began by prompting the participants with a few questions in German. As the session came to a close, they were all laughing about various jokes in German and at times in English. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, Stefan was an especially important friend for Katie, and their friendship involved a lot of English speaking. With both Katie and Stefan in this group, a fair amount of joking and laughter took place throughout the recording, and some of it was in English. The others also took part in this conviviality. As seen in Figure 4-2, Stefan and I had the highest number of turns overall; of the participants, Katie had the highest number of turns. Her closeness to both Stefan and me likely
accounts for her high turn count. Though Katie had the highest number of turns of any study participant in this conversation, it was actually David who had the highest number of German turns, and the lengths of his turns were also longer than Katie’s. Stefan and I took many more German turns overall in our attempts to keep the conversation going in German. It is noticeable that group conversation 4b consisted of many more English turns than the first group. As noted, this may be because Stefan and Katie often spoke English together outside of the study, leading to a higher degree of code mixing during group conversation 4b. I also had a higher English turn count than many of the participants, and this may have also been due to my close relationship with Katie.

Joe was the least talkative in conversation 4b. Through observations in more informal settings I noted that he was quieter in groups in general. In fact, our one-on-one interviews were usually under an hour since his responses were fairly brief; in fact his final interview lasted only 35 minutes, whereas the final interview lasted closer to an hour with the others. While his language proficiency evaluation score was in the same range as Katie’s by the end of the year, his introversion and desire for complete accuracy when speaking led him to initiate conversation only rarely and, when spoken to, respond with short phrases that were more direct and to the point. Joe’s introversion and desire for accuracy will be highlighted more in-depth in the following chapter. In group conversation session 4b, Stefan prompted Joe a few times early on, helping him to join the conversation somewhat. In the middle of the conversation, Joe was somewhat quiet, though he joined in on his own accord a few more times towards the end.

Having looked at each group conversation and the turn counts of each individual participant, it would be useful to look across the two groups. Overall, Brad was quite clearly the most active participant, as he had more turns overall than any participant in either conversation. Overall, turn counts show that Brad and Katie were the participants who spoke the most, though a closer look at turn lengths revealed more about the quality of their turns. Brad took many turns
consisting of ten words or more. To clarify, Katie, Sarah, Joe, and Mark all took fewer than ten turns of ten or more words. David took 14 such turns. Brad, by contrast, took 73. This is a vast difference in turn length, though it is not solely about language proficiency. I had already noted in my observations that Brad was the most active participant in the conversation. In previous group conversation sessions (group members were not always the same), he was always very relaxed, talkative, and comfortable speaking to anyone in the group and discussing a wide variety of topics; he would make a lot of jokes and even seemed to perform for the other group members, and the recording. Nonetheless, Brad’s language proficiency evaluation scores were consistently much lower than David’s and yet David was not as talkative as Brad across these group conversation sessions. However, Brad is an extremely talkative, informal, and easygoing person who uses a lot of slang and humorous ways of communicating. David, a more formal speaker, does not communicate in this way. This helps explain why Brad spoke more than David in this kind of setting, and may also indicate why Brad did not score as high on language proficiency evaluations as David. These evaluations do not tend to test youth language, or more informal, colloquial ways of communicating, and thus one could say they contain a formal, conservative bias. With this in mind, it is no surprise that Brad and his informal communication could not attain the highest scores on the language proficiency evaluation.

David, for his part, still took more turns than others in his group, such as Joe and Sarah, though one might suppose that his advanced proficiency was a reason for this. However, he took approximately as many long turns as Mark, who consistently had the lowest proficiency evaluation scores. Perhaps David was using particular discursive strategies in order to maintain emotional security in this group setting. Here is where it becomes clear that counting turns and turn lengths cannot tell us why or to what end discursive strategies are being used. It cannot inform us of the kind of person the participant is, and how this may further our understanding of why one takes a certain number of turns. In order to understand David and Brad’s turns and turn
lengths in this group conversation, one must also consider their identities and histories, pertinent experiences and emotional lives. I have noted that David acted more formally than the average male student in his age bracket, and this came across in the way that he interacted with others. He planned on going into the ministry and carried himself in a way that was far more mature than his age and student status suggested. David also positioned himself as a very proficient learner of German compared to some of his American counterparts, although he was extraordinarily hard on himself when speaking of his own perceived shortcomings. For example, he was very self-conscious about his pronunciation in German, wishing he sounded less American. In this group, however, he had the most advanced knowledge of German according to the language proficiency evaluation scores.

David sometimes talked about having an advantage over others because of his close community of German friends with whom he regularly spoke German; noting that this was something that the others did not have access to. He even noted at one time that in the group conversations, he preferred to give the others a chance to speak with native speakers in German. In this way, he positioned himself as the expert of the group, or the one who was not in need of the extra German interactions happening in the group conversations. David positioned himself as allowing others to speak more German than they normally would. Still, David did take frequent turns in the conversation – certainly he must have seen it his duty to communicate in this context, since he was taking part in the study. And yet he also appeared to be less comfortable than Brad in a group of this kind, even though he was far from quiet in one-on-one contexts. While David was friendly with many in the group, he was not necessarily included in all of the social activities in which the group members took part. For example, he did not drink or enjoy going to loud parties. Perhaps it was not just about giving other Americans a chance to speak German in a group setting; his social anxieties may have also been a reason for his shorter turns in the group conversation setting. Brad, on the other hand, is a very social person – loud, crass, a joker, and as
mentioned, very informal; he constantly tried to make people laugh and spoke informally in both English and German. Knowing this, Brad’s chatty demeanor in the group conversation also came as no surprise.

Though Mark had the most linguistic challenges to overcome, he seemed to make a concerted effort to take longer German turns during the conversation. Many others relied on taking English turns, and it should be noted here that Mark took none. Looking at Katie’s turns, she spoke quite a lot, similar to Brad. However, upon closer observation, the vast majority of her turns contained just one to four words. Her turns were also often in response to something that Stefan or I said, so the specific group conversation setting and the relationships of its members is important to consider.

Overall, these findings provide an idea of how the participants communicate in this specific group conversation context. And while we cannot say for certain that their interactions during these group conversations mirror how they interact in any other community during their time in Marburg, data from the group conversations can help to situate each participant’s different ways of interacting in their larger study abroad experiences. In doing so, these data provide insights into factors that may be relevant for the larger issues of community participation and identity development during their time abroad.

4.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I introduced the six participants in this study, and presented their questionnaires and group conversation data. These data inform us of the participants’ histories, goals, desires and beliefs regarding learning German and language learning in general, as well as study abroad. The data also give us an idea of their various proficiency levels and how they communicate in the group conversation community that I organized. The participants state
various beliefs, goals and desires throughout their year abroad. Their language proficiency
evaluations scores give us a basic understanding of how they progress in terms of linguistic gains
over the course of the year. The group conversation data highlight what the participants actually
do in this particular community that I set up for them. How the students communicate in these
conversations can inform us of whether their original goals and desires when in a communicative
setting remain the same or show signs of shifting. Investigating the ways in which these students
participate in this community may also provide some insight into how they orient to other aspects
of the year abroad, such as academic, social or travel pursuits. Their use of German in these group
conversations may also inform us about their orientations to speaking and using German in a
group setting, though the German data may or may not reflect their language proficiency
evaluation scores. Finally, it is clear that these group conversation data do not provide insider
perspectives about the individual participants’ community participation, levels of engagement and
identity negotiation and transformation, which is something that will be discussed further in the
following chapter.

The data presented in this chapter gives us a preliminary sense of who these people are,
and what they want to accomplish in their year abroad. We also get an idea of their general
German proficiency levels and how they use German when participating in a group conversation
community created by me. In what follows, I will introduce and discuss the oral reflection and
interview data of each participant in order to talk about the local communities in which they took
took part and their levels of engagement in them. I will also highlight where, in the oral reflection
and interview data, participants make references to their own agency in and access to
participation and engagement in their communities. I will also highlight any instances of self and
other positioning through their participation and engagement in their communities. I will show
how the participants negotiate critical cultural encounters or rich points and underline whether or
not they reflect on the dynamic identity processes at work. Reflection and awareness of their own
and others’ salient identity issues may lead to shifts in beliefs, goals and desires, and as such, participants may begin to construct new identities and ways of being.
Chapter 5

Oral Reflection and Interview Data

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate the participants’ study abroad experiences further through their oral reflection and interview data. I look at the communities that were important to each participant, as well as their levels of engagement in those communities. I explore whether the quantity and quality of participants’ engagement in these communities informs how they negotiate personal, cultural, social and linguistic differences while studying abroad. I also draw attention to participants’ own perspectives regarding their beliefs and goals in order to highlight instances of identity negotiation via instances of self- and other positioning, as well as references to individual agency and access. I look in particular at shifts in goals, beliefs and actions based on moments of identity destabilization in oral reflections and interviews. While the participants’ experiences share similar qualities and issues, as will be shown, many aspects and qualities of their experiences and contexts are also unique.

5.2 In Katie’s Words

Katie states quite emphatically in her first questionnaire, as well as in her first interview, that her goal for going to Germany is to improve her German skills. However, my observations and her later interviews and reflections demonstrate that she is a person who is insecure about applying these language skills. Such insecurities have a major impact on the primary community of American or English-speaking friends with whom she interacts, as well as her relationships with individual members within this community. This is not to say that her insecurities had an
overall positive or negative impact on her year abroad, but they played an important part in her study abroad experience as she negotiated her linguistic insecurities while trying to make the most of her time in Germany.

5.2.1 German vs. English

The story of Katie’s year abroad began as she spent her first month settling into Marburg, Germany, and her first time ever on foreign soil. She and I bonded quickly in those first days. I met Katie on her first ever day in Germany and noticed then that she was fairly exhausted and overwhelmed. My observations show that she remained overwhelmed for a few weeks as she adjusted to life in Germany, and the immediate need to speak German. Katie seemed happy to have me to speak with; I was someone who understood what it meant to live abroad. With me, she could also communicate primarily in English. As the principal investigator of this study, and as someone who had a lot of study abroad experience, I initially felt the need to help her adjust. She seemed to need direct pragmatic guidance with day to day particulars, so I helped her navigate Marburg and German in the first few weeks. We spent a lot of time together in the first few weeks and throughout the year as well. In fact, in her first interview, I asked her who her closest friends are and she answered “most of my time is spent with you” (Interview 1, winter semester). Our friendship began as a near-peer relationship. The term near-peer refers to the process that describes an older, more able peer helping a younger peer who is at a similar social, professional or age level, and whom the younger peer may respect or admire. Within the larger study-abroad-in-Germany setting, I was an old-timer and she was a newcomer, even though we were both new to the city of Marburg and outside of one another, knew very few people at first (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Still, I served as a guide for her in the various routines and practices that met her immediate needs: grocery shopping, buying a cell phone, dealing with certain
bureaucratic issues. I was Katie’s first important contact, and over the months to come, it turned into a meaningful friendship.

Early on, I noticed that Katie seemed to struggle with her goals of improving her German. On the one hand, she noted that she wanted to “embrace the culture” and be seen by Germans as someone who fit right in (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). Katie spoke about how she loved when she could “speak like I’m a real German (…) that makes me pretty proud” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). On the other hand, she would talk about avoiding the need to speak German, complaining that she did not feel like herself while speaking German, stating that she felt forced to find a “round about” way of saying things (Oral reflection 11, winter semester). This was a rich point for Katie, as she reflected upon her realization that expressing herself in German in a way that aligned with her own views of herself might not be possible in this new place. Katie realized she would have to learn a new way of expressing herself that was appropriate for German contexts, and the various communities in which she was taking part. This need to change how she expressed herself led to insecurity not only about her German language speaking but also about who she was perceived to be in a German context.

Based on my observations, it seemed that Katie preferred to avoid any and all conflicts or difficult situations instead of trudging through a few awkward and incorrectly formed German phrases in order to get her point across. In the first week, at an international orientation lecture, Katie left and realized only ten minutes later that she had forgotten her sweater in the lecture hall. I went with her to retrieve it, only to find that the hall had been locked. I suggested that we walk to the maintenance office in a neighboring building and ask them to open the hall. Completely overwhelmed at the idea of speaking with German maintenance workers, Katie tried to convince me that she did not really need to retrieve the sweater after all – she would just live without it. Katie was so nervous to speak German that she would have preferred to avoid communicating with the workers than retrieve an important article of her clothing. In this and many other
instances, Katie saw speaking German as leading to severe emotional insecurity and that Germans would treat her differently or make judgments about her linguistic abilities (Oral reflection, 5, winter semester). Re-telling the experiences she had buying a cell phone, Katie noted: “thankfully I had friends who knew what the word was+ that I had to use but I went in+ and I was really nervous about going in because I hate going and talking to people who don’t know+ that I’m+ um+ a foreign+ person?” (Oral reflection 5, winter semester). Katie was obviously anxious about making linguistic and/or cultural mistakes that would lead to being ridiculed or judged.

Katie thus avoided having a voice in German, which may have been due to her weaker German proficiency levels as well as her confidence level in speaking German. Familiar ways of communicating were no longer simply at arm’s reach, nor were they perhaps useful in this new context. Katie, however, also saw Germans as the interlocutors who would pass the harshest judgment on her. She felt they could not see her true self, and would generalize her as a stereotype instead. Katie thus blamed Germans as one reason for why she could not practice her German as much as she had anticipated. Katie believed that whenever a German interlocutor would switch into English, it meant that they thought her German was inadequate. She expressed frustration during one particular service encounter in Marburg:

maybe my German’s not the best+ but I wanna practice it+ sooo I need to get better+
and++ I was at a bar the other day+ and+ the I ordered in German+ but then the+ waiter or the bartender+ umm+ answered me in English+ so I like I get sooo angry (Oral reflection 4, winter semester)

Katie’s experiences show that she assumed that those who switched into English judged her German ability as being too low. Katie thus began to avoid communicating with people in German whom she thought would make judgments based on her proficiency level. As she could not control what people thought about her, she chose to avoid this perceived judgment by silencing herself. This struggle was connected to the fact that Katie was constantly worried that
she would look like a “dumb American” who was singled out and positioned as different from everyone else (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). Connected to her fear of being spoken to in English, Katie stressed over every encounter with a German that she had to have by herself, saying, “I really have a phobia of looking like an American+ and people knowing that I’m foreign and treating me differently I really just want to be here and+ be part of the culture and+ totally embrace it” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). As such, Katie’s struggle was not just about having a lower proficiency level and lacking the confidence to speak, but also about how she felt was viewed by others.

In the first week, Katie enthusiastically stated that her goals for her year abroad in Germany were primarily about having the opportunity to improve her spoken German. And yet as noted, after one week, Katie discovered that simply being in Germany would not be enough to improve her German. She realized that improving her spoken German required much more than just the mechanical process of opening up her mouth and talking; it required a re-evaluation of who she was as a second language speaker and a re-orientation to the second language in order to find a new way of communicating and being. Katie would have to do a lot more than just be proficient on paper; she would have use the language and interact with others in the local context. This posed a threat to her emotional security. She felt as though she could not find familiar ways of communicating and was thus out of her comfort zone. Katie quickly realized that she would have to re-orient to a new context. Negotiating and dealing with such newness and difference is crucial to development and the way in which a person navigates certain conflicts and differences can inform us of how they orient to the language and the learning of that language.
5.2.2 Friends and language

After one month abroad, Katie started to become very close to a German native speaker and Universität Marburg student, Stefan. This relationship will be discussed in greater detail in section 5.2.4. Stefan and Katie initially spoke a combination of German and English. As the year went on, however, they spoke a lot more English. In fact, the closer that Katie and Stefan became, the more English they spoke. This may be connected to the fact that by the second semester, Katie and some other American and English-speaking exchange students eventually became a tight-knit group, and Stefan became an important member of this group as well. This group also included a couple of international students who were not English native speakers, but who all spoke English well. In fact, it seemed that speaking English well was obligatory in order to participate fully in this group. Since the majority of people in this group were on exchange programs from the United States, I term this the English-speaking community.

By the end of the year, Katie was a central member of the English-speaking community. She organized most of their get-togethers, including a large-scale scavenger hunt that involved all members. It is not surprising that Katie’s most meaningful friendships were through English, considering her fears about speaking German and her general tendency to avoid having to do so. Additionally, Katie shared cultural values with many in the English-speaking community and did not have to negotiate new cultural differences in the way that she otherwise would have. Within this group, she could also hear about other Americans’ challenging cultural encounters, and not feel as isolated. It was a safe space to hear about others’ struggles and experiences. Katie was able to maintain her emotional security in this English-speaking community, and ways of being that she was more accustomed to were encouraged. In this manner, she could build deeper connections immediately with those just like her.
However, the English-speaking community did not come together right at the start of the year abroad. In the first semester, as regards formal language learning, Katie did not take any German as a second language courses. She noted that she regretted this decision one month later, and decided to take two in the summer semester. Katie also stated, however, that she spoke more German than English in her everyday life because of her early friendships with Stefan and international students after orientation week. Her ERASMUS\(^3\) group was comprised of a broad network of European exchange students. When the ERASMUS students would communicate, it varied as to whether the conversation is in English, German, or another European language. Katie initially got to know some ERASMUS students from Greece, Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Italy and other countries. She spoke mostly German and some English with those students. In fact, one of these students was her Belgian flatmate (Vivienne), who was more comfortable speaking German than English. Katie spoke German with her ERASMUS friends throughout the first semester, and mostly German with Vivienne until Vivienne moved back to Belgium in February. Katie was less worried about how she was perceived when speaking with other international students, as she felt comforted by the fact that everyone was learning German. Still, her relationship with Vivienne in the first semester caused Katie to notice that she had difficulty emoting in German as she would in English, and this frustrated her:

> there have been certain situations where I’ve been with someone and they’ve been sad and they don’t know like+ and I don’t I don’t know what to say to them because I’m not familiar with the language enough to be able to say oh it’s okay like don’t worry about it or+ offer advice because I don’t know what to say (Oral reflection 6, winter semester)

Through her relationship with Vivienne, Katie felt that her ability to portray emotions was threatened when speaking German, regardless of whom she was speaking with. For her, being

---

\(^3\) ERASMUS stands for European Regional Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
unable to emote in a way that was familiar to her prevented her from becoming close to a person, or feeling a particular bond of friendship. Instead of thinking about how one might adjust to emoting in a different way, which may have been viewed as a risk to her identity, she would just shut down, not knowing what to say or do. Perhaps this was an issue of German language proficiency. She noted that she felt the following when with Vivienne: “sometimes I feel like I come across+ as cold or maybe like+ a little bit insensitive because I don’t respond” (Oral reflection 6, winter semester). This quotation shows Katie’s own worries about being perceived as an unemotional person, when in fact she believed herself to be a very caring individual who could always offer kind words of support.

Katie reflected upon her through-English versus her through-German relationships, stating that “I feel like the people that I’ve become more close with are the people I can speak+ English with because you can actually portray what you’re really feeling” (Oral reflection 11, winter semester). Here, she positions her through-English relationships as having more depth and being more meaningful to her. What is notable is that the depth of her friendships in Marburg seemed to be connected primarily to the language spoken. Mid-year, Katie vocalized the re-prioritization of her goals, saying “I don’t think I realized how ridiculously hard this was gonna be” (Interview 2, winter semester). She talked less about finding ways to embrace the culture and speak a lot of German, and began to put much more emphasis on her social life with the English-speaking community. Katie recognized that she was doing a lot of English-speaking and defended it, agreeing that she spoke more German in the first semester than in the second semester (Questionnaire 4, summer semester).

Katie really began to distance herself from her initial goal of speaking German and improving her language skills in the middle of the first semester abroad. Mid-year, it seemed that Katie no longer cared that she did not meet a lot of native German speakers. She commented that any moment of awkwardness in German made her uncomfortable, stating “I pick up on
awkwardness in greetings or general moments and it freaks me out” (Interview 2, winter semester). Speaking German made her feel awkward and this awkwardness may have led to emotional insecurity and identity risks. In my observations, I noted that Katie seemed happy to have German friends at all, and did not really make any more efforts to branch out. This contentment with current friendships and communities as well as her desire to avoid awkward situations were ways that Katie both legitimated and extended this version of herself – a version that viewed the process of becoming fluent in German as much harder than originally conceived. This version of herself understood that taking on the challenge of becoming fluent was impossible. At one point late in the first semester, Katie commented that when hanging out with her American friends, she had moments where she even forgot that she was abroad: “we're only speaking English and then I go outside and all I hear around me is German and I just have this oh wait I’m in Germany I totally forgot” (Oral reflection 11, winter semester). She defended her English-speaking and compared it to what other foreign students were doing: “I don't feel like we're the ones that are sticking out or being lazy or being rude by speaking English” (Oral reflection 16, winter semester). These comments highlight the aforementioned shift from her initial goals to embrace the culture and leave her Americanness behind. Katie also began to reposition her view on Americans who speak English while in a foreign country, since she now had to defend her own English-speaking and explain how she was different from what she called the rude Americans who speak English. Katie viewed her actions as different from theirs. Her comments also show that as she struggled to understand who she had to be and how she had to act in order to have a voice in German, she eventually abandoning any active attempt at finding such a voice. Through generally avoiding having to use the German language, Katie may have missed out on the potential to experience rich points that may have led to greater linguistic and/or cultural development. Her reliance on familiar ways of being meant that she could maintain her emotional security and avoid major linguistic and cultural struggles.
5.2.3 Lisa and Katie

In her first month abroad, Katie was excited to sign up for a tandem language exchange for German practice, as she thought this would help her to meet some more Germans and improve her spoken German. This is a program set up by the *Sprachenzentrum* (language center) at the university. It is meant to encourage international students and Marburg students to meet and practice German, as well as the language of the other partner. Through this program she came to know another *Universität Marburg* student named Lisa. Lisa and Katie met regularly for a lunchtime meal in the university cafeteria or at Lisa’s apartment. With Lisa, Katie spoke primarily in German, though for the purposes of the partnership, they switched into English from time to time. Katie noted that they ended up speaking mostly German. This is what she had wanted, and yet she felt that this relationship did not have the depth that her other friendships have. Katie stated, “we have a very surface level relationship” and commented that the relationship had not progressed into a friendship of a deeper level (Interviews 2 & 3, winter semester). At one point, Katie noted that Lisa’s religious beliefs prevented her from wanting to become closer as well (Interview 2, winter semester). This may have been true, but it should be noted that the nature of their relationship was different than that of many others she met; it was set up as a tandem partnership for language exchange reasons only.

Katie often positioned herself as the one who had the superior foreign language skills in this partnership, which was different from other situations where she would point out her linguistic insecurities and fears. However, she felt her German was stronger than Lisa’s English, and this apparently contributed to her comfort in speaking German with Lisa. Perhaps the context of mutual language practice, as well as the fact that she was not particularly close with Lisa allowed her to feel more at ease when speaking German too. In the spring semester, Lisa invited Katie to her birthday party, and among the guests were many Germans, friends of Lisa who Katie
had never met. Initially Katie was quite nervous, since she did not feel too close to Lisa to begin with. She especially feared having to converse in German with many native speakers whom she had never met, and even made plans to leave early if she felt uncomfortable. Afterwards, Katie reflected on how well the event went, saying: “I was kind of happy because [Lisa] didn’t feel like she had to babysit me and that she didn’t feel like she had to constantly talk to me (…) I kind of got by on my [own]” (Oral reflection 11, summer semester). Here was a situation where Katie’s comfort zone and emotional security were challenged, and instead of avoiding a potentially awkward situation, she decided to speak with Germans in German, regardless of nerves about her language skills or how she would be viewed. Katie discovered that conversing with German native speakers was indeed not as scary as she had originally thought. After many quality interactions that night, she ended up enjoying herself at the party. Katie realized that maybe not all Germans positioned her negatively, saying “I went to her birthday party and I ended up speaking German the entire time to her friends, and many people told me that my accent was good, not hardcore American” (Interview 4, summer semester). Interestingly, this did not become a jumping off point for a deeper relationship with Lisa, or with anyone she met there. And yet, the party served to bolster Katie’s confidence as it led her to feel more able to handle new situations in a foreign language, and communicate with other Germans. Still, as neither Lisa nor Katie searched out a closer friendship here, their tandem partnership remained just what it was intended to be – useful language practice.

Early on, Katie stated that she wanted to speak a lot of German and meet Germans. Lisa and Katie spent a fair bit of time practicing German (and English for Lisa), and as mentioned, Katie felt comfortable speaking German with her. With Lisa, she was less worried about looking like a dumb American, and this allowed for longer conversations. Katie noted the differences between speaking German with Stefan, her closest German friend while in Marburg, as compared to Lisa:
I have a really hard time speaking German with Stefan maybe because I used to be like he makes me nervous, girly crush thing and also his English is really good so when I speak German to him I automatically feel inferior…with Lisa I feel like my German is superior to her English, we couldn’t have an English conversation before though she’s improved a lot lately…also her job was to help me with German, Stefan is my friend and I don’t want to feel critiqued by my friends either. (Interview 4, summer semester)

Here, Katie characterized her relationship with Lisa as primarily aimed at improving language skills, indicating outright that Lisa is not a close friend, therefore confirming that theirs was not a close friendship.

With Stefan, Katie was nervous for reasons other than whether her German was accurate or not. As will be described in greater detail in the next section, more was at stake for her with Stefan. Her early romantic interest in him made it clear that her wishes for their relationship were not about language practice. Katie’s fears about speaking German with him were much more complicated at first, and they implicated her emotional security in a major way. Being hurt or criticized by Stefan would have caused her much more emotional injury than being criticized by Lisa. Katie was especially vulnerable to what Stefan said and did early on. She also wanted to have control in the way that she could express herself to him, since she wanted him to view her favorably. Stumbling awkwardly through a foreign language was likely not what she considered her best side. Later in the year, as the romantic interest dissipated into friendship, Katie’s reactions to Stefan’s view of her and her German became much less sensitive. Overall, both Katie’s orientations to Lisa, Stefan, and her friendships with both of them, alongside their orientations to her influenced the way in which Katie communicated with interlocutors in Marburg, including what communities she decided to invest in, and perhaps equally important, which communities she chose not to invest in.
5.2.4 Stefan and Katie

Stefan and Katie's relationship was significant in that Stefan was both Katie’s closest German friend and her closest friend overall. Stefan and Katie met during her first week in Germany at international orientation; he was her group leader. She got to know him as someone who could provide transitional help with opening a bank account, obtaining German health insurance, navigating the German university system, and so on. Stefan made a great effort to keep in contact with Katie once the orientation week was over, and by the end of the year, Stefan and Katie were fast friends. As noted, Katie had a crush on Stefan very early on in the year. She informed me about her crush right away. Katie did not act on this romantic interest at first, instead she enjoyed the fact that the two of them got along quite well and that Stefan invited her to go out often. In the first month of the sojourn, there were many international student parties and group events, and Stefan and Katie hung out together at all of them. People began to ask her about Stefan, but she was hesitant to admit her feelings publicly, since the international student community in Marburg was very tight-knit. In late October, it came to her attention that Stefan might be gay. Katie had not considered this, and she was devastated to think that this could be true. She did not address it directly, however. Stefan and Katie continued to grow even closer, and we both came to know him very well throughout the winter semester. In late April, Katie decided to make a bold move. As he drove her home from a party one night, she told him, in English, about her feelings for him. He was very gracious to her and explained, also in English, that he did not feel the same way. Stefan went to great lengths to make sure she would not feel bad. He validated her feelings. They agreed that their friendship was more important, and while Katie felt disappointed, she seemed content with how he handled it.

About ten days later, Stefan and Katie’s friendship was tested and strengthened yet again when he told her that he was gay. In fact, he also told her that she was the first one he had ever
come out to. Katie told me months later that Stefan told her most of this in English, which she both appreciated and was in awe of. This is interesting, since she often talked about being very unhappy when Germans switched into English for her. However, in this case, she positioned Stefan and his language choice as a sign of his sensitivity to the fact that this would be difficult for Katie to hear. She viewed it as Stefan wanting to make her feel comfortable. She was amazed by this and that he could even emote in a foreign language this way, as Katie always lamented that she could never express herself emotionally in German. At first, Katie felt upset that Stefan did not tell her that he was gay when she had informed him of her crush one month earlier. However, she reflected later that it was not a moment about her and her feelings, saying:

at first it was really difficult, when someone comes out to you, you have no choice but to be supportive…I saw it as I can’t be selfish about my feelings, he is going through something way more difficult than I will ever understand, something more important than my feelings so I had to be supportive. (Interview 4, summer semester)

Katie made great efforts from that point on to make Stefan feel accepted for who he is. She dealt with her own disappointment privately. Katie summarized her experiences with Stefan in our last interview:

it started out with Stefan as my tutor and he has turned into Stefan my gay best friend which is hilarious and ridiculous but he just turned out as the German friend who I was in love with, ok had a crush on (...) I was really into him then I told him about it, we were friends so I told him drunkenly I had feelings for him and then a week later he came out to me and ever since then I’ve been trying to hook him up with guys. (Interview 4, summer semester)

Realizing that their friendship was as strong as it would ever be, Katie soon decided to tell Stefan something that she had never discussed with any friend, except for me. She told him
that her own father is gay. Katie’s father had informed the family about six years earlier, and was now married to another man. Katie says: “we talked about that, and that night I told him about my dad being gay so he knew someone understood, for him that was a big deal” (Interview 4, summer semester). Katie’s father’s homosexuality and her parents’ divorce was a very tough topic for her to discuss in any capacity. Stefan, too, had internalized his thoughts and feelings related to his own homosexuality for a long time. Back home, Katie never addressed her father’s homosexuality with family or friends, and Stefan had also never readily discussed his feelings with his family or friends. In this way, Katie and Stefan were able to support and legitimate each other’s feelings and ways of dealing with such difficult personal issues. They ultimately grew closer. Their friendship was to some extent based on support and understanding of multiple contexts and stories – accommodating language learning issues, Katie’s feelings for Stefan, feelings about her Dad being gay, as well as Stefan’s own struggle to come to terms with his homosexuality. Both made great efforts to consider the other person’s feelings about their insecurities and worries in their daily lives. Katie did not refer to this deep understanding between her and Stefan in her oral reflections explicitly, though we discussed them at length in the final interview.

Katie’s father and his husband visited her in June. Katie was confronted with the fact that she might have to tell many friends about her father’s relationship to prepare them for their visit. Katie wanted everyone to meet her father and stepfather, but found addressing her father’s relationship difficult. She constantly dreaded that talking about it would lead to endless questions about his sexual orientation, family history and how it made her feel. Her family and friends back home just knew and never dared to address it. In Marburg, too, she was very nervous about everyone’s reactions. Katie says: “I know everyone’s cool I just don’t want to be the subject of conversation I just don’t like that” (Interview 4, summer semester). Here, Katie relied on familiar frames of reference regarding the topic of her father’s homosexuality, in that she would have
preferred to continue to ignore it and not address it. In this way, she could continue to avoid discussing anything uncomfortable. Katie considered many different ways in which to approach this topic and slowly began to consider talking about the issues with friends directly. Katie decided to tell one other American friend, Emma, when Emma asked Katie if her dad was coming to Germany alone:

so I told her no he’s not alone (…) and she was like oh who is he coming with and I was like with his husband, my dad and she was like what and I was like oh I don’t know if you knew this but my dad’s gay and she was like oh I didn’t know that and it was just fine (…) I was completely a mess during, nervous and then after just moved on (…).

(Interview 4, summer semester)

Katie told another friend Leslie, and was immediately annoyed by her response: “she was like, oh is [your dad being gay] weird for you? and my response was no it’s only weird when other people think it’s weird, and she was like oh ok, and I was just like ok thanks” (Interview 4, summer semester). After this, Katie was extremely irritated and felt very insecure once again. Stefan offered to tell the other members of the group himself so that Katie would not have to confront this topic again. She felt relieved and thankful. In this way, Katie managed to maintain emotional security and avoid conflict. But she had already begun to change her internal dialogue on how she handled this matter. Even though she had only told a few people, just thinking about the fact that she wanted to change how she dealt with it caused Katie a lot of self-reflection. She later stated that she should have told all of her friends directly, personally. Katie noted: “I should have told people before but I just avoided it and made a huge deal out of nothing, when I should have said something seven months ago” (Interview 4). This was certainly a major shift in recognizing that addressing her father’s homosexuality and second marriage may change the way she perceives the story herself, including how others view it, and her too. This instance of identity negotiation and reflection of different and challenging ways to orient to this difficult issue was a big step in
moving towards dealing with difficult struggles directly, instead of constantly looking to avoid awkward and tough moments.

It is apparent that these events played a major role in the trajectory of Katie’s year abroad. She slowly began to deal with major personal issues like her father’s homosexuality, something that was not related just to her study abroad experience, but a part of her larger history. Katie’s reflections on her actions regarding this topic effected change in the ways in which she addressed and dealt internally with such challenges. Without her experiences with Stefan and his sensitive and understanding ways of dealing with these issues, her own ways of dealing with this topic may have remained unchanged. In the past she preferred not to address her father’s sexual orientation openly with friends, and in this context, with Stefan, me and others, she began to reflect on how she might better address such issues. This led to her wanting to make changes to how she internalized and addressed it. In essence, Katie finally felt comfortable openly acknowledging that her father is gay.

Stefan’s sensitivity to her needs as an insecure language learner in Germany for the first time, as well as his deep trust in her, as evidenced by his openness regarding his homosexuality, helped Katie to reflect on her own life and her personal story in new ways. When studying abroad, students are not only in an entirely different sociocultural context, but they are also with people who may have very different sociohistorical backgrounds. In fact, we might say that a few things caused Katie to begin to move past familiar frames of reference as regards issues such as her father’s homosexuality. Certainly, new friends such as Stefan played a major role in helping her navigate and understand why there may be a different way to deal with this issue. However, being removed from her home life and living in an entirely different context also played a role: in this way, she learned how to view what may have felt like an impossible issue through new lenses.
5.2.5 Social life vs. academic life

Towards the end of her sojourn abroad, Katie became acutely aware of how important her friends from the English-speaking community were. In the final weeks of the semester, when many students stayed up late at night to study for exams, she stayed up late to hang out with friends, emphasizing the social aspect of her life in Marburg. In fact, it seems as though she actively de-prioritized her academic life: “[I’m] hang[ing] out with my friends cause like that’s more important to me than my grades right now” (Oral reflection 9, summer semester). She mentioned in an interview that this was not a part of her typical school routine:

yeah I didn’t try at all this year [academically] I mean in the next week I’ll probably stress out a lot and study a lot, coming here I thought I can definitely pass this, I’m a studious person at home, I’m gonna work on German a lot here and study so much but that didn’t happen. (Interview 4, summer semester)

Katie’s academic experiences in Marburg were limited because, as she reports, she had a hard time following what went on in the lectures and seminars (Interview 3, summer semester). The language barrier seemed to be an issue that, as mentioned earlier, she did not make a lot of effort to overcome. Katie appeared uninterested in making the changes to her routine that would be necessary in order to improve her grades.

Some students became very stressed out about the effect the German courses will have on their grade point averages. Katie, on the other hand, though she did speak about being concerned, seemed largely unaffected by the potential for bad grades. For example, Katie became aware of the fact that she was close to failing her Spanish course. If she had failed, she would have lost her Spanish minor. Katie’s response was that it would aggravate her but that she could not do much to change it, as she felt there was nothing she could do (Interview 2, winter semester). Katie seemed to make decisions like this because it was simply easier to avoid struggles and
confrontation. She knew she would be leaving eventually, and returning to a system that she could navigate very well. Her limited language skills did not give her full access to German university courses and thus she lost interest in her courses very quickly. As such, while in Germany, she skipped a lot of classes, and contented herself with aiming for a passing grade. Katie actively prioritized her friendships and avoided the language barrier when it made her uncomfortable or put her in an awkward situation. She did not fully participate in academic life in Marburg.

5.2.6 Conclusion

Overall, Katie’s full participation in a circle of Americans and other English speakers created a sojourn experience that consisted of a lot of English speaking, which as mentioned, was counter-intuitive to her initial goals. Her tandem partnership with Lisa was limited in that neither Lisa nor Katie conceived of this partnership as a blossoming friendship. Katie thus associated no feelings of emotional instability with this community, nor did she reflect on her own practices through her partnership with Lisa. On the other hand, her full participation in the English-speaking community and her close friendship with Stefan can be viewed as both comforting and challenging. Being around Americans and other English speakers was a comfortable space with friends who were sympathetic to the challenges that occurred in the sojourn context. Her participation in this English-speaking community, however, also meant missing out on potential rich points in the local communities. Through her personal relationship with Stefan, however, she experienced substantial personal growth, re-negotiating her ways of addressing tough personal issues. This personal development did not exhibit any shifts towards translingual or transcultural competence, nor did she move towards developing interculturality. However, Katie did begin to realize that addressing issues directly may have better consequences than keeping quiet in order
to avoid direct conflict. In a brand new context with only electronic ties to home, and with Stefan and other friends’ support, she was able to begin to change how she dealt with her father’s homosexuality. In general, Katie focused on her close friendships in the English-speaking community and de-emphasized her academic life without much regard for how it may have affected her grade point average back home. Upon her return to the United States, Katie was surprised and relieved with her grades and credit transfer, since she had made very little effort to fully participate in educational settings in Marburg. She has since graduated from college, received her teaching certification, and currently works as a junior high and high school German teacher.

5.3 In Brad’s Words

In our first meeting, Brad was open and forthcoming, and informed me that his greatest desire in going abroad was to escape from his small college town and gain freedom. As I will show, his year in Marburg involved active participation in a group of ERASMUS friends and a Thai boxing training, or Muay Thai, an activity that he was also involved in at home. This particular hobby led to some noteworthy experiences that played a central part in how he negotiated and transformed certain views of himself and his surroundings. Overall, Brad’s very easygoing, social demeanor helped him to negotiate some challenging points throughout the year abroad.

5.3.1 Brad and depression

Brad told me in the first interview that he was taking anti-depressants, noting how hard it was for him to get the drugs shipped to him in Germany. Later in the year, he talked about not
needing to take the drugs anymore, saying he felt happier overall. When Brad first talked about his issues with depression, it seemed to me that he viewed his depression as something normal, or something that he was accustomed to. However, he began to view himself and his depression differently by the second interview, noting:

I’m making myself work on that and just like+ um everything else like like I have depression and stuff and (...) like the way I view things (...) I just kinda like look at always the negatives and things but um I’ve just been really trying to focus on um+ taking like every everything I’ve experienced here um+ and just getting whatever good I can out of it (Interview 2, winter semester)

This comment indicates a shift from viewing his depression as normal to actively wanting to move past it. Brad began to try to work on the way he viewed things. He said that he no longer wanted to focus on negatives; rather, he wanted to make the most of his study abroad experience, and his life in Marburg. As will be described in greater detail in section 5.3.3, it was around this point that he started to get even more involved in a few particular communities that became very important to him.

By the third interview in May 2010, Brad recognized that his issues with depression were less prevalent in Marburg. When I asked him whether or not he was looking forward to going home, he seemed to associate depression with being in the US:

I anticipate++ depression (laughs) I mean I already have depression but I anticipate it probably will come back when I go back because++ um+ I'm meeting people here that I like consider best friends+ now+ there are a lot of people here I'm I'm way more closer with the people here I'm way closer than the+ with the people here than I am at my school so+ um+ that's really gonna suck (Interview 3, summer semester)

Brad discussed how his father noticed changes in him when he and stepmother came to visit in the spring. Brad told me that his father said he had changed and looked different, and Brad
reflected on that here: “I (...) tried to imagine who I was before I got here and (...) I have to say I have changed a lot+ um+ so now (...) I can definitely tell I changed a lot for the better I believe” (Oral reflection 6, summer semester). In the fourth interview, Brad made no mention of his issues with depression except to say that when he was stagnant he felt depressed, but not “depressed depressed” (Interview 4, summer semester). Brad took part in a number of communities in Marburg, most of which he actively searched out, noting that when he would spend too much time alone, he got depressed (Interview 3, summer semester). This was a big change in the way that he talked about and dealt with his depression at the beginning of the year.

In the first interview, Brad’s main way of addressing his depression was by framing it as normal and joking about his medication. By the third interview, Brad demonstrated even further that how he viewed himself and the depression had changed. He went from talking about medication to actively recognizing that being stagnant did not help. Brad made efforts to improve his life, for example, searching out local opportunities to keep from being depressed.

5.3.2 The quest for German friends

Over the first few months, Brad talked about how he attempted to speak German in as many contexts as possible, saying that he wanted to speak a lot of German because that was why he came to Germany in the first place. At first he talked about wanting to meet a lot of Germans, but as time went on, he found that his closest friends were Americans and international students through ERASMUS communities. His American friends remained important for him and while he often portrayed other Americans in a more negative light, he constantly positioned his American buddies in a very positive way. Brad notes that “it’s a comfort thing to have other Americans there” (Interview 1, winter semester). Still, it is clear that he took care to position himself in opposition to other Americans, and often in opposition to stereotypical portrayals of
America in general. He said he was different from “other Americans” (Interview 1, winter semester). Brad talked about how many Americans have a complex, and that he, by contrast, is not an overly patriotic individual. Brad reflected on this, negotiating his feelings about being seen as Brad and as an American: “I feel like my identity is separate from my nation you know and whereas with some people is+ you know they they they keep that there and they+ hold it with them” (Interview 1, winter semester). As such, he was not really interested in meeting many new Americans, and hoped instead to get involved in communities with a lot of Germans.

It did not take long before Brad began commenting on how hard it was to actually get to know Germans. He talked about not always understanding how Germans do friend-making (Interview 1, winter semester). He was often frustrated about these and other issues that he perceived to be hindering him in this regard, and wondered how to become a legitimate participant in a community with Germans. Part of Brad’s frustration here may have to do with the way in which Germans conceptualize the word Freund or ‘friend’, and Bekannt(e) or ‘acquaintance’. For Germans, the word Freund often refers to a person with whom one has been close for many years, or at the very least it must be a person with whom one has built a quality relationship. Any other person with whom one is friendly may be referred to as an acquaintance. Germans, therefore, generally have a larger range of people whom they call Bekannt(e) as compared to Americans. In American English, the term acquaintance is reserved for those with whom one has barely ever spoken. This conceptualization may also shape how many Germans in Marburg go about getting to know international students like Brad. Local Germans that the participants were hoping to get to know necessarily viewed the Americans as Bekannt(e), or acquaintances, something that American sojourners may have perceived as rude and unfriendly. To some, it may have seemed like an intentional act to avoid friendship instead of the first step in speaking about someone whom you do not yet know. It was interesting to note that Brad was in fact very frustrated about this, even when, at the very same time, he was starting to take part more
fervently in his Muay Thai community. In February, he even said that he had given up on Germans, noting that they are boring and cold and that they “don’t talk much” (Interview 1, winter semester). Brad also commented that the lack of extracurricular activities at German universities could be a reason for his difficulty in meeting Germans, since that setting was very important for making friends at his home college (Interview 1, winter semester). Mixed in with his complaints, however, was an awareness of the sociocultural dynamics taking place. Although he was frustrated and complained quite a bit, other comments seemed to show he had experienced a rich point as regards friend-making in German, showing his recognition that there could be differences regarding how Americans and Germans orient towards making friends:

I just don’t know how the how the friendship thing works like how they just meet friends like if it’s not a necessity or what but they just+ eh I have a hard time talking to them and really+ getting engaged like small talk I feel like+ it doesn’t happen as much with Germans like the then they seem like they’re more interested in like+ facts (Interview 1, winter semester)

From this comment, it is clear that Brad is beginning to notice what differences may exist cross-culturally regarding how Germans and Americans orient towards developing friendships. Still, Brad did not fully digest what this might have meant for him, since even with his reflection on this issue, he did not continue searching out new local German communities based on his His thoughts on what it meant to be German did not come from a third space, or, from having the ability to step back and take a new look at this particular cultural difference. To a large extent, his reflection still focused on placing some kind of a value judgment on this issue. Brad’s comments about making German friends stemmed from experiences in his dorm, and not from his experiences at the Muay Thai boxing gym. Brad’s early hope of meeting many German friends slowly faded as he started to believe that they were unfriendly and impossible to get close to. His reflections on Germans saw him contrasting them with what he felt was a more welcoming,
friendly demeanor in his international friends. Brad subsequently put most of his energy in emphasizing those relationships over continuing to search out new German friends.

### 5.3.3 Muay Thai

Brad began taking part in one of his most important communities, Muay Thai boxing, very early on in the academic year. While he never developed extremely close friendships in his gym, he did form some important relationships with some of the German men there, including his Muay Thai trainer. At the same time, he did not position the men there as the cold, boring Germans he portrayed elsewhere. In any case, the Thai boxing gym became one of his most significant communities. In fact, he even talked about how he actively searched out the possibility of continuing training before he had even left for Germany:

> I actually emailed them several months before saying like oh I’m coming over you know can I train they're like yeah no problem show up so I showed up and um it was uh it was it was interesting cause like I walked in and they're just all talking German. (Oral reflection 2, winter semester)

This demonstrates how important Muay Thai was to Brad in that he made an effort to find a gym in Marburg before arriving in Germany. Once in Marburg, his involvement in the Thai boxing gym developed slowly, as his initial reason for joining it was simply to continue training as he had done at home. Brad did not initially take on Muay Thai training with the thought of making new friends there:

> yeah originally like I did not think about the benefits of you know+ um+ you know that didn't even cross my mind the fact that I would need something where it would just be just Germans because I did not know I would be with international students this much even just by default just cause we live close together and stuff (Interview 4, summer semester)
This is notable, because Brad complained about having no opportunities for extracurricular activities at the university, which he thought might be hindering his chances of meeting Germans. It seems that he originally thought he would make German friends through the university or on his dormitory floor. He never considered Muay Thai as a way to make German friends. Muay Thai was not an extracurricular activity that would provide him with that opportunity; rather, he envisioned it only as a place to work out.

By the end of the year, however, Brad talked about how much the gym meant to him, and that it had ultimately become more than just a place to work out:

I didn’t do Muay Thai to make friends I did Muay Thai to do Muay Thai you know and I was like alright if I meet friends along the way that’s great but+ like I didn’t+ foresee that it would be this have this much of an impact on me (Oral reflection 20, summer semester)

Solidarity with the people at his German Muay Thai gym did develop, albeit slowly. In early interviews and oral reflections, Brad often discussed Muay Thai and that he trained there multiple times weekly, and yet he still lamented not meeting many Germans. Later on in the year, however, Brad reflected that he saw the other guys in the gym differently than how he perceived “regular” Germans: “in terms of Germans they’re the only really+ kinda like+ cool people th that I can really relate to” (Oral reflection 20, summer semester). This comment was in direct contrast with his original comments about Muay Thai not being a place where he would find or search out friends. It is fascinating that he did not seem to consider the other Muay Thai members as regular Germans. Even in the middle of his year abroad, when he would be there multiple times weekly training for fights, Brad lamented that he never got to meet any Germans in Marburg. Only at the end of the year did he position the Muay Thai friends as the only Germans that he could relate to. This could be due to the fact that most of the men and women at the Thai boxing gym were of Turkish or Arabic descent (Brad, personal communication, February 2010). I found this interesting, given that Brad proudly talked about his partial Native American heritage, something
that is quite recognizable in his features (Interview 1, winter semester). It seems that he visualized the Muay Thai members as either non-Germans or at least not as German as ethnic Germans, however he conceptualized this Germanness. Traditional conceptualizations of what it means to be German are hotly debated in Germany today. In the eyes of German law, only those with German parents are considered German. Until recently, second and third generation immigrants still could not get German citizenship based on such official language regarding what it means to be German. Both discussions on this issue and the laws themselves have been changing, but as in other European countries, immigration and citizenship remain a topic of much political and personal tension. As such, perhaps the men at Muay Thai purposefully positioned themselves in ways separate from what may have been perceived as traditionally German. Ben’s idea of what it means to be German may have begun to change as well. In any case, as he got to know the Muay Thai members better, he began to feel like he was a part of the Muay Thai family. Brad went from barely mentioning these men when talking about his desires to meet Germans to considering them the most relatable group of local friends that he had come to know while abroad.

Brad’s engagement and investment in Muay Thai become especially obvious when he took part in his first fight. His gym invited him to take part in the event as they needed someone that was about his weight to fight. Supposedly, this fight gained him a lot of respect within the gym “everyone said it was like the best fight of the day and I was really excited and I was like oh yeahh I did it” (Oral reflection 4, summer semester). This attention and success motivated Brad to continue training, and he got to know people a little better. Later in the summer semester, he reflected on how seeing his pictures in a gym collage started to really make him feel like a part of the group:

I felt like I was really in the group now like I mean I’ve always felt like+ kind of I was I was in the+ in the group with the guys I train with but (…) I see this big collage with all
the guys and just like I don’t know part of the family you know (Oral reflection 20, summer semester)

Brad began to re-negotiate his orientation to and engagement in this community through their recognition of his participation within the group. Through help from his trainer Thorsten, who played a big role in getting him involved in fights and encouraging him to train harder, he began to actively take part and train every other day.

Brad had a lot of respect for his trainer, Thorsten, who he claimed “has his back” when a guy in the change room called Brad out for speaking English instead of German with one of the guys: “[my trainer] just points at me he says it in German too he's just like (...) Brad being here is an opportunity for us to perfect our English cause it sucks right now” (Oral reflection 5, winter semester). Brad felt that his presence there was validated by his trainer, especially through the access that the trainer offered. Without Thorsten there to validate his presence and fighting skills, Brad may not have been as engaged in the Muay Thai community. Thorsten was very focused on getting Brad fights, and spent a lot of time training him. Brad felt great knowing that his trainer saw his potential. As for more personal relationships, Brad stated that he would have loved to have a beer with his trainer. However, the two never hung out outside of the gym, as they maintained a purely trainer-trainee relationship (Interview 2, winter semester). Brad even noted the following: “we don't hang out but I feel like+ like if I had to say I have a father figure in Marburg (laughs) I’d say that'd be him (...) I look up to him” (Interview 4, summer semester).

Clearly, Thorsten was someone who Brad held in high standing and his conduct and actions had a major influence on Brad. Thorsten gave Brad a lot of access to the gym, including many opportunities to help train newer, younger members as well as lead certain warm-up sessions. Brad’s respect for his trainer was especially clear when he later mentioned that he would love to become a Muay Thai trainer himself (Interview 4, summer semester).
Brad's deeper levels of engagement in Muay Thai interfered with his academic life throughout the year. In June, Brad missed and failed an exam because he chose to go to see his Muay Thai idol give a seminar instead, saying “I missed it cause I went to a Muay Thai seminar to meet my hero which I don’t regret at all” (Oral reflection 17, summer semester). Like Katie, he noted that he did not prioritize exams and seemed equally nonplussed about it. Instead, his constant emphasis on training and sparring highlighted his investment in Muay Thai. Through his full participation in this community, Brad re-negotiated himself in new and different ways. He commented: “I feel like that’s kinda like me in [the ring] (…) that’s kinda like what I want to be like more (…) more mature and (…) taking responsibility for everything” (Interview 2, winter semester). Through his mutual engagement in the Muay Thai community in Marburg, Brad began to reflect explicitly on who he was and how he wanted to be. He began to take different stances on issues he was sure about before, and appeared to be willing and open to doing things differently. For example, Muay Thai and re-envisioning himself led him to talk about his cousin. Brad knew his cousin was going through some similar issues with depression that he himself had experienced. He wanted to help his cousin and reflected on his own path:

[my cousin is] turning into everything I don’t want him to be (…) I mean my little cousin we have a lot of the same like life phases and things and I kinda went through the phase he’s going through (…) I know exactly how he feels cause I was the same way (…) I think he’s in the phase where we have low self-esteem so to compensate we try to work out really hard and look good (…) get girls and shit and it’s (…) sounds fun but it’s really depressing (Oral reflection 5, summer semester)

Here we can see that Brad recognized that changing how he viewed himself was vital. These instances of his identity re-negotiation, as well as his desire for his cousin to have the same realizations, show how Brad was changing. It is clear that his participation in the Thai boxing gym in Marburg was instrumental in helping Brad re-negotiate his own identity and views of
himself throughout the year abroad, even though he did not develop extremely close friendships there with individual members. Brad’s participation in Muay Thai helped him to see himself through the eyes of other members of this community. He confronted some difficulties with his periodic L1 use, when one member of the Muay Thai group told him that he should speak more German. Brad also experienced support in that same instance, when his own trainer told that particular man that Brad could use whatever language he wanted. In this way, Brad re-negotiated his own self-perception and ways of being. What began as a desire to continue training in Thai boxing as he had done at home turned into training and participating in a familiar activity, but through a new language and culture. Through conflicts and new challenges related not only to the sport, but also the language and local context, Brad began to take up new subject positions and imagined new future trajectories for himself. It is clear that Brad’s case of reflection and development is about personal growth. However, his experiences also show the beginnings of intercultural development, as he developed the ability to converse appropriately with Germans in the Muay Thai gym, even though there may have been tensions about what it really meant to be German. Brad became more aware of local politics in Marburg based on these tensions. There is limited evidence to show that Brad developed significant interculturality, though I would argue that his ability to penetrate an urban boxing group shows his ability to be relevant in the local context.

5.3.4 ERASMUS friends

Brad was very close with his friends from his college who were also in Marburg for their year abroad. He periodically spent time with Katie’s English-speaking community that was discussed earlier as well. Early on in the year, he would also hang out regularly with people in his dormitory hall. However, by the end of the year, Brad’s closest personal relationships in Marburg
consisted of a number of Spanish and other ERASMUS students. He commented that the people from his dormitory hall spoke mostly English together, and that frustrated him. This group started to disband at the end of the winter semester, however, and Brad actively began to branch out and get to know some other people. Brad had no problem socializing with others; he was not shy, and seemed less concerned about making grammatical errors or discussing differences in German proficiency levels. He spoke quite informally and comfortably. As mentioned, Brad constantly lamented the difficulty he had making German friends in the early months, saying that Germans smile as much as a KGB official and that it is often “like talking to a fucking wall” (Interview 1, winter semester). Still, Brad used what resources he had to meet all kinds of new and different people. He did not seem to just stick with what was comfortable or familiar, rather, I noted in my observations that he actively searched out new things. Interestingly, he branched out from his dormitory community right around the time that he told me he wanted to actively find ways to change how he views himself. He did not want to remain stagnant, and he wanted to speak more German. So, mid-year, Brad made great attempts to become closer with a group of ERASMUS students. This particular group made a daily effort to speak primarily German together. This was significant for Brad; he even wrote on his third and fourth questionnaires that there was an increase in how much German he spoke on a daily basis (Questionnaire 4, summer semester).

Brad’s desire to become a member of this group may have partially been about having more opportunities to speak German, but it was also motivated in an entirely different way: “I actually started cause I cause I like Karmen you know+ that girl you know and I was like alright like wanna hang out with this chick so like she’s awesome so I started hanging out with her” (Interview 3, summer semester). I noticed that he would eat lunch with Karmen every day. I believe that Brad’s pursuit of Karmen was connected to his thoughts on how he was trying to change. Brad wanted to continue to build his confidence and self-esteem, and for him, part of that included avoiding the ERASMUS party scene where short-lived romantic affairs were the norm.
Brad wanted to hold himself to a higher standard in that regard, and he talked about that when addressing his concerns about his cousin. I observed that he spent a lot of time getting to know Karmen, and it was apparent that he was putting in a great deal of effort. In contrast to the dominant discourse surrounding relationships and romance in many study abroad contexts, it was clear that Brad was trying to look for something more meaningful. Ultimately his pursuit of Karmen only developed into a good friendship, though he stayed very close with this group to the end, even visiting her and a few others in Spain post-sojourn. Brad’s insistence on displaying confidence, patience and looking for more meaningful relationships certainly made him a respected member of the ERASMUS group. Towards the end of the year abroad, he had been spending a lot of time with an Italian woman, and they ended up dating and continued a long-distance relationship when he returned to the United States.

By early July, it was clear that Brad felt like a legitimate participant in the ERASMUS group because amidst German World Cup fever, Brad decided to cheer for Spain over Germany. This was discussed in a group conversation session in the summer semester:

Cho:  habt ihr das spiel gesehen?
    *did you see the game?*
Mark: fast jedes spiel ja
    *almost every game yeah*
Janice: .hh
Brad:  xxx
Sarah:  jaaa
    *yeahh*
Brad:  espana!
    *spain!*
Janice: .hh ja++ er+ unterstuetzt spanien
    *he+ is cheering for spain*
Cho:  .hhh ohh nein
    *ohh no*
Sarah: nein .hhh
no
Cho: die haben doch gleuck gehabt+ die ganze zeit nur
they have just been lucky+ the whole time
Brad: ja die deutschen xxx
yeah the germans
Janice: .hhh
Cho: ah diesmal wieviel also diesmal muss man schon zugeben dass die das
oh this time how many so this time you surely have to admit that they
verdient haben oder
deserved it, no
Brad: ja um
yeah um
Cho: ahh komm jetzt nun das war schon sehr
ahh come on now that is definitely
Janice: die deutschen haben am besten gespielt ich denke
the germans have played the best I think
Cho: darf ich?
may I?
Brad: ja aber spanien ist uh mauer so+ boom! dann kann kein mehr vier null+
yeah but Spain is a wall so+ boom! there can be no more four nothing+
ich hoffe
I hope
Cho: das haben die argentinier auch gedacht
that’s also what the argentinians thought

(Group Conversation 4a, summer semester)

Brad provided reasoning for his comments a few moments later, when asked where he planned to watch the game:

Brad: ja aber weiss nicht wo+ weil die spanische leute haben angst in der stadt
zu gehen
yeah but I don’t know where+ because the spanish people are afraid to
go into the city
xxx
Brad: doch doch weil letztes mal+ ahm fer+ er ist ein spanier er hatte ein eine
flagge mit ihm und ein deutscher hat das weggenommen und dann ein eine
bierflasche geworfen oder etwas+
no yeah because last time + um fer+ he’s a spanish guy he had a flag with him
and a german took it away and then threw a beer bottle or something
Mark: echt?
really?
Sarah: whoa!
Brad: yeah ich versteh das nicht das ist nur scheiss fussball
yeah I don’t understand it it’s just stupid soccer

(Group Conversation 4a, summer semester)

Brad aligned himself here as a sympathizer of Spanish fans and the Spanish team, rather than the
German team. This was interesting for a few reasons. One, most of the other American students
in Marburg rooted for Germany in the final rounds once the United States had been knocked out.
Two, Brad often highlighted his desire to meet and become friends with real Germans, and yet at
the end of the year, he aligned himself with the country of his closest friends at the time – Spain.
Brad knew he was an important member of the ERASMUS group, and as such, positioned
himself squarely within the group by openly cheering for a team that would go up against
Germany in the world cup semi-final. One must wonder whether or not his experiences at Muay
Thai played a role in this decision as well. The men there may have been cheering for other
teams, as they or their parents may have been born elsewhere. As Brad’s was deeply engaged in
this community at that point, this may have also played a role in his desire to see Germany lose
the world cup.
5.3.5 Conclusion

Over the course of his year abroad, Brad began to view himself and his depression differently through his Thai boxing hobby, and this created a unique experience for him while abroad. He was not shy or nervous to speak with people, and felt comfortable chatting informally in German. Still, Brad had a hard time getting to understand how Germans conceptualize friendship, even though he realized that it may require a different orientation to friend-making than what he was currently used to. That he could articulate the fact that cultural differences may be at work showed that he was able to reflect on different sociocultural orientations to friend-making. Brad could see and understand others’ views. He began to show signs of developing empathy for others’ positions. Perhaps this was one reason why Brad seemed able to navigate completely new contexts with just about anyone and chat with new people with ease. His relationship with ERASMUS students saw him spending a lot of time with a Spanish woman whom he liked, though they just remained friends. He then began dating an Italian woman, and they stayed together for over a year. Brad has since graduated from college and soon afterwards, was accepted to a Master’s program (German Linguistics) in Marburg. He was planning to return there to resume his studies, but unfortunately could not raise the funds to do so. Brad still aims to return to Marburg at some point.

5.4 In Sarah’s Words

On the day of her arrival in Germany, Sarah was excited about the prospect of travel, advanced language learning and something different from her college back home. Sarah emphasized her goal to meet a lot of Germans, and as will be shown, she only really met Germans through other friends’ social networks and not because of her own actions. Sarah also intended to
improve her German, and yet she was very nervous to speak with Germans and often fell silent. This led to a lot of interactions with other English speakers in the first six months, including many from her private liberal arts college and another international student, Evelyn, from the United Kingdom. In fact, Sarah’s most important communities were English-speaking, and it soon became clear that improving her German was not something she actively pursued. However, through her closest friend Evelyn, Sarah eventually met some German men and took part in many events with them at their local Verbindung ‘fraternity’. Participating in this group brought her closer to German men, and brought her apparent goal of finding a German boyfriend to the fore. However, even in this community, Sarah participated only peripherally.

5.4.1 Being American and speaking German

Sarah’s first language proficiency evaluations gave the impression that she was one of the more advanced German speakers in the group. She also mentioned that she took language courses in Germany for a few weeks one summer two years earlier (Interview 1, winter semester). In her first interview, Sarah emphasized that she did not want to be seen as an American who only speaks English. She seemed concerned about how she would be viewed by Germans and she hoped to make it clear that she was not someone who thinks “oh I’m American, I don’t need to learn languages” (Interview 1, winter semester). And yet, I noted in my observations very early on that Sarah made little effort to speak German on a day-to-day basis. She rarely discussed any of her linguistic insecurities with me, except when they were related to academic contexts. In the first few months, Sarah spent most of her time with primarily English-speakers. I observed that Sarah did not go out of her way to take the floor in German with anyone, except for perhaps a few ERASMUS acquaintances whom she met early on in the year. These were people whom she saw mostly at parties. When talking about the international student parties, Sarah stated that
“everyone knows” having a drink or two would make you more apt to try to speak the foreign language (Oral reflection 20, winter semester). Based on this assertion, Sarah seemed to feel most comfortable interacting in German when she was at a party having a drink. I noticed that even when mutual friends and acquaintances addressed her in German, Sarah would often answer in English. If she responded in German, they were often short, superficial turns. In general, I observed that she stayed mostly with fellow students from her private liberal arts college and a few English-speaking ERASMUS students, including her British friend Evelyn. When asked about speaking German when meeting other people, she noted “I could go awkwardly talk to people but they seem very closed off,” suggesting that most German speakers were unfriendly or not people she would be able to get to know in the way she was accustomed to (Interview 1, winter semester). Here, she seemed to simply opt out of communicating in German, demonstrating that she likely missed out on experiencing potential rich points. Sarah blamed Germans for the fact that such exchanges did not occur, positioning them as the unfriendly ones. She did not seem to reflect on other’s potential perspectives; for example, that some of the Germans she felt were ignoring her may also be too shy to speak with new people. Sarah also never considered that there might be cultural differences regarding how Germans approach newcomers and acquaintances for the first time, as mentioned elsewhere in Brad’s case.

After a few months, Sarah did not seem too interested in actively branching out. She commented: “I don’t think there’s anything like clubs that I did at [my college] that I can really do here” (Interview 1, winter semester). This statement indicates that she knew this to be so, even though she had not really looked into extracurricular opportunities on her own, or at least done very little. The desire to avoid having to face linguistic or cultural differences caused Sarah to keep from asking around for potential activities that she might take part in. In general, Sarah was passive in seeking out new activities and friendships. Instead, she focused on the through-English relationships that she had. Early on, she hesitated on the issue of branching out and speaking
more German, saying “maybe that’s bad”, when discussing how much English she spoke (Interview 1, winter semester). This was one of the few moments in which I saw her reflecting on the fact that having only English-speaking friends might be counter-intuitive to her original goals (Interview 1, winter semester). Still, Evelyn became Sarah’s best friend and confidante, and this friendship bloomed throughout the year, to the extent that other people even created a hybrid nickname for them.

All of this seemed to suggest that taking risks, like speaking more German, joining groups with people (German or otherwise) whom she did not know, posed a threat to Sarah’s emotional security and how she wanted to present herself. In fact, it seems that she did not realize that in order to become a central participant in local communities, she would have to act differently. It seemed she was unaware of any need to navigate linguistic and cultural differences. As such, she never appeared to shift towards becoming an intercultural speaker. This would have required her to consider other ways of being in order to negotiate potential rich points and locate new frames of reference. Perhaps she found the risk of the unknown too great. The need to consider different thoughts, orientations and routines seemed to cause discomfort and this may be why she relied on what was familiar, such as hanging out with other students from her college, and other English speakers. At times, I observed that even her friendship with Evelyn brought about funny discussions about whether American or British English terms were correct or better. Indeed, this relationship was also a novelty to Sarah at first, and the linguistic value judgments she would make on what English terminology was right or wrong demonstrated this. Even in English, she relied on what was familiar instead of negotiating different linguistic forms and orientations to the language. In general, I am not certain that Sarah was aware that there are many different and valid perspectives on language, culture, and people in general. This is something that I will highlight in the following sections.
5.4.2 Expert status

Sarah dealt with her linguistic and social insecurities by positioning herself as extremely knowledgeable about the things that she could speak about. During the early months, Sarah’s daily actions did not match her aforementioned linguistic goals, or her desire to meet Germans. Yet she drew attention to the fact that she had been to Germany before, saying that she “knew what to expect” (Interview 1, winter semester). Being in a new environment where all of her knowledge about familiar routines had disappeared may have led Sarah to rely heavily on the issues and pieces of information that she did know something about. For example, by our first interview, Sarah, Brad, Joe and Mark had all been in Marburg exactly one month longer than David and Katie. Based on my observations, Sarah often made a distinction between the exchange students who (like her) arrived in September to take part in the pre-semester language course, and those who arrived in October right before the semester began. In some ways, it seems that she attempted to elevate her status by positioning herself as an expert in the general exchange student community. Sarah also made note of the language course and how it helped her adjust to life in Marburg, even though she also stated that it was useless for German (Interview 1, winter semester). Here she positioned herself as someone who was already settled into Marburg.

Sarah lived in a shared dormitory flat with a German woman and a Chinese woman. She noted that her German flatmate was simply never around, and in my observations, informally lamented the fact that she had no German interlocutor around to interact with in a more casual way. Sarah positioned her Chinese flatmate, Mei, as someone who had a lot less German knowledge and experience in Germany than she did. Sarah viewed Mei as a person who was good enough to practice German with, even though she noted that Mei “only speaks to me in German, because it’s probably easier for her” (Interview 1, winter semester). Sarah positioned herself as the older and wiser one vis-à-vis Mei. There was little attempt on either woman’s part to
communicate more; Sarah noted that they did not have a friendship and that she was not surprised given the “huge language barrier” with Mei (Interview 4, summer semester). Sarah often positioned Mei as young, naïve and unable to take care of herself. She said, for example, “oh sweet little girl…only 19, she should still be at home, she needs to grow up” noting further that Mei is “not independent” (Interview 2, winter semester). Here, Sarah positioned herself as the grown up, self-sufficient one, and yet in one oral reflection, she commented on her own issues with becoming more independent, showing her own insecurities as regards food and cooking: “I’m having [to deal with] the fact that I’m actually completely responsible for feeding myself” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). Both Sarah and Mei had something in common here: both were living alone and abroad, and simultaneously coming of age. However, Sarah did not align herself with Mei in any way. Instead, she talked about how Mei was naïve and had not yet matured.

Sarah commented further that Mei always left messes and did not communicate well with the dormitory Putzfrau ‘cleaning lady’. The Putzfrau would come looking for Mei and instead find Sarah, and complain to her (Oral reflection 5, winter semester). Sarah positioned herself as having to be the responsible one who took care of talking to the Putzfrau on Mei’s behalf. As such, Sarah would often position Mei as someone who caused problems and herself as the one who solved Mei’s problems. In general, whenever Mei was in the picture, Sarah positioned herself as the more knowledgeable one, even though this may not have been the case. For example, Sarah found the Putzfrau to be somewhat incomprehensible without the help of gestures. One time, Sarah found that she had no idea how to ameliorate the situation due to not understanding what the Putzfrau was saying, even though she positioned herself as regularly having to solve problems that Mei caused (Oral reflection 5, winter semester). Overall, Sarah interpreted her lack of friendship with Mei and her German roommate as being related to fear: “I’m pretty sure they’re mildly afraid of me” (Interview 1, winter semester), positioning both
them and their inability to communicate with her as reasons for why they were not close friends. Nowhere in her narrative did she suggest that she also played a role in why these friendships did not develop. It stands to reason that Mei and her German roommate would likely tell a completely different story. It is interesting that her comments here re-emphasize the fact that she rarely came into contact with German speakers and that she probably missed out on many potential rich points while abroad.

Early in the year, Sarah socialized in a limited way with some ERASMUS students. In the first few months, there was a natural split in the international student population between those who, like Sarah, had arrived in September for the pre-semester language course, and those who had arrived in October. However, by November 2009, it had more or less become one large group. As noted in my observations, however, Sarah brought up the distinction between September and October arrivals from time to time, especially in front of peers who had arrived in October. This may have been another way for her to deal with her linguistic insecurities, as talking about the two groups allowed her to remind the October group that she had been in Marburg longer than they had. Based on my informal observations, if someone made a comment regarding a certain characteristic about everyday life in Marburg, Sarah would immediately advise the interlocutor about how she perceived or dealt with the related issues.

In front of peers, Sarah positioned herself as an experienced exchange student. For example, in the first months, I asked her and a few other 20-year-old American undergraduates informally at a party how they felt about being able to purchase and drink alcohol legally. In front of this group, which included some people who had arrived in September and others who had arrived in October, Sarah immediately positioned herself as someone for whom this was no novelty. She confidently stated that she was already long accustomed to this difference, as she had been in Marburg for one month and did not think of it as a big deal anymore. Katie, who was involved in this particular interaction, told me later that this made her feel as though she was
being positioned as inexperienced and inferior. Sarah talked about being of legal drinking age in our first interview as well, making the following statement about it: “I’m almost over that in a way now, it’s been a few months” (Interview 1, winter semester). The message here was clear; she was not new to Marburg. She had adjusted and wanted people to understand that she knew what is going on around her.

In addition to positioning herself as an expert relative to other foreign exchange students, Sarah even positioned herself as an English language expert as compared to Germans. In one oral reflection, she talked about her business professor making an English joke in class and how she was the only one who understood it. Sarah talked about the joke here:

> the professor got to+ the word+ stakeholders+ and I obviously knew what a stakeholder was+ I’ve been taking business courses for two years now+ but+ what made me laugh+ was+ I guess he was trying to explain+ to the Germans+ that+ what a stakeholder was+ and+ he said+ es hat nichts mit Fleisch zu tun ‘it’s got nothing to do with meat’ (…) I don’t know why I found it so funny. (Oral reflection 7, winter semester)

It seemed to delight her to feel like a language expert compared to the Germans for once. She was also critical of how much English Germans would say they could speak versus how much they could actually understand, taking up the position of someone who has the ability to judge what constitutes advanced English language abilities: “I like how+ [Germans] say they know English but+ sometimes+ it’s a little silly” (Oral reflection 7, winter semester).

This is quite remarkable, especially since something similar was happening to her. Sarah's language proficiency scores show that she was consistently in the top three of my group, though they were certainly not at an advanced level, and she did not make any vast improvements at any point in the year. However, unlike the other participants, she had also taken a German as a foreign language course in Germany before. In June 2008, she spent four weeks in Münster. And yet, as mentioned earlier, I rarely heard her use spoken German in conversations. She did not
actively search out opportunities for speaking German, which may explain why her linguistic
development was minimal at best. Perhaps Sarah simply felt content with the level of German she
had already achieved. She did, however, seem very interested and motivated to improve in the
beginning, even though her actions showed quite the opposite. In general, Sarah did not actively
take the steps necessary to make any significant improvement in her German, not even when she
was a motivated peripheral participant in a community full of German men.

Overall, Sarah’s habitual self-positioning as an expert seemed to allow her to take some
control and demonstrate to others the knowledge she did have in an otherwise new situation. This
likely contributed to her overall emotional security. Sarah’s insecurities about her limited German
speaking abilities may have been a reason for why she felt the need to assert her knowledge in
other areas. When feeling insecure about her German language abilities, it seemed to me that she
saw no other option but to express herself in English, which played a role in her heavy reliance on
familiar frames of reference. Sarah dealt with those insecurities by re-asserting herself through
her knowledge about living in Marburg and in Germany. She dealt with the fact that she could not
communicate in a completely fluid way in German by positioning herself as an expert on other
sociocultural and linguistic issues that she could articulate. She did this rather than search out
ways to interact in German in Marburg and avoided or ridiculed what she did not know or
understand. Sarah’s self-positioning as an expert came as a result of a lack of reflection on the
sociohistorical contexts in which she was socialized. This is a key notion to becoming a
translingually and transculturally competent speaker, and it is apparent that she did not critically
reflect on other ways of being. Sarah’s interactions with Mei showed that she was not aware of
Mei’s salient identity issues and thus offered little to no empathy for her situation. Perhaps if she
could have pictured herself in Mei’s shoes, shown compassion, and reflected critically on her own
actions, Sarah may not have consistently reverted to familiar ways of thinking and being.
5.4.3 Meeting German men

Like many of my participants, Sarah had high hopes of meeting Germans at the beginning of the year. She lamented early on that “meeting Germans is impossible”, though she certainly wanted to have a community of German friends (Interview 1, winter semester). She specifically mentioned wanting to meet “German guys” or have a German boyfriend, though she did not actively search this out on her own (Interview 3, summer semester). In her third interview, she talked about how a previous student from her college met her now-fiancé, a German man, while on exchange in Marburg. Sarah noted that she dreamt of something similar: “I want the fairy tale” (Interview 3, summer semester). She discussed how her friends had teased her about this before she had left the United States: “my friend was always consistently telling me how jealous she was that I was going to come here and meet tall gorgeous German men,” mentioning further that fleeting romances were definitely a huge part of the year abroad (Interview 3, summer semester). In the first interview, however, she talked about not wanting to “be awkward” and just go up and talk to anyone in class (Interview 1, winter semester). Sarah positioned her German classmates in the same way she positioned other Germans: very closed off and unavailable for socializing. It was as if her social life depended entirely on the actions of others. In general, she did not actively talk to anyone outside of her own friends, especially not Germans in German, though she continued to desire access to a German community. The insecurity she had in applying her language skills was surely one reason for why she did not make greater efforts – certainly, the individual act of attempting to befriend Germans would cause too much emotional insecurity due to the need to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences.

In the late winter semester, however, her English friend Evelyn met and got to know a group of German men. As a part of her ERASMUS requirements, Evelyn was working on a year abroad project for credit back home. She decided to investigate German *Burschenschaften* and
Verbindungen (types of fraternities in Germany). To begin, she contacted a local Verbindung chapter in order to find out more from its members directly. Fraternities in Germany arose from a completely different sociohistorical context than did those in the United States and are thus difficult to compare directly. Most German Verbindungen are known for being quite conservative; in fact the particular Verbindung that Evelyn contacted only allows men with German citizenship to become members. In Marburg, a town that leans politically to the left, Verbindungen come under constant criticism, though they continue to exist. Like American fraternities, many host raucous parties in their bar/party rooms. Evelyn’s attempts to learn more about the Verbindung began in an official manner, but eventually, the fraternity brothers invited Evelyn to their weekly parties. Evelyn inevitably brought Sarah along. Sarah finally found herself with the chance to come into close contact with German men, and she had not had to search out this group herself. Both Evelyn and Sarah were nervous to attend parties hosted by acquaintances. However, Evelyn’s project requirement gave both her and Sarah a valid reason to attempt to gain access to a community they would otherwise never have come into contact with. Evelyn could have chosen a range of other topics that have nothing to do with Verbindungen. However, after having chosen this topic, she made great efforts to get to know the history of this particular community. As such, both attended parties, attempting to get to know the men themselves under the auspices of Evelyn’s official university assignment.

Sarah and Evelyn soon made weekly appearances at the Verbindung parties, and it was not long until Sarah developed a crush on one particular fraternity brother. “Sebastian the gorgeous German” and a few other fraternity members were in one of her business lectures, and she also spent time with them in various party situations (Interview 3, summer semester). She even asked them if they could all meet and help each other study for the course’s final exam, though this apparently never ended up taking place (Interview 3, summer semester). This interaction and most of the communication between the men and Sarah and Evelyn took place in
party settings; there was often alcohol involved. Sarah noted that one time they went over to watch a World Cup game with the fraternity brothers and since “no one was drinking, they didn’t end up talking to them too much” (Interview 4, summer semester). This was not the first time that Sarah made a connection between drinking alcohol and speaking German. In an interview, she also commented on drinking and speaking a foreign language: “I just don’t think about [making mistakes] so I just speak,” stating when drunk she does not mind looking like a “fool” (Interview 2, winter semester). She felt that alcohol gave her the confidence to communicate with Germans in German. Sarah noted about one fraternity brother: “Sebastian was drunk on Wednesday and I figured I could use it to my advantage” (Interview 3, summer semester).

Every other Wednesday, Sarah and Evelyn made their way to the bi-weekly Verbindung parties, excited at the prospect of hanging out with these German men. Sarah emphasized their regular attendance, saying: “I think they expect us to be there by now” (Interview 3, summer semester). She also talked about how Sebastian and the others spoke mostly German with them: “normally he only speaks German with me, like the others” (Interview 3, summer semester). They appeared to be legitimate peripheral participants in the fraternity community; Sarah talked about limited interactions with them and that it mostly happened when alcohol was involved. At the time of the third interview, Sarah told me she had a huge crush on Sebastian, and hoped that something would happen between them. Sarah referred to a conversation with her friend back home about wishing she would meet German men, saying “oh […] well now I have!” (Interview 3, summer semester). Sarah told me after interview 3 that she had sent Sebastian an email in German, asking him about the possibility of seeing where things might go between them. This was a huge step for Sarah; not only was it a major threat to her participation in that community, but it was also a language risk. Although she did not tell Sebastian face-to-face, sending this email in German was something that she would normally not do. Though perhaps an immature move, the fact that she took matters into her own hands was a big deal for her. Participating in
this community helped her to feel comfortable enough to take bigger risks in order to fulfill one, perhaps naïve, goal – to get a German boyfriend. Sarah even noted that she was starting to view herself and her actions differently, saying that she was no longer just “sitting around and waiting like for people to like come to me and be like [telling me what to do]” (Interview 4, summer semester).

However, Sebastian unfortunately never responded to Sarah’s email. Later, Sarah confided in me about her disappointment: “part of me always wanted to date a German, I guess this was as close as I was gonna get” (Interview 4, summer semester). I noted here, that her disappointment was not about losing out on the opportunity to get to know Sebastian better. Rather, Sarah was sad because she thought she would not fulfill her goal of dating a German man per se. Sarah noted in that same interview that one of the other fraternity members, Achim, had told her that she should ask Sebastian out (Interview 4, summer semester). Sarah explained that Achim was constantly playing pranks so she had not been sure if he meant she should do it. Still, she had decided to email Sebastian anyway. From my own observations, it appeared that Achim was indeed joking around, but Sarah either did not seem to take it seriously or chose not to see it as something cruel. In general, Sarah’s lack of awareness surrounding these actions demonstrated that Sarah imagined the Verbindung community and her position in this community to have a very different dynamic compared to how its central participants actually viewed the situation. I do not believe that Evelyn or Sarah were central participants in the eyes of the fraternity members. This may be simply because they were both women and foreigners, and as such, forbidden full access based on fraternity rules. Regardless, symbolically speaking, it appeared that the men were never invested in Sarah and Evelyn in such a way that would give them access to central participation in the group. More importantly, Sarah never submitted data that showed any kind of critical distancing or eloquence through the relationships with these men that she found so
important. She may well have been experiencing valuable rich points, but was she even aware of them?

Just a few weeks before departing Germany, however, Sarah began casually dating a Verbindungs member named Jan. Jan was a quiet, serious, conservatively dressed man, who was not a practical joker like many of the others. Since this relationship developed quickly and close to the end of the sojourn, I could not ascertain how serious it was in that short time. Sarah, however, informed me that this relationship was evidence that she had finally achieved her dream of finding a German boyfriend. Again, it seemed less important to her which German man it was; the most important thing to Sarah was that she got the opportunity to date a German at all. Though she appeared to long for a fairy-tale relationship similar to that of a previous student at her college, Sarah never talked about her pursuits in a way that suggested she was searching for a suitable long-term match or a good quality partner. She was simply interested in being associated with good-looking German men. Overall, Sarah did not seem to reflect on how she and Evelyn were viewed by the fraternity men, but she seemed to indicate that their level of engagement in the community was mutually important for all involved. There may have been varying opinions on this. It seemed to me that Sarah participated in this community in a fairly naïve, innocent, and peripheral way, projecting the men as tall, attractive German males instead of quality friends. Even when Sarah talked about how some of them made fun of her accent, which annoyed her, she continued to prize this somewhat imagined community over any other, except perhaps her friendship with Evelyn (Interview 4, summer semester).

5.4.4 The European traveler

Others have found in previous research that American undergraduate study abroad students often have a very clear goal in mind: to travel extensively (see Kinginger, 2008). Sarah
contributed to this “dominant discourse” (see Gore 2005) by regularly emphasizing travel. This may be another reason for the fact that she did not actively search out new communities in the early part of the year. Sarah may have conceptualized the year abroad less as a chance to live locally than as a stepping off point for Europe-wide travel. In the first interview, when asked about her goals, she answers directly: “definitely traveling” (Interview 1, winter semester). After the first few months she already noted how she had been traveling quite a bit locally and specifically talked about her “favorite cultural experience” at the Hofbräuhaus in Munich during Oktoberfest (Oral reflection 6, winter semester). In December, Evelyn and Sarah traveled every weekend to different cities to see various Christmas markets. In the New Year they began to plan a whirlwind European vacation for their semester break in March. Evelyn’s friend from home also joined them on their 26 day tour of 22 cities. Other trips included receiving visitors. Sarah’s sister and friend visited over the winter break. Her best friend from high school visited in May and while they stayed in Marburg for two weeks, they also took a week-long beach vacation in Greece. Research has shown that those who were constantly traveling and away from their local context may feel less connected to this local context (Kinginger, 2008). Sarah did begin to move away from the dominant travel discourse as the winter semester finished, however. She stated that she began to feel locally tied to the city in that Marburg “feels like home” (Interview 2, winter semester). Interestingly, this renewed interest in Marburg happened around the time that she met the German men in the fraternity. When one of her friends from high school visited in May, Sarah enjoyed the fact that she could show her friend the fraternity parties. She wanted her friend to experience exactly what she did every day. While Sarah saw the year abroad as a time to travel and visit as many places as possible before going back home, after a time, she did feel a connection to the local context and ended up spending more time in Marburg in the summer semester. The connections born out of the fraternity community may have led her to renegotiate her travel goals. Or, perhaps her travel checklist was simply complete. Still, Sarah’s earlier
emphasis shifted as she began to prioritize local relationships, most notably, her late-summer relationship with Jan.

5.4.5 Conclusion

Overall, Sarah’s insecurity in applying her language skills on a day-to-day basis led her to interact mostly with English speakers for most of the year. She did show some minor reflection of her own actions, stating “looking at who I hang out with it makes sense I don’t speak much German” (Interview 3, summer semester). However, she did not follow up with ways to change, showing that her initial goals of improving her German shifted in order to avoid the need to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences. Sarah’s close friendship with Evelyn created an opportunity for access to communities that she, on her own, would never have searched out. This particular point highlights that having other English speaking (and international) friends can be of great value as far as meeting new people is concerned. It is not only Germans who provide access to other local German communities like the Verbindung, whether the person’s participation in that community is real or imagined. Sarah’s limited reflection on navigating linguistic and sociocultural differences in Marburg plus her continued reliance on familiar frames of reference when doing so show that very little transformation took place during her year abroad. Sarah did not seem to develop either intercultural competence or translingual and transcultural competence as there was little reflection on her own culture, language, and ways of being through the lens of another. Furthermore, her need to fulfill tangible goals that did not emphasize the process or quality of relationships showed that she focused on preserving her emotional security and core identity by projecting what she desired and expected onto an existing community, instead of getting to know the people and relationships qualitatively. She reached two of her most important goals – she traveled extensively and had a German boyfriend, Jan. This relationship, however,
ended as soon as she was back in the United States. In the final interview, Sarah noted how important the year had been for her, stating, “I never thought I’d want to stay this much” (Interview 4, summer semester). Since leaving Marburg, Sarah graduated from college and moved back home. She then began working in sales at a local business in her hometown. She still yearns to return to Germany.

5.5 In David’s Words

A self-described German language and culture fanatic, David began his year abroad eagerly, with hopes of a resounding success. During his first few weeks in Germany, David enthusiastically reflected on his desire “richtig eingelebt [zu] wirken” ‘to appear really settled in’ (Oral reflection 2, winter semester). Much to his surprise, David was crippled with homesickness for the first few months, though he soon created a meaningful life in Marburg where his identity and orientation to both the German and English languages began to change as well. Although he had a very difficult time settling in, David eventually became very close with a group of German friends as well as various international students. Initially, he wanted to avoid developing friendships with non-native speakers, but as will be shown, David soon abandoned this notion as he began to feel homesick and lonely, saying, “I decided I changed that that+ goal to be I’ll make friends (laughs) not making German friends it’s more realistic too” (Interview 1, winter semester). David’s goal soon shifted to fostering meaningful relationships with speakers of any language. David also had the major goal of continuing to improve his German and especially wanted to improve his accent, saying “I remember from the beginning that accent I wanted to learn to speak German without an accent+ that was the dream” (Oral reflection 5, summer semester).
5.5.1 David and homesickness

David was crippled with homesickness for the first few months in Marburg. While the new international students were taking the time to get to know one another, David stayed away, hoping to meet more German native speakers. However, meeting people was tough at first. David also had limited internet and telephone access for a few months, since those who lived in the dorms were responsible for finding their own telephone and internet providers and paying for services themselves. David felt disconnected, and found that to be quite isolating, noting “I didn't have a connection to the outside world” (Interview 1, winter semester). He could not figure out how to be David in this new context, and felt very lonely with little support. He desperately missed his family and friends. David crafted a spreadsheet that counted down when he was going home for Easter, as well as for good: “I’m looking right at my uh++ excel spreadsheet that I made that counts down the days and graphically records every+ everything that I um think is important” (Oral reflection 6, winter semester). Through interviews as well as personal communication, it was clear that David’s extreme homesickness led him to become very attached to this countdown document. It became a strange comfort and perhaps unhealthy obsession during his hardest times in the first few months. David talked about typing in numbers to see how many days were left until various important events, like Christmas, when he went to visit a friend, and Easter, when he went home for three weeks (Oral reflection 6 and Interview 1, winter semester). Sometimes, he said that he would type in incorrect dates, just to see a more “comforting” number, and that “my mind says David don't play with the graph, it's not good for you” (Interview 1, winter semester). When I asked him if it was really helping him make the time seem like it was passing quickly, he noted “it's doesn't work I'll tell you right now it's not healthy for me but it's very hard for me to change” (Interview 1, winter semester).
Informally, David told me that he did not deal with change well and wanted a structured, scheduled existence, much like the one he had at home. His initial challenges were more related to figuring out a way to have that structured existence in order to feel useful and academically, spiritually, and socially fulfilled. Other participants had trouble negotiating linguistic and cultural differences and shifted their goals the moment they experienced any such emotional insecurity, David, however, knew that in order to continue to use German, he had to learn how to navigate and find a place for himself within this new context. Though he had the highest language proficiency evaluation score and was therefore the most advanced speaker of German in the group, he still found the adjustment very difficult. In the first interview, I asked him: “what if you deleted [the spreadsheet]?” as I wondered if it hindered his day-to-day life by serving as a constant reminder that he could not go home for months (Interview 1, winter semester). David responded by staring at me, shocked and slack-jawed. He adamantly informed me that he could never delete the spreadsheet. Months later he reflected more on his difficult time with homesickness, saying that it caused him to “cry significantly (...) twice” (Oral reflection 17, winter semester). He also told me that at his lowest point he had emailed his pastor back home saying that coming to Germany was the greatest mistake of his life. During that time, I was aware that he was very lonely and homesick, so we sometimes met to talk. During the first interview, David told me how important I was to him on his lonely days, saying, “well, you've been a huge help already in the first two months” (Interview 1, winter semester).

These moments led David to reflect on who he was as a person. He tried to figure out how he was supposed to act in this new and unfamiliar place, and yet still maintain his goals of improving his German:

I’m having a sense of identity crisis of sorts because+ what I know to be David is not working here I’m trying to force the David that I thought should be in a place that the David that I thought should be won’t work (...) (Oral reflection 8, winter semester)
I really think part of it is figuring out who I am (Oral reflection 14, winter semester)

Here, David experienced some major identity destabilization about the need to view himself in a different way. He came to a realization that his American self was not working in a German context. His identity was clearly at risk and this was causing him to have severe emotional insecurities. Through this difficult time, David talked a lot about who he was and what was happening to him (Oral reflections, 6, 8, 14, and 17; Interviews 1 and 2, winter semester). David seemed aware that a multiplying of the self, or *desdoblamiento*, was occurring (Pratt, 2002). This led him to lose confidence in who he was and who he had to become in this new context.

Homesickness is common amongst study abroad students. David longed to go home, and it was certainly due in part to the fact that at home, he knew exactly who he was (Oral reflection, 8, winter semester). In Marburg, he had a hard time making new friends. He mentioned that he had a hard time with more “superficial interactions”, which may have had something to do with it (Interview 1, winter semester). David noted that he also needed some structure and had no idea how to create a similar routine for himself in Marburg. Therefore, he often felt that he had no purpose (Oral reflection, 8, winter semester). He soon realized that he had to re-envision and re-create a new normal, a new daily routine in order to feel fulfilled and happy (Interview 1, winter semester). That David was able to reflect on and discuss his internal identity politics brought about many discussions of coping strategies.

In late fall 2009, David began to spend a lot more time with international students, including American students who speak a lot of English. This was a challenge for him, especially since his father, who he called “very pig-headed,” would be angry to find out that he was spending time with native English speakers (Interview 2, winter semester). David’s original plan was to avoid getting too close to the international student community, and he especially wanted to avoid speaking English. He soon realized, however, that having friends and communicating with other people was more important than looking to befriend just Germans. David stated: “I haven’t
really played up the relationship with [the English-speaking community] to the people at home, sorry,” though he listed Katie’s English-speaking community and various other international students as among his most important friendships (Interview 2, winter semester). He recognized this in the same interview, and actively decided to change his approach, saying, “I decided I changed that, goal to be I’ll make friends [at all], not making German friends it’s more realistic too” (Interview 2, winter semester). By the end of the year, he noted: “I remember thinking well I’m not going to be friends with anybody who isn’t a native speaker,” talking about how this unrealistic expectation was not realized, and left him feeling unnecessarily lonely when he could have started building friendships during the first few months like everyone else (Interview 4, summer semester). Indeed, changing his mind and actively attempting to make English-speaking and other international friends demonstrated David’s growing openness to shifting his goals through critical reflection. This eventually gave way to some changes in his views and orientations towards both the German and the English language.

In a December reflection, it was clear that David was beginning to deal with his emotional insecurity better and that he was slowly overcoming his severe homesickness through his re-orientation to the countdown spreadsheet, saying “I don’t look at that first thing in the morning like I used to I don’t look at that the last thing before I go to bed at night like I used to” (Oral reflection 14, winter semester). David eventually worked through his homesickness and carved out a place for himself in Marburg. He realized that who he was back home could not work in this new context, and ultimately succeeding in re-negotiating who he wanted and had to be in this new context. He negotiated issues related to homesickness and changed his formerly narrow perception of who he should have friendships with while abroad. David wanted to have the ability to speak a lot of German with Germans. When he realized that he was limiting who he could interact in German with, he decided to try to develop friendships with non-Germans as well. After weeks of getting to know others from the United States, and other European countries,
David eventually settled into Marburg, and enjoyed living independently there. He shifted his friendship goals in order to have as many opportunities to speak (German or English) as possible. In so doing, David developed new ways of being in the local context.

5.5.2 David and belonging

David often informed me that he has a very hard time making friends, noting that this had always been the case. He did attempt to branch out on his own, but had setbacks. This may have been due to characteristics that made him somewhat different from other 20-year-olds. David is religious; a devout Lutheran. He is currently studying at a seminary. He speaks with conviction when asked about his personal, political and religious beliefs. He tends to dress a bit older than most people his age, and he speaks with great maturity. In Marburg, David focused on school assignments and emphasized his studies. He did not go to parties, and at the very most enjoyed a glass of wine from time to time. These were not the dominant characteristics of his peer group back home or in Germany. David also happened to be gay, though this was something he did not often publicly discuss, as he preferred it to be a private issue. Another important personal issue to consider is that prior to David's arrival in Germany, he had succeeded in losing an extraordinary 100 pounds. He was naturally thrilled about his progress; though he noted that he still had more weight to lose. It was hard for him to navigate being overweight in Germany. David knew he had already made some great weight loss accomplishments, and yet he worried that because no one knew this about him, that they would just see an overweight American man. His insecurities regarding this issue are demonstrated in the following excerpt of an early oral reflection, in which he described trying to befriend one of his dormitory floormates, who told him he “seems American,” and as David felt, positioned him as fat:

aber ich meinte, es kommt davon dass ich ziemlich dick bin (...) weil (...) ich meinte dass
but I thought, it comes from the fact that I’m pretty fat (...) because (...) I thought that

er+ an meinem bauch also+ geschaut hat und+ geguckt und da das hat++ ja das hat mich

he looked at my belly and looked and th- that ++ yeah that

ein bisschen gestört.

bothered me a little bit.

(Oral reflection 12, winter semester)

This was a major rich point for David. He realized that Germans may use the word American to also categorize a person as being overweight. David had a hard time continuing with his weight loss in Germany, as he had originally hoped to do. This was something that he thought about often, and he talked about how the clothing sizes were much smaller in Germany. This made him feel as though he had made no progress. This affected his self-esteem. David says, “at home I can wear a size 2x to 3x maybe sometimes even a 1x [now] depending on how it’s made (...) I bought a pair of swimming shorts here (...) yeah and I had to get 5x and that’s like+ not normal” (Oral reflection 12, summer semester). After returning home, he continued with his weight loss and eventually lost even more.

During his period of homesickness, David maintained close contact with loved ones back home, and spoke regularly with German friends he had made via many years of participation in online forums. Years before going to Marburg, David searched out German interlocutors via online forums with the hope of improving his German communication skills. He was not necessarily looking to prepare for a sojourn in Germany directly, but was instead looking for a way to use German more regularly. He came across a website, began posting, and was soon a core member and contributor of a couple different forums. The contributors of these forums were mostly middle-aged German women. These women served as an online support network for David during the early months when he felt depressed and wished to go home. Some tried to help by inviting him to visit them in person, and he took one family up on their offer. Throughout the
fall, David spent a few weekends at one woman’s family home and even spent Christmas vacation there. Certainly, communicating with these women on a regular basis and visiting the one woman and her family was helpful. However, David still longed for friends closer to his own age in Marburg. For months, he spoke about his great fear that he would remain lonely and depressed in Marburg and that nothing would change. In December, however, to his great surprise, David had an epiphany about a group of German friends Marburg with whom he was growing closer. This was a group of women who, in previous years, had studied abroad for one year at his home university. He had not known them well while they studied at his home institution, but they knew of each other. As such, this group had a lot in common, and the group made many initial efforts to include David in their social circle upon his arrival in Marburg. They understood what it was like to live abroad themselves and, in addition, were all church-goers, did not drink a lot or go to big parties, and were serious students. These were all things that were important for David. They invited him regularly to lunch in the cafeteria and eventually they invited him to other social gatherings as well. For a while, however, David believed that they were just trying to be nice, and were not necessarily interested in investing in a real friendship. He had known before he left for Germany that he would be able to contact these women for initial help. David had hoped that these women may serve as a way for him to get to know many more Germans, but during his phase of extreme homesickness, he felt that he was more of a burden than a welcome addition to their group. In early December, after going away to Berlin for a weekend on an ERASMUS trip, David returned to multiple emails from this group of German women. They were planning a movie night and wanted to make sure he would be able to attend. David realized that the group was waiting patiently for his response before making plans. This was an important moment for David, and he finally felt accepted by a group that he could call friends: “it came to my attention that+ now these people really do want me to come there (…) I’m really excited about that um really excited about+ having+ friends” (Oral reflection 18, winter
semester). It seems, too, that he fully recognized the implication of being called a *Freund* in a German context, as explained earlier in Brad’s case. Around this time, he started to feel less homesick and more settled in. He felt at home with his German friends, and was encouraged by the fact that they treated him like any other in the group. He was an active, full participant in this community. David noted:

> it’s wonderful, Katja, Juliane, Christina, they are wonderful people they have studied abroad and know what I’m going through, but they don’t try to baby me, I don’t feel… they understand where I’m coming from but also like you’re in Germany…they don’t make it burdensome, but it’s normal interactions (Interview 2, winter semester)

The access and acceptance of these women made David want to invest more in the community and regularly take part in all parts of their lives. These friends were aware of his salient identity issues, and he reflected on theirs, for example, the importance of their shared religious beliefs. This community also gave him the feeling of having a routine, since they spent time together regularly. As such, through the friendships he had with these women, he moved past his emotional insecurity and identity vulnerability and learned new ways to be David in Germany.

In December, David was also happy because he learned that a friend from home would come to visit in early January. He did not go home for Christmas, so he was thrilled about having a familiar face visit him over the holidays. But her visit and his consequent feelings about their time together shocked him. They met in London, spent five days there, and then traveled back to Marburg for a week. David quickly discovered in London that she saw him as their tour guide, and he was immediately frustrated with her need to rely on what was familiar. She would not try new things. She had never been abroad. David felt her expectation was that he would lead her through everything, though he too was unfamiliar with London. Their orientations to being tourists were extremely different and caused tension between them. She wanted to tour London in
a way that made her feel emotionally secure, and he wanted to do things differently. Initially, he tried to validate her wishes but found that he preferred instead to do what he wanted:

after a few days of having to try to conform her expectations to mine I just simply said you know what (…) this was really hard for me because I wanted to be together and travel together but I did break down and [went on my own and did what I came to do]

and I was so much happier afterwards (Oral reflection 22, winter semester)

David stated further, “I so wanted some connection to home and when I had it, it was like ok go now” (Oral reflection 22, winter semester). David, a person who had very similar problems in the beginning, not having known how to be alone and himself in a foreign culture now found he had no patience to deal with this issue in his friend. He was aware and sorry for her discomfort in this new context, but after a few days of her complaints, he developed a low tolerance for her helplessness. Such moments saw David realizing that access to home was no longer the only thing that could make him happy. He was shocked that after so many months of pining for a familiar face, that he now wanted her gone. Afterwards, upon returning to Marburg, he also realized that “it just felt like I didn’t have to worry once I was in Marburg it just felt really good to be back in Marburg” (Oral reflection 23, winter semester). In general, David’s orientation to his year abroad changed quite dramatically around this point. In the beginning, he had not known how to act, and could not figure out how to be himself in Marburg. By January, he had detailed plans and desires with regards to daily life in Marburg. David had changed so substantially that he felt frustrated that his friend had a difficult time navigating her first trip to Europe. It is clear that David had changed in a major way in only a few months’ time.

Towards the end of the winter semester, David noted that he was nervous about the imminent arrival of six fellow students from his home university. They were coming to study in Marburg for the summer semester. Before they arrived, he talked about how he had never felt accepted by these students back home, saying: “I had some bad memories of being used and
abused by these people from [Home University] and not being included in their circles” (Oral reflection 5, summer semester). David was worried that this group would take his new German friends away from him. Here, he positioned himself as powerless to the incoming students’ social abilities with a group of people who they had not yet met (Oral reflection 5, summer semester). David believed that these students had both the desire and the ability to intervene in his social life in this way. Note too, that he felt there would be no way to co-exist in any friendship group with them. As such, he seemed to believe that his German friends could not maintain relationships with both him and the incoming students.

However, David’s worries were short-lived. The group arrived, and the situation was nothing like he thought: “they’re not the assholes that I made them out to be in my mind” (Oral reflection 5, summer semester). In fact, David enjoyed having them in Marburg, and they became a community of great importance for him. He was shocked. This group shared a common history, and yet the interactions he was accustomed to having with these people back home were fundamentally different in Marburg. He felt that he came to know them differently, and they him. David enjoyed spending time with them, saying that they “turned out to actually be a bigger blessing than I thought it would be” (Interview 3, summer semester). At the end of the semester, three of them invited David to join them on a week-long trip to Italy. David was thrilled to go along; he finally felt like an important participant in this group. It was clear that David saw both this group and himself differently through this new context. They too communicated with him in a very different way. They actively invested in one another as friends, no longer excluding David by limiting his access to their community. One of the students told me at one point that he felt bad about the things he had said about David in the past, showing reflection and empathy for David. In Marburg, they all faced the need to negotiate linguistic and cultural differences. Addressing issues of emotional security and identity risk seems useful in helping people re-evaluate the way that they interact with others. These students were in a new place, with new routines, constructing
new identity trajectories. As such, the ways in which they once positioned each other was no longer useful or valid. They began to re-orient to and developed empathy for one another, becoming close friends and allies in a new and foreign place.

David was a student who experienced a lot of homesickness and loneliness at first. Eventually, his beliefs and hopes regarding friendships shifted as he wanted to belong in Marburg. As such, he intended to come into contact with more people, regardless of their native language. He downplayed his own agency in participating in this and other social groups: “I just try to fit in wherever I can” (Interview 3, summer semester). He emphasized the importance of the sense of belonging he had with his German friends and home university friends. These were communities of mutual importance for all involved. Particularly his German friends’ acceptance of him was extremely influential and he realized how much his friends meant to him at the end of the year, saying, “I don’t want to say goodbye to my German friends” (Interview 4, summer semester).

5.5.3 Thoughts on German and English

Like other participants, David’s original language goals shifted throughout the year, though not as dramatically. This is likely because his proficiency level was the highest in the group, though he still talked about wanting to improve his pronunciation and speak accent-free German (Interview 3, summer semester). As the year progressed, David changed his thoughts on speaking without an accent, saying: “you know what, that’s ok” (Interview 3, summer semester). This showed that he learned to be ok with the fact that a perfected accent was not going to be a realistic priority. In fact, David seemed to be satisfied with his language skills at the end of the year in general: “simply put, I’m happy with my German” (Interview 4, summer semester). In addition, his participation in various communities, whether English or German-speaking, guided
David to re-negotiate his orientations to both the German and the English language:

Now for a bombshell I suppose+ I always considered myself to be+ a German fanatic for the German language German culture (…) but now you know what I don’t think the German language is the alpha and the omega anymore I really don’t feel that way (...)I think the English language is a very+ nice language (Oral reflection 11, summer semester)

David also adds that this may be because speaking German does not make him special in Germany, and speaking English as a native speaker does: “here everyone can speak German and the reason maybe I like English here is because+ the fact that I’m perfectly fluent in it+ (…) makes me+ special+ there could be a degree of truth to that” (Oral reflection 11, summer semester). Certainly, David was more critically aware of and emotionally reactive to conflicts L2 since he had a more advanced proficiency in the L2. Since he experienced more rich points due to his ability to reflect on more complex linguistic experiences, he was also more able pick out issues that came up, reflect on these issues, and deal with them in his own way. In contrast, most of the other participants could not reflect on rich points in the way that David did; many, in fact, did not experience such moments of conflict due to a limited linguistic ability or the desire to isolate oneself in a safer, less challenging L1 environment. As such, it is quite clear that David experienced the greatest transformations of any of the participants.

In particular, David’s re-orientation to both German and English is notable. He re-negotiated his fanaticism for the German language after living in a German context for a longer period of time. His feelings about who he is as a person changed through the German language. In the United States, David’s knowledge of German made him feel special compared to everyone else; it was the thing that made him stand out. In Germany, this was not the case. His complicated views of the German language and Germany were certainly related to his own identity. In Germany, people praised his excellent German, but his native knowledge of English was also
deemed important in that context and as such, made him feel desired. David re-negotiated his own identity vis-à-vis his relationship to German and English, claiming that something had changed after having been in Germany. David began to position the German language as more of a day-to-day and regular occurrence, and nothing unique or special at all. This had consequences for his identity development. Instead of putting one language on a pedestal and judging one language against another, he began to see the value of himself as a multilingual individual.

### 5.5.4 Conclusion

David’s lack of individual agency and access to participate in communities in the early months led to a lot of self-reflection and re-negotiation of what it meant to be David. As he figured out how to be himself in Marburg, he took steps to stop feeling stagnant and eventually became an important member of groups of German and American friends. Not only did he begin to realize he belonged to those communities and in Marburg in general, he also began to re-negotiate who he was through members in these communities accepting and investing in him. David consistently made sure that using German remained a number one objective. Even after his early homesick period, he re-focused in a way that still meant he could speak as much German as possible. David saw himself differently particularly through new orientations to both German and English, and his ability to critically distance himself from his relationships to both languages show early signs of developing as a translingual and transcultural speaker. The most interesting example of this shift can be seen in his developing criticality of the German language and newfound appreciation of the English language. His newfound appreciation of English was not a simple overreliance on English as a familiar frame of reference, as seen in the case of Katie, Sarah, and Mark. On the contrary, David problematized his previous views of language, realizing that his perceptions had changed, and therefore, he had changed too. Since his year abroad in
Marburg. David has graduated from college and is now attending the seminary. He plans to go into the ministry once he has finished his studies there.

5.6 In Joe’s Words

Joe is a student who focused most of his time abroad on academic achievements in his undergraduate major, chemistry. His story began when he flew to Europe for the first time in May 2009 to do a ten week internship in Prague, Czech Republic. Afterwards, he spent one month taking German language courses and lived with a host family in Münster, Germany. As such, Joe arrived in Marburg having already made some adjustments to life in Germany. He planned this purposefully in order to have some extra time to gain confidence in comprehending and speaking German. Early on, he hoped to “become bilingual”, though he eventually re-negotiated this desire, especially after realizing that he did not have to speak as much German in Marburg as he originally thought (Interview 1, winter semester). At the end of the sojourn, his closest friends were a few American men from his college, including a man named Craig. He also became closer with some German lab mates in the summer semester. Joe came to Germany with a 4.0 grade point average and maintaining that was a major goal. Joe’s intense focus on grades and schoolwork was apparent throughout the entire year. He had been taking German as an elective since his freshman year of college, and always saw it as a way to study chemistry and other sciences in Germany. Overall, his main reasons for coming to Germany were not primarily about language learning. Joe saw the potential for language learning as more of a secondary bonus; the real prize was having the opportunity to study at a European university.
5.6.1 The introvert

Joe is a fairly quiet, laconic individual. When he would speak, he expressed his opinions clearly and succinctly. He told me, however, that he spent a lot of time alone, especially in the early months, saying, “I really don’t go out of my room that much, I have a lot of work by the time I get done with lab now I do my homework and then go to bed” (Interview 1, winter semester). The early difficulties and frustrations that Joe faced while in Marburg could be one reason for why he often preferred to stay in his room for long periods of time, though his somewhat reclusive actions may also simply have been evidence of his more introverted personality.

Joe came to Marburg with other students from his college. Some of them were his good friends back home, and so they naturally spent time together in Marburg. They often met to play video games together in their dormitory rooms. Joe, like many others, told me that he had a hard time meeting Germans. Joe found Germans to be very quiet and not very sociable. He laughed, telling me that his girlfriend back home joked that he and Germans should get along just fine since “[we both] don’t like talking about things” (Interview 1, winter semester). Joe lived in a suite in his dormitory, which meant that he shared a kitchen and bathroom with just one other man. This man was a German pharmaceutical student named Lukas who only spoke German. Theirs was an interesting relationship due not only to the language barrier but also the fact that they had very different personalities. For these reasons, Joe and Lukas had a few interesting interactions as they navigated differing linguistic and cultural expectations regarding how to co-exist.

In the first month of living in Marburg, Lukas informed Joe about how they would organize and clean the shared living space of the apartment, giving Joe some insight into the type of living style he would be expected to have. Joe positioned Lukas as both a control freak and a
neat freak; he was someone who had particular desires about how one should orient to shared living spaces (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). It seemed that Lukas set all of the rules, and Joe just tried to follow them so that both would be happy. In complying, he was also hopeful that he and Lukas would be able talk more in detail and perhaps get to know one another better:

[Lukas is] kind of anal about+ things being clean+ so it probably wasn’t the best I’m probably not the best roommate for uh for him but he seems like a nice guy and he wants to get along so+ uh I’m sure we’ll have some good interactions (Oral reflection 3, winter semester)

The early interactions that he did have with Lukas were for the most part challenging and frustrating, as Joe noted here:

he doesn’t speak English and I’ve been trying to+ explain myself like he you know he seems to think that I don’t understand him and I do I it’s just I I re can’t generate things to say in return so it (…) seems to him as though I have no idea what’s going on (Oral reflection 3, winter semester)

Challenging as their interactions were at first, Joe commented that it was a shame that Lukas was not around very often, and even questioned Lukas’ ability to be a good student given the amount of time he spent away from Marburg, saying, “I don’t really know why he keeps going home or how he can manage to be a student” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). Joe would have really liked to have the chance to speak with Lukas more one-on-one, since he was one of the few people in Joe’s life with whom he had to speak German. Joe found it unfortunate that Lukas went home a lot, because he saw it as a missed opportunity for language practice. What he may not have been familiar with, however, is the fact that in Germany, little to no emphasis on campus living exists. In Germany, the university itself is generally not conceptualized as a social space. This is something that is quite different from the United States. German students therefore routinely go home for the weekend, as it is often the case that their parents live in a nearby town.
Joe’s lack of knowledge surrounding the typical practices of German university students’ surely contributed to the ways in which he positioned them.

In the middle of the year, Lukas was in fact at the apartment more, as he studying for his state pharmacy exams. Struggling with some of the material, Lukas actually searched out Joe’s help in areas that were related to chemistry. Lukas knew that Joe was very studious and that he had recently done very well in his winter semester seminars and labs. That Lukas wanted his help really boosted Joe’s own self-assurance regarding his chemistry knowledge as well as his German-speaking abilities, and he was pleased to be able to interact with his roommate about a topic he already felt quite comfortable speaking about in German. For the first time in this roommate relationship, Joe was positioned as the expert in one area of this community. He felt validated and saw it as a way to encourage more contact: “that was pretty cool I mean I feel (…) better that we can+ actually talk now and get along it kind of broke the awkwardness+ um seem to get along pretty well now” (Oral reflection 29, summer semester). This was a major turning point for Joe, as it was the first time that he felt positioned as an expert in something through communicating with his roommate. In having a closer look at what Lukas was working on, Joe could also begin to better understand his ways of being and orienting to university studies.

Though Joe and Lukas never became extremely close friends, this moment of reflection helped Joe to see Lukas differently at this point in the semester.

During the middle of the winter semester, Joe also started to befriend some of his German class and lab mates. After class one day, he noted “I had a conversation today in my uh organic reactions class with one of the Germans which is rare because you know, they’re not very sociable” (Oral reflection 8, winter semester). Perhaps it was that they too had introverted personalities, and that both this and an interest in chemistry eventually connected them. Towards the end of the winter semester, Joe began to hang out with some of the lab mates outside of school a few times. He described how they went to a bar together and that he was invited to their
place once as well. At that point, Joe emphasized that it was still somewhat collegial and had only the qualities of the beginnings of a friendship (Interview 2, winter semester). Here, I noted that Joe seemed to understand the differences in German between *Freund* ‘friend’ and *Bekannter* ‘acquaintance’, and how these words and their conceptualizations do not map one-to-one. It took Joe awhile to call his lab mates friends, and though he did not directly emphasize his knowledge of the different meanings and vocabulary related to this topic, he may have been taking cues from them regarding what the kinds of relationships were. Overall, Joe seemed to development of an awareness of how Germans view friendship and these might development.

In the early summer semester, Joe acknowledged that he had been spending more time with his German lab mates outside of the lab, even though he maintained that he still spent a great deal of time studying in the lab and at home. Joe noted: “I don’t spend that much time with really anybody, outside of formal classes but yeah the small amount that I do, it’s increased with lab” (Interview 3, summer semester). In the third interview, he talked about certain individuals in his lab, including one young man, Daniel, who had an American father (Interview 4, summer semester). Joe and Daniel spoke mostly English together. Daniel invited Joe to his hometown, and he had a wonderful time there. He also talked about another student in his lab who was an avid player of a particular German card game that Joe and Mark often played (Interview 4, summer semester). In general, Joe began to have more access to new communities through these two friendships, and he made sure to take advantage of every chance to attend events with these people. Joe was generally not one to take charge and organize social gatherings, especially when he did not know the people; however, Joe was invested in the process of getting to know those who wanted to know him. In the fourth interview, he even commented that he had been watching a lot of World Cup games with his lab mates. At first, Joe noted that he spoke a mix of English and some German with these friends. By the end of the year, however, he said that they mostly spoke English when they were together. Overall, he estimated that he spent about half of his
socializing time with these German lab mates and their friends (Interview 3, summer semester). The other half of his socializing time was spent with the American men from his college (Interview 3, summer semester). Both the lab mates and Joe invested more into their friendships at the beginning of the second semester. One can imagine that students in the lab would be more comfortable around one another after a semester’s completion. However, it also seemed that Joe was granted more access to this community soon after he attained excellent grades on the winter semester exams and lab reports. He proved himself to be a top student in chemistry, even though some of his interactions in seminars and labs took place in both German and English due to the fact that he was not very comfortable speaking and writing lab reports in German. Thus, the German students may have also been impressed by Joe’s academic results, leading to him gaining more access to their community.

Besides spending time with the American men from his college and his German lab mates, Joe was otherwise found alone in his room studying, chatting online with his girlfriend back home or sleeping, as well as working in the chemistry lab. Joe came to know Germany through spending time with his German lab mates, hanging out with his American friends, and focusing on maintaining his grade point average and studying new chemistry topics in specialized areas. Joe’s overall approach to making friends was somewhat reserved, in that he did not actively search out new contacts. However, he was by no means a loner at the end of the year. Having regular access to certain communities, Joe started to feel comfortable around many of his new contacts. Later in the year, he no longer positioned himself as awkward in those contexts, and even began to actively make plans to return to Marburg through the Fulbright program (Interview 3, summer semester). This was a huge change, as in the beginning he emphasized his indifference about being abroad in general (Interview 1, winter semester). Over the course of the year, Joe began to feel more comfortable in his own skin in Marburg. He was typically not one to amass large groups of friends, and this did not change, nor did he alter his reserved, quiet nature.
Still, Joe was eventually very successful in developing good friendships with his German lab mates. He took up every opportunity to develop relationships with people who had similar academic pursuits. Clearly, introversion and limited linguistic abilities did not preclude him from developing close, personal relationships with local L2 speakers. These friendships granted him access to other communities as well.

### 5.6.2 Academic pursuits

Upon his arrival in Marburg, Joe held the belief that Germany was a place where one could get a more in-depth education in chemistry (and many other subject areas). He felt that Germans focused more and earlier on very specific subfields, such as organic chemistry. Joe lamented the American school system, saying that overall, education was an “underlying problem” in the United States (Interview 1, winter semester). He found that German students were exposed to more subject-specific training in the various arts and sciences while still in high school, unlike in the United States (Interview 1, winter semester). In the American school system, Joe said, there are few chances to study one area more in-depth until you go to graduate school (Interview 1, winter semester). This caused him to reflect on what he felt was advantageous about each education system: “I like structure in the American system but I like the flexibility of the German system” (Interview 3, summer semester). Towards the end of the summer semester, Joe displayed a continued interest in conducting organic chemistry research in Marburg after realizing that he had impressed some of his German professors there. Joe talked about his plans to return to Marburg:

I’m applying for a Fulbright to come back to Marburg actually (...) I (...) talked to one of my organic [chemistry] professors and (...) he has a really interesting project and interesting research over overall (...) the professors at [my home college] said I could
apply for it um…and I managed I I guess to impress the organic professors um…I I just looked at all the research and I mean I sent him a proposal a few weeks ago…and he was happy with it (Interview 3, summer semester)

Joe ended up going to great lengths in the summer semester to secure a way to return to Marburg, and Germany, in the near future. Considering the fact that he did not prioritize language learning and is in fact at many times quite frustrated with his inability to speak German, this seemed to be an interesting move. However, Joe’s prioritization of his chemistry education and lab friendships were certainly major parts of this decision to return, and as shown, not everyone sojourns for language learning reasons.

As noted, Joe spent a lot of his time trying to maintain his perfect grade point average and strongly emphasized studying over socializing. He worried that the year abroad would lower his grade point average and impede his ability to get into the graduate schools of his choice. Interestingly, Joe said that he originally thought he would be spending a lot more time hanging out and going to parties while abroad. In the first interview, Joe noted: “[I’m] definitely not homesick…I won’t regret it, I feel pretty neutral about [being abroad], another year of studying a lot of work, originally I thought it would be more going out, experiencing Germany, I don’t do that very often” (Interview 1, winter semester). Joe’s quiet nature meant he rarely spoke to people he did not know well. Informally, I observed that with close friends, he was more talkative, showing that with familiarity, he felt more comfortable speaking. This is surely common. Still, I suspect that his quiet demeanor was a reason for why he did not often actively attempt to speak with many people outside of his very small inner circle of friends.

Joe alluded to the fact that he sometimes felt positioned as a person who did not speak German, and yet he too often actively positioned himself as being outside of the German-speaking world. For example, he stated outright that he does not “speak German” when reacting to a time that he got yelled at in Marburg and could not understand what was being said (Oral
reflection 20, winter semester). Whether it was a result of being positioned as a non-German speaker or his shifting goals as regards language learning while abroad, Joe did not seem to view himself as someone who could claim membership to the German-speaking world, nor did he expect others to see him as a person who belonged. He discussed what often happened when he would attempt to speak German with Germans, saying, “when I try to speak German (…) the Germans usually just revert to English” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). This may also have caused him to throw all his effort into something that he knew he could do: chemistry. Joe asked and was given permission to write most lab reports and exams in English, since most of his professors and teaching assistants possessed an excellent command of English. One professor even offered to lecture in English for Joe and his American friend Craig, though Joe remained uncomfortable with how the Germans in the class would react and subsequently view him (Oral reflection 24, winter semester). In this case, Joe was clearly sensitive to how Germans in his course might position him if he were to accept English-only seminars and lectures as well. That being said, it was clear that he put most of his active energy into understanding materials, succeeding academically and maintaining his grade point average, even going so far as to ask multiple professors if he could write exams and reports in English.

Joe saw his year abroad as an opportunity to work ahead in the areas of chemistry he was specifically interested in continuing with in the future. He was not surprised by what he felt was a more thorough European education in multiple subfields of chemistry; however, he was astounded when he realized that he “can (…) still stand out from the Germans even though I don’t speak their language” (Interview 3, summer semester). Indeed, Joe’s achievements in his coursework in Marburg came as a big surprise to him, and he commented on this again at the end of the year:

Before I came here I kind of thought that the Germans were somehow more intelligent, it’s hard to tell…you know (…) if you don’t speak their language you kind of don’t look
at them the same way as you do uh peers at the English-speaking university at home but um after being here I kind of realized that they’re just the same as the American students and I think I can still kind of…excel here (Interview 4, summer semester)

Clearly, Joe experienced a rich point and re-negotiated his views on what it meant to be a foreign student. He began positioning German and American students as similar, in that the Germans were not necessarily smarter or more studious than Americans, which was something that he had originally thought (Oral reflection 3, summer semester). This changing perception of German students as people who were also capable of being lazy and uninterested in studying gave him a new perspective on his views of the German education system. One of the main reasons he came to Marburg was to get to study in what he felt was a more superior European education system. Joe, however, began to re-position the people within that supposedly superior system as also espousing certain negative characteristics and bad study habits that he often saw in students back home. This rich point caused him to re-think how he positioned German students, their habits and even their intelligence as compared to American students. In his final interview, Joe positioned himself as having the ability to do very well regardless of the fact that he was not a native speaker of German. He found it somewhat shocking that an American could perform on par with many Germans in subject-specific subfields, even though that person may have had limited abilities in speaking German. He tempered his views of the German education system and its students as he negotiated why an American student with little confidence in his German could do as well as, if not better than, many German chemistry students (Oral reflection 3, summer semester). Joe drew comparisons between how he felt he may have initially been viewed in Germany with how he and others view foreign students back home. Here, he re-oriented to how he positioned foreign students in general, realizing that one cannot equate linguistic ability with academic prowess. This was a major intercultural transformation.
5.6.3 Urban, sociocultural, and linguistic differences

A lot of Joe’s early oral reflections focused on his negotiation of the linguistic and sociocultural differences that he encountered living in Marburg. But as he put it:

this isn’t so much of a uh cultural shock between Germany and the US as it is uh cultural shock between living in a rural uh college town like [Collegetown] and uh now being in a much larger university city (Oral reflection 11, winter semester)

Joe noted something here that is rarely discussed in research on language learning and study abroad: he, Brad, Sarah and Mark were used to studying at a very small college, situated in a very small town in rural Pennsylvania. Suddenly, they were abroad and studying at a university that was about fourteen times larger and in a city that was about twelve times larger. He and the others had to adjust to life in Marburg not only as foreigners, but also as people who were now living in a mid-sized city. Brad and Mark, in fact, list this explicitly as a reason for going to Marburg. However, moving to an urban European city was perhaps not something that Joe was fully prepared for. In addition to this move to a more urban space, there were many linguistic and cultural growing pains that Joe had to negotiate while in Marburg. He had a hard time dealing with feelings of inadequacy, and many situations that he came across left him feeling frustrated and angry.

Joe’s self-criticism regarding his German-speaking abilities is not surprising when one considers the pressure he put on himself to attain academic perfection in general. As an overachieving student, he consistently stated that his linguistic inaccuracies made him feel stupid and/or inadequate. He felt that Germans were positioning him as a complete idiot. Joe commented:

I say something very loudly and they still don’t understand it but it of course it’s+ my pronunciation+ so you know that kind of makes me feel stupid in general (…)
characterizes most of my interactions with other Germans and the feeling of stupidity and inadequacy (Oral reflection 3, winter semester)

Later in that same month, he stated: “[I] still haven’t learned how to speak but I don’t speak very much” followed by “[because] I don’t need to” (Interview 1, winter semester). In the first interview, Joe made it quite clear that he purposefully avoided speaking German by relying on the excellent English that most educated German people could speak.

One of his biggest expectations pre-sojourn was that he would have to speak German in most contexts – this expectation was not met. Joe, like many others, assumed he would communicate in German much more than he did. However, unlike the others, he was not disappointed by the fact that he could rely heavily on English. Joe noted in the first interview that his goals had already shifted in the first few months:

Before I came to Europe uh, ideally, uh like everyone wanted to uh be uh bilingual (…) but uh I think that’s pretty unrealistic now maybe if that were my only goal and I didn’t have anything else to do but my my goal uh…has shifted to surviving and making sure I I get uh…the requirements for my classes done (…) so usually you know German is subordinate to that (Interview 1, winter semester)

This quote re-emphasized that his goals in Marburg were only loosely tied with improving his language skills. Joe also noted that he often used English for reasons of efficiency, saying that if a German could say something in ten seconds that would otherwise take him thirty, then why should he even bother?

It would appear that Joe started abandoning the idea of improving his German early on when he realized he could not learn languages in the way that he learned chemistry. He was not used to having moments that caused him to feel stupid and inadequate. Joe had not had this type of learning experience in other subjects. However, he did understand that he could not always choose to abandon speaking German in Marburg:
In our lab our T.A. speaks English well and now he addresses the whole class in English because of me and Craig and it bothers me I will talk to him this coming week I don’t want the other students to hate us because of that, it’s not fair to them (Interview 1, winter semester)

In this comment, it is clear that Joe was aware of the identities of other students in the lab – they were German students at a German university. However, he found it challenging to negotiate his own desire to attain good grades by communicating primarily through English, and to keep the rest of the class from being angry with him and Craig, since, after all, it was the German students’ home context.

As the year progressed, Joe saw certain qualities of German in a new way that caused him to re-think issues of pronunciation: “I’m taking a linguistics class now, and uh we’re slowly uh learning how to properly pronounce German words which I was surprised to find is a lot different from, just how I assumed they were to be pronounced” (Oral reflection 18, winter semester). Around the same time, Joe also talked about a positive encounter he had in the library when searching for his lost jump drive. The interactions he had with the people working in the library while he searched for his jump drive were very successful. Still, he almost refused to give himself any credit, positioning himself as “lucky”, as seen here:

[interactions with workers in the library] went over surprisingly well definitely better most other um interactions I have+ with the Germans they always seem to understand me I’m surprised+ um++ yeah I don’t know what was up with that um+ yeah (laughs) just got lucky (Oral reflection 17, winter semester)

Joe’s early experiences showed that he negotiated many linguistic and sociocultural differences that made him feel like an inadequate German speaker. Perhaps both these experiences and the desire to maintain a perfect grade point average led him to spend a lot of time focusing on his chemistry work. Regardless, he seemed intrigued by the encounters he had, and was particularly
happy when one went well. When faced with major cultural differences, he, like many, would become angry and frustrated. However, Joe’s experiences caused him to re-negotiate his views on differing education systems as well as foreign students, language learning and intelligence. He continued to succeed in his studies, and managed to make more friends than he would have thought through his lab.

5.6.4 Conclusion

Taking all of this into consideration, it is clear that Joe’s need to re-orient to his own preconceived notions while in Marburg altered his view on foreign students, education and speaking German in varying ways. These challenging linguistic and cultural differences did not stop him from wanting to return to Marburg and Germany in general. He spoke of feelings of inadequacy and frustration, yet he flourished as a student in an entirely different educational system, where more proficient participants did not. What is more, there were moments when Joe negotiated sociocultural differences in ways that caused him to reflect on his own background and history, as well as the predetermined ideas that he had about Germany and its education system. We can see the early development of intercultural competence specifically in his renegotiation of his thoughts about the German education system and German students.

In general, Joe’s case shows the need for more research on academic desires in study abroad. Closer exploration of the types of encounters he had in his lab and lectures would allow us to better understand the kinds of experiences he had. While abroad, Joe positioned himself as an outsider to the German-speaking world more than once in his oral reflection and interview data. However, he made new friends, succeeded academically and completed his year abroad with a perfect grade point average, and a clear desire to return. Joe returned to Germany in the spring
of 2011 to do an internship, deferring his acceptance to graduate school for one year in order to do so.

5.7 In Mark’s Words

Mark, a biochemistry student, also hoped to improve his German while in Marburg. As seen with many other participants, this turned out to be a lot more difficult than he originally thought. His original reasons for going abroad came from his desire for a change; he wanted to travel and live in a new place, saying: “I see myself as the type of person that really likes change” (Interview 1, winter semester). As will be shown, however, his views of what it means to experience such large changes may have been ill-informed and naïve and this may have led to the shifts in his desire for change throughout the year. Mark consistently scored the lowest on my language proficiency evaluation. He had taken German for just two years prior to going to Marburg. When I asked exactly why he decided on German, he had a very hard time answering, and noted that he first took German to help him build a strong resume, though he said he continued with it more for personal development. As will be seen, the shifts in Mark’s desire for change via studying abroad in Germany cause one to wonder what personal development really meant for him.

5.7.1 Proficiency woes

In the first interview, Mark commented that one of his goals is “to get German down pretty well” though it appeared that he was not aware of what this might entail (Interview 1, winter semester). His low proficiency scores and goals were reasons for his struggle, though he certainly learned a lot of German while abroad. In my observations, it was very clear that his
ability to communicate and interact in German improved after the year abroad. Mark originally hoped to become bilingual by going abroad for the year, and yet one of his main reasons for going to Marburg was similar to Joe’s, in that he was taking advantage of a science education in Germany: “I’m studying science and biochemistry and my advisor was in Marburg before (…) she strongly advised me to go there since she knew I was learning German” (Interview 1, winter semester). Here I note that his advisor encouraged him to take advantage of studying in Germany for the purposes of getting a sound chemistry education.

Regardless, Mark did, in many respects, dive right into his year abroad by attempting to speak a lot of German early on. He took swing dancing lessons with a new French friend and at first was quite anxious about what this would require of him: “the first time I did it I was like really nervous because (…) I knew it was going to be in German see that was my initial reaction now I go there to have a real good time because it’s dance it’s more visual” (Interview 1, winter semester). He realized that knowing German and knowing how to physically follow dance steps were almost equally important in that context, though and admitted that “that’s another experience where+ not (…) understanding a lot of German (…) makes life a little harder” (Oral reflection 3, winter semester). Here Mark positioned himself as someone who could not understand German well, and his frustrations with German continued. In the second interview, he noted that drinking alcohol lowered his inhibitions when speaking German:

As far as progressing I think I’ve gotten I can’t really tell I think I’ve gotten a little better not as much as I’d like to (…) I mean everyone says this you know when they you’re intoxicated you’re going to speak the other language and you kinda lose your shame (…) about making mistakes so, yeah I think that’s like the main problem I know I’m going to screw things up so I kinda just like hesitate speaking (Interview 2, winter semester)

Like so many others, Mark, too, felt shame when speaking German, though he suggested here that he had considered that accepting shame would be a regular part of using a foreign language
in a foreign context. It appears that Mark recognized that making mistakes and being positioned as a non-expert was bound to happen, something that Katie, for example, was apparently less able to deal with.

In the second interview, Mark was asked to discuss his goals at that point and whether or not these goals had changed since the beginning of the sojourn:

Coming in I thought, academically (...) that was pretty much top on my priority um learning German when I first came over definitely was cause before like I really got um incorporated into Germany I thought oh not many people are gonna speak English I’m really gonna improve on my German (Interview 2, winter semester)

Similar to many of my other participants, it appeared that Mark’s thoughts on becoming bilingual had changed by the end of the first semester. Given his lower proficiency, he may simply not have noticed or reacted to some moments where salient linguistic and cultural differences came to the fore.

Notably, at the end of the year Mark stated that he never had a moment where he was proud of his German speaking ability, though he claimed he had started to feel more comfortable with certain vocabulary and structures (Interview 4, summer semester). When asked if he was fluent, he loudly proclaimed, “no, no!” (Interview 4, summer semester). Mark emphasized his belief that a fluent person had to be able to converse without pauses and with only a few mistakes; and he felt this was something that he could not yet do (Interview 4, summer semester). Still, my observations of his improved level of comfort communicating in German were corroborated by his comments here:

I definitely feel a lot more free and comfortable just speaking German with other people, bugs me when I make a mistake I shouldn’t have made but if I do make a mistake I just go with it because they usually can understand (Interview 4, summer semester)
His lower proficiency levels, however, did not inhibit his ability to get involved and engage in various communities in Marburg, including ERASMUS students and young German men he met in his dormitory. Mark seemed aware of and okay with any emotional insecurity that accompanied communicating in a second language.

5.7.2 A time for change

Early in the year, I always saw Mark at international student events with a big smile on his face. It appeared to me that he was elated to be in a new place. As previously mentioned, Mark often talked about how he was open to change. He told me about how his college decisions were based on moving away from his hometown in Massachusetts. Mark said that his mother was “clingy” and that this was one reason why he decided to move away from home for college (Interview 1, winter semester). He positioned himself early on as someone who was open to meeting new people and ready for change. When I asked him in the first interview if he felt homesick, he responded immediately, saying “not at all” (Interview 1, winter semester). When asked about his expectations and whether or not they had altered after arriving, he commented that though Marburg did exceed his expectations, “[I] don’t really know what I expected to tell you the truth” saying he just went with the flow (Interview 1, winter semester). This comment suggested that Mark did not think about actively searching out information prior to leaving, and thus had no expectations. One could also posit that he was simply unaware of the challenging differences and changes that he would face in a foreign context, due to the fact that he had little mobility capital, or minimal experience traveling or living outside of the United States. It is also possible that he viewed his pre-sojourn expectations as silly at the end of the year and simply did not want to share the information. Whatever the situation was, Mark had a very hard time clarifying the kinds of expectations he had pre-sojourn.
In his year abroad Mark befriended a number of international students early on and a few Germans from the dormitories. He maintained close friendships with the American friends from his college who were also in Marburg (Craig, Joe, Ken). At an international student party in the first semester, I observed Mark enthusiastically dancing a lyrical Brazilian dance with a group of ERASMUS students; he was grinning from ear to ear. This kind of dancing was certainly not a part of the dominant discourse on American college campuses regarding how men are expected to dance at parties. I asked him about this in the first interview, and he commented on the Marburg party scene in general:

So at [my college] the party lifestyle is you go to a room (...) and there’s a beer pong table almost sitting there always the b blue or black fluorescent light (...) yeah you just like grinding in the middle and it’s really loud music and it’s usually country or really bad rap (...) so I don’t know and it never really was (...) my thing but when I came here it’s just like uh really open and you know you’re just kinda dancing to have fun more or less (...) I don’t know I find like I don’t have to really drink to have fun (Interview 1, winter semester)

In the same interview, we discussed what the dominant discourse might be regarding the performance of masculinity at a party or in the club scene, and Mark shared his original thoughts regarding dancing for the sake of dancing (as opposed to dancing with the purpose of meeting or hitting on women):

no like the first time I was like I couldn’t shut up about how strange the dancing was here I was like oh you guys don’t do anything this is so silly (...) I don’t know I ate my own words and after a while I got used to it so (Interview 1, winter semester)

Mark became aware of other cultures’ practices, for example the ways that European international students orient to partying. He relied briefly on familiar frames of reference by completely opposing the way men were dancing in this German context. However, he was soon able to
reflect on his own reasons for opposing how European men dance, and was able to critically reflect on the actions of both German and American cultures and eventually let his emotional insecurity go. In mere months, I observed him dancing in a similar way without worrying how others viewed him – he was laughing, relaxed and having a great time. Mark’s mindfulness of this European way of partying and dancing allowed him to move beyond his emotional insecurity and participate in a totally different way.

In keeping with his desire for change, new contexts and travel, Mark saw many new places during the year. He stayed in Europe over Christmas, something that he called “neither a good nor bad experience” (Oral reflection 15, winter semester). Mark traveled to Paris for New Year’s Eve, staying with a French woman who was also studying in Marburg. Therèse was dating his close friend Craig from his college. Mark was close with many of the French women in Marburg, though he never told me if he was officially dating any of them. In the semester break, he and a few of his American friends went on a mini-tour of Europe. Mark’s brother also came to visit him during the summer semester, and they visited various German cities together. His lust for travel hearkens back to the “Grand Tour” mentality as noted by Kinginger (2008). Mark’s words in the second interview demonstrated this:

and traveling, yeah I’m only here for a year (…) and I’m gonna move on with my life so I want to travel a lot when I have the chance um and I think I have travelled a fair amount I’d like to do more (Interview 2, winter semester)

Here, it is notable that Mark saw travel as something that would not be a part of his life when he “moves on” from this context, whatever that may mean. Mark made it quite clear that his awareness of what a sojourn abroad offers was somewhat limited; for him, the study abroad year would not be a part of his real life back home. He positioned himself as only temporarily in Europe, with the mindset that he should take advantage of his current situation. Mark’s words underscore a view of study abroad as a time for personal growth via access to parties, travel and
global culture (Kinginger, 2008). This view also demonstrated that Mark was a peripheral participant in the local context in Marburg. As such, one must wonder about the desire for change that he articulated at the outset of the sojourn. It appeared at the time that he wanted something completely different. Soon, it became clear that he conceptualized this desired change perhaps as something much more superficial – Mark seemed to desire change in personal growth and development only as it related to a change in context, activities or location and not necessarily challenges to and changes in his own view of the world.

5.7.3 Meeting new people

Even though Mark often talked about the desire to meet new people, his most important group of friends included Craig and Joe, plus a few other Americans from his college. He also met a lot of international students. Early on, Mark spoke positively about Marburg and all the new people he met:

I feel like more as a community here [than at my college back home] which is kinda interesting cause I try to associate with a lot of different people and backgrounds back home I never just it got boring after a while (Interview 1, winter semester).

Indeed in the early parts of the year, he was very interested in branching out and meeting people from all over the world, especially because he found his home college to be a bore. At every turn there was someone new and different to communicate with, and he seemed to find this riveting.

By the second interview, however, Mark told me that he had actually grown closer to his American friends, noting the following: “originally I was determined to meet other people and at first I was like ok cultural differences are so cool but then [the differences] started to nag me so I was searching for a common ground” (Interview 2, winter semester). At this point, Mark became suddenly averse to the notion of change that he emphasized so strongly in the beginning,
expressing a desire to find something more familiar. Indeed, it seemed as though he had shifted away from desire for change in favor of feeling comfortable. It may well be that Mark’s desire for change had its limits, and that he was never fully aware of the need to reflect on his own identity and ways of viewing the world in order to experience deeper personal growth and development.

In this second interview, I noted generally that Mark spoke about meeting new people almost as if it were a check-list and less of a mutual investment and desire for participation in the eyes of both people: “I wanted to meet a lot of people and I think I’ve done that” (Interview 2, winter semester). It seemed to be a superficial way of discussing friend-making, emphasizing little quality investment in favor of quantity of people met.

When asked for more detailed information about his frustrations, I discovered that he was discouraged in his attempts at getting to know European women, and he loosely hinted that these linguistic and cultural frustrations came specifically from his interaction with a French woman:

communicating with European girls is a lot more difficult, sometimes they say they understand me no matter what language we’re speaking but they don’t actually understand (…) I still hang out with French people a lot too (…) at the big parties (…) usually it depends on how drunk I am hanging out with everyone (Interview 2, winter semester)

Mark was clearly frustrated about his linguistic ability here, though he noted that it did not matter what language they are speaking; there was always confusion. He had a hard time negotiating the different ways that cultures orient towards friend-making and dating in particular. Through these frustrations, which likely included feelings of rejection, Mark preferred to rely on his friends from home who understood the immediate issues and disappointments he was facing. He talked about his good friend Craig and his French girlfriend, noting that Craig’s relationship was also not without its problems. This led him to state the following: “For me looking to the future well I’m going back to the US so maybe it’s for the best, nothing too complicated” (Interview 2, winter
semester). Though he did not divulge any specific relationship information to me, it was clear that Mark retreated into what was familiar and relied on his American college friends and the thought of going home. He participated much less in the international community during this time.

By the third interview, it seemed that he had stopped taking part in the international communities altogether:

I’m definitely (...) pulling away (...) I don’t know why I do that I don’t really like it (...)
I’m starting now to like realize that, trying not to so much but I guess it’s like a defense mechanism I always just like wanna (...) I don’t I don’t really know how to put it (...) it it’s just strange I guess (Interview 3, summer semester)

Mark reflected on his own history, leading him to re-think the idea of pulling away from the international group. It is hard to say if he pulled away from the European student community because of a complicated relationship with a French woman, or if he really was trying to protect himself by not investing more into his Marburg friendships. During this time, I did not see him at any international events. However, in the fourth and final interview, he noted: “I think I came out of my hole” and emphasized that he was actually depressed about the thought of having to go home so soon (Interview 4, summer semester). Perhaps his aforementioned sadness about having to leave was also related to feelings of romantic rejection, and was thus short-lived. In any case, Mark felt differently and did not pull away fully in the final month. He did note, however, that he still looked forward to transitioning back to his life at home. Mark’s active pulling away from his group of French and European friends showed that during a depressing time, he preferred the familiar over the frustrating, whatever that was at the time. His dissatisfaction with those frustrations led him to retreat from the international scene in favor of what was comfortable and familiar.

Besides his American friends and the ERASMUS students, Mark also spent a lot of time with two German men in his dormitory. One, Tim, lived on his floor. They met in the first few
weeks of the year abroad, and began to hang out more and more as the year went on. In general, 
Mark said the following about living in the dormitory in the first semester: “I do miss having 
people to talk to, um, cause people tend to keep to themselves here” (Oral reflection 11, winter 
semester). However, his growing friendship with Tim improved his dormitory life quite a bit, as 
they both frequently stopped by each other’s rooms to hang out (Interview 2, winter semester). 
Another German friend of Mark’s was Ben, a friendship that grew stronger mid-year. Ben lived 
on the same floor as Mark’s friend Craig, and Ben and Mark had a lot in common. Mark was 
often over on that floor because of Craig. Since Ben was often bored, he would hang out with 
Craig and Mark as well. In the summer semester, Craig was often busy with his French girlfriend, 
so Ben and Mark took day trips together, for example, one weekend they took the train to 
Frankfurt for the day (Interview 3, summer semester). Mark spoke a mix of German and English 
with both Tim and Ben. In the final group conversation, I noticed that Mark took the floor more 
often than in previous conversations. It appears that he was much more comfortable expressing 
himself in German towards the end of the year. While this was not too surprising given that he 
had lived in Germany for ten months by July, it was likely in large part due to his growing 
friendships with Tim and Ben. Overall, it was interesting to note that Mark claimed he was 
pulling away from investing in friendships with international students and yet did not mind 
investing in closer friendships with Tim and Ben. He did not address this incongruence 
specifically; however it led me to believe that his depression in the early summer semester was in 
fact about romantic rejection.

5.7.4 Conclusion

In general, Mark was a lot less forthcoming about the more intimate details of his life in 
Marburg than the other five participants. His oral reflections lacked critical reflection, though his
interviews do contain somewhat more detail, due to my probing. Joe, a man of few words, talked openly about some rather embarrassing moments from his time abroad. Mark was much vaguer, and it was an uncomfortable practice for me to press him for intimate information. Mark’s lower linguistic ability may have precluded him from having more high-stakes linguistic encounters to report on in oral reflections, though he definitely negotiated linguistic and cultural differences. Perhaps his acceptance of shame led him to feel that few encounters while abroad were critical ones. Still, Mark did talk about his difficulties in understanding European women in an interview situation as a result of my questioning. In general, it was clear that both his investment in my study and the quality of our relationship were different from the other participants. It seemed to me, however, that a major reason that he did not elaborate on his depression in the early summer semester may have been because he was embarrassed about his romantic rejection. If this was so, either he did not want me to know about it or he simply did not wish to discuss it with anyone. In any case, Mark returned to the United States and graduated from college the following year. He is now working and living somewhere in New England.

5.8 Final Thoughts

Overall, it should be noted that my relationships with both Mark and Joe were much less intimate than with Katie, Brad, Sarah and David; this had a lot to do with the fact that I did not see Mark and Joe on a daily basis, nor did I see them very often in informal settings. My relationships with Katie, Brad, Sarah, David, and even Joe were mutually beneficial. As such, I had a sense that each of these five participants was invested in my study. What the participants’ questionnaire, group conversation, oral reflection, and interview data demonstrate is that the study abroad experience is two things at the same time: a singular experience, fully unique to each individual, and an experience that is rife with similarities, shared emotions, and encounters
across participants, to some extent due to a shared sociocultural background and the fact that some of the participants knew each other prior to ever setting foot in Marburg. In my study, each participant’s personality, desires, goals, as well as their linguistic proficiency brought a human complexity to their experiences. The intricate paths each participant weaved while abroad, whether they were the makers of certain decisions or were granted access by the people whom they met, created both similar and differing levels of engagement in various communities of practice. The non-, peripheral and full participation by students in communities led to many instances of identity negotiation and re-negotiation over the course of the year abroad. Is this fully unique to someone who is abroad, or even to someone residing in a new country for the first time? No. However, not only are the cultural and linguistic differences in a study abroad environment extremely salient, but the dominant discourse and points of reference that American undergraduates may be accustomed to are most obviously different in a foreign context. For many in my study, it was the first time that they had ever come across such vast sociocultural differences. Here, in this new place, they were meant to study the same topic they were studying back home at college. In most cases, they were also expected (by their college, family and friends) to improve their language skills, maybe even become fluent. They were also expected to fully take care of themselves each and every day for perhaps the first time in their lives. It is for these reasons that the study abroad context is an appropriate place to investigate the interaction between levels of engagement in various communities and identity negotiation, and identity transformation over the course of the sojourn.

In the following chapter, the results from chapters 4 and 5 will be discussed. I answer the research questions regarding the potential interactions between levels of engagement in communities and instances of identity negotiation. I will also discuss whether or not the amount and intensity of the participants’ identity negotiation leads to larger transformations towards either intercultural or translingual and transcultural competence. This will be done by discussing
the data through two pertinent themes that appeared in the qualitative data: imagination and emotion.
Chapter 6

Discussion

6.1 Discussion of Results

In the previous chapters, I have shown that the participants in the present study are individuals with particular goals, ideas, and beliefs about language learning and study abroad. I have also demonstrated that the participants' experiences are complex in that they share similar qualities, but are not singular stories. They are unique. I have shown that these individuals engaged in community participation in varying ways, and that their desires, beliefs, actions, and access to these communities played a large role in how they engaged in, negotiated, and constructed identities. Participating in various communities in Germany led participants to have to navigate rich points, through which they positioned and re-positioned themselves and others, as well as their beliefs and goals. As such, three of the participants found themselves re-negotiating their beliefs about who they are. This also brought about changes regarding how they view Germans, the German language, the English language, study abroad, and more. There were numerous stories, communities, and interactions and as such, multiple reflections, and transformations.

In what follows, I will first summarize results from the language proficiency evaluation and group conversations in order to set the stage for the discussion of oral reflection and interview results. I will present these oral reflection and interview results according to the primary themes that arise. My analyses show that investigating participants’ communities and their levels of engagement in those communities can inform us of whether or not participants experience moments of identity destabilization, re-negotiation, and/or overall development. These findings also show that four of my participants wanted to make meaning and be relevant to their
fellow friends and community participants, as well as achieve some kind of emotional stability in the study abroad context. Both these findings and the results from the language proficiency evaluations and group conversation data from chapter 4 show that four participants, Katie, Brad, David, and Joe experienced larger personal transformations, or shifts towards intercultural communicative competence throughout the year abroad. David in particular appeared to show signs of moving towards translingual and transcultural competence. The results also show that one participant in particular, Sarah, appeared to change very little. Mark, too, appeared to experience very few personal transformations, but as he did not provide as much data, I cannot say for certain if this is the case. The participants’ oral reflection and interview data in particular highlighted two general themes that were significant for each participant, as portrayed in their oral reflection and interview data. These themes are imagination and emotion. I will discuss the participants in relation to one another via these themes.

6.2 Language Proficiency Evaluations and Group Conversations

The participants’ language proficiency evaluation results show that they all made some linguistic gains during their year abroad, albeit to varying degrees. I have shown that Katie, Brad, David, and Joe were study abroad participants who through instances of identity destabilization and re-negotiation, saw shifts in their worldviews including how they view themselves, Germans, the German language, among others. Katie and David’s language proficiency evaluation scores improved the most of all of the participants between the first and second time they took the test. David was the participant with the highest initial language proficiency score, and he still made the largest improvement of all six participants. While Brad's scores did improve, his do not represent the greatest gains. I believe that Brad's L2 knowledge, however, lies outside of what language proficiency evaluations often test. As noted, Brad is a tremendously relaxed individual whose
usage of extremely informal, colloquial, urban language is a large part of the way he constructs his own identity as a more casual, laid back, and easygoing person. As such, it is of little surprise that he did not score very well on a more conservative evaluation that tests primarily formal, accurate linguistic forms and understandings. In this way, he likely encountered some testing bias. Joe, a participant who constantly reflected on the challenging issues he faced as he attempted to maintain his grade point average in a country where he felt linguistically inept, also went through many transformations, and his language proficiency evaluation scores increased slightly. Mark, a participant who saw little overall identity transformation based on what appeared to be a limited awareness of the need to navigate and consider other viewpoints, made some great improvements on the second language proficiency evaluation, but little after that. He was also the participant with the lowest initial score, and this did not change throughout the year. Sarah, who, of all of my participants, probably saw the least identity transformation based on almost no awareness of the need to navigate and consider other viewpoints, made essentially no linguistic improvements during the year abroad according to her language proficiency evaluation scores.

The group conversation data further demonstrated that particularly Katie, Brad, and David felt most comfortable using and speaking German compared to Sarah, Mark, and Joe. This is not to say that Katie, Brad, and David were always accurate or did not code-switch between German and English. However, throughout the group conversation data it is clear that especially Brad was always very willing to take German turns, and very long ones at that. He had the most and longest turns of any of my participants in the group conversation data. Katie and David were also willing to take German turns, but it should also be noted that Katie was also the participant with the highest number of English turns, even more than Sarah, Mark and Joe, all of whom took far fewer German turns. This supports what I have pointed out elsewhere about Katie's need to be meaningful and feel emotionally secure by making sure that communicating in English is always
an option. It is interesting to consider the kind of access to formal language classes that Katie and the other participants had while abroad. Not every participant even took formal German language courses throughout the year abroad. Katie did not take the pre-semester language course, nor did she take a formal language course in the fall semester. She later lamented this fact and signed up for two German language classes for foreign students in the summer semester. David, too, did not take the pre-semester language course, but purposefully took one or two formal German language courses each semester. One such course discussed German academic writing for foreign students. Brad, Sarah, Mark, and Joe all took the pre-semester language course, as they were financially supported and encouraged to do so by their home institution. They were, however, incredibly disappointed in how it was conducted. All of them noted that they had found it useless for their current needs. As such, few continued to take formal language courses during the regular year abroad, though both Brad and Mark began to take other formal language courses in Spanish, Italian, and French while in Marburg. Sarah took a formal language course in the summer semester, and Joe focused primarily on his chemistry studies throughout the year. This information about access to formal language learning and the group conversation data that I have reported on support the ways in which I have characterized the participants’ German language proficiency and language use. David showed deep interest in improving his German and thus invested heavily in formal language learning throughout the year. Katie showed interested in taking a formal language class only when she realized that she was not making a lot of progress with her German language skills, which she felt would ultimately harm her chosen career path as a German high school teacher. In fact, Katie showed no interest in taking formal German courses for the sake of developing as an intercultural speaker. On the other hand, Mark and Joe were not as invested in formal language learning as they felt these courses would not be relevant for their studies and careers. Transferring German credits was not a major goal of theirs, and neither was developing advanced levels of German proficiency. Brad showed a great interest in getting to
know people through German in a more casual and intimate way. He felt that the pre-semester course was useless for him, as little of it focused on how to deal with current, day-to-day interactions. Brad’s actions and words regarding the pre-semester language course show his dispreference of formal, abstract, and decontextualized ways of learning a second language.

6.3 Imagination

Students embark on sojourns for a number of reasons, and these reasons are related to their own desires, whether linguistic, social, romantic, academic, or otherwise. Their reasons for going abroad may also be related to the ways in which they imagine their sojourn experience, for example, how they picture themselves in this new space, and how they imagine their own future trajectory vis-à-vis language learning and studying abroad. In dealing with impending unknowns, individuals also attempt to imagine themselves as participants in desired communities, as well as how they can bring about desired events and outcomes. Many studies reveal that foreign language learners often have conflicting desires, ambivalent feelings, and multiple perceptions of language and language learning and investments in that learning in general (see Goldstein, 1997; Kouritzin, 2000; Norton, 2000; Pavlenko, 2002). Wenger (1998) discusses participants’ desires and imagination by saying that this should not be understood as simple fantasy, nor should it be seen as the act of pulling away from reality (p. 176). He argues that imagination refers more to the creative process of viewing new possibilities for oneself in relation to the world, and the potential for new trajectories. This view sees participants as constantly playing an active role in creating various ways to situate themselves in a foreign context. According to Norton (2001), imagination may not always lead to action; however, imagination tells us how participants align with people and communities, and through this alignment we can view what learners do (or do not do) in order to take part in communities (p. 164).
Many participants addressed personal beliefs and goals that were shaped by the intensification of global social relations, such as online communication and travel. The participants’ oral reflection and interview data show that their globally-influenced beliefs and goals contributed to how they imagined themselves and others in the SA context. Advanced communication technologies have the ability to link distant places, and this was significant for two of my participants who sought out German contacts pre-departure. Kramsch and Thorne (2002) write that much research has pointed out the easy access that students have to foreign speakers and cultures via internet communication tools and how potentially transformative this is for learning foreign languages in contextualized environments (p. 83). Online communication tools are at students’ fingertips in ways that were not possible even 15 years ago. Students can find information and people to chat with via forums, social networking sites and so on. The ways in which individuals imagine themselves in the study abroad context may be somewhat unrealistic and uninformed; however, online communication tools can provide a quick, more direct way for prospective SA participants to imagine themselves in their own sojourn context, as well as the larger study abroad context. Students may already have constructed certain representations of what a people, country, or city may be like, or even what the process of travel, or living abroad may be like prior to departure (Kinginger, 2008, p. 77). These online interactions may also be comforting to participants who are unnerved by the thought of moving across the world all by themselves, to a place with multiple unknowns.

Once in-sojourn, participants may struggle to maintain their original images and desires when events do not unfold as they had originally imagined. In order to actively engage locally, individuals often must re-negotiate the way in which they imagined their time abroad unfolding. Thus, they may also find themselves re-orienting or abandoning their original desires and hopes for the year abroad. There are many other kinds of references to images and desires that participants mentioned in my data and these played a major role in how they viewed themselves.
and others, how they aligned or did not align with others, how they engaged in their various communities, and how they oriented to using English or German. Imagination played a large role in how the participants re-negotiated and constructed their identities, and how these developed throughout their time abroad.

6.3.1 Language desires

At the outset of the study abroad year, my participants expressed, to varying degrees, the desire to become fluent or improve their German while in Marburg. Many individuals want to study abroad because they view it as the fast track to fluency in a foreign language, and it must be said that academic departments and universities go to great lengths to encourage this viewpoint. While participants’ hopes of becoming proficient in a L2 may be genuine and well-meaning, research has shown that their conceptualizations of fluency may be ill-informed (Block, 2007; Kinginger 2009; 2008; Kinginger & Farrell Whitworth, 2005). All of my participants who expressed advanced language proficiency as a major goal of their study abroad year re-negotiated their orientations to German and language learning in various ways throughout their time abroad. Katie, David, and Sarah all noted in one way or another that they were not the kind of Americans for whom learning a foreign language was simply an academic exercise; that is to say, they actively positioned themselves as being not one of “those Americans” who could only speak English (Sarah, Interview 1, winter semester). And yet most participants’ pre-departure enthusiasm regarding the prospect of advanced linguistic proficiency gains waned, and this resulted in shifted goals and actions in not only taking formal language courses, but also how and with whom they decided to speak. This led to very different kinds of reflections and perspectives on language, language learning, and oral fluency.
As German majors, Katie and David spoke of their language learning objectives quite regularly in the beginning of the year. By the end of the year, to varying degrees, they had problematized their own original objectives by instead re-defining what it meant for them to be fluent. They did so by describing what they had managed to accomplish, emphasizing the ability to make meaning and express themselves appropriately in various contexts in German. At the outset, David, the most advanced German language learner in the group, really wanted to improve his pronunciation and continue to feel more comfortable speaking German. Katie, on the other hand, a participant with much lower language proficiency scores at the beginning of the study, came to Germany with a general desire to improve her oral fluency for her future career as a high school German teacher. Their reasons for wanting to achieve improved fluency in German are different, and this too appears to have played a significant role in whether or not they decided to take formal German classes while abroad, and how their linguistic desires shift, and ultimately, how they developed as German and intercultural speakers over the course of their year abroad.

David’s desire to use and improve his German was central to the subject positions that he constructed and imagined for himself. When he first arrived, he insisted on speaking only German and actively avoided investing in relationships with other Americans and international students. But David’s initial self-positioning, that is, a person who wanted to become an improved speaker of German by simply extending who he was at home into this new context, kept him from participating in meaningful ways in the local context during his first six weeks in Marburg. His homesickness led him to re-think his beliefs on language use in a SA context, as he eventually realized that he in fact coveted friendships and social support regardless of the language spoken. David later reflected on the fact that he was shocked to discover that through this re-negotiation of how to approach language use in the study abroad setting, his views of the German and English languages had shifted quite drastically. David reported no longer viewing himself as a German fanatic and talked in great detail about his newfound appreciation for using the English language.
As such, his linguistic imagination and desire eventually took a different course as he became more aware of his views on language and language use. He moved from imagining himself participating in German-only communities, to judging meaningful community participation as also being about social quality and intellectual depth, and not just whether or not German was spoken. In other words, David seems to have re-examined the relationship between language use and social context, in that he began to understand why taking up the subject position of a German fanatic may have been less beneficial or useful in Germany as compared to the United States. In Germany, an overly vocal German fanatic or enthusiast is rarely viewed as an intellectual superior; rather, such a person is often viewed as inferior, and may even generate suspicion due to cultural memory related to the Second World War. To this end, David developed critical language awareness, or began investigating the relationship between language and social context, by realizing that while being an enthusiast of all things German and Germany was viewed positively in an American context, such fanaticism was seen through a very different socio-historical lens and thus took on different meanings in Germany (Fairclough, 1992). In coming to this understanding, David began to transform his orientations to the German and English languages, as well as to his own language use and meaning-making. In this way, he shifted towards more relevant participation in his German study abroad context.

Katie’s images and desires were quite different. She found herself overwhelmed by the need to communicate in German and navigate a foreign culture for the first time on her own. Her linguistic desires began to shift almost immediately upon realizing that the actions that she would have to take in order to improve her German skills in the way she had originally imagined were unexpectedly onerous or even impossible. Perhaps this is also why she decided not to sign up for formal language courses in the first semester. Katie continued to state that her main reason for studying abroad was to improve her spoken German, but a shift in her desires became noticeable through her actions, including the fact that she did not enroll in formal German courses at first.
Perhaps in an attempt to maintain control of both her own emotional security and how she was viewed by others, Katie invested mostly in friendships where speaking English was an option. Her close friendship with Stefan was one of deep mutual engagement because speaking English was possible. Her very few German-language-only friendships never developed into communities in which she saw deeper engagement, and this is likely because of the difficult time Katie had bridging the gap between imagining herself becoming fluent in German and the actual act of using German to express herself, emotions and all, something that Katie lamented in an early oral reflection (Oral reflection 6, winter semester). In essence, the desire to express herself meaningfully took precedence over Katie’s original language learning goals while studying abroad.

In contrast to David and Katie, Joe constructed his linguistic desires purely in terms of survival. He imagined himself facing many linguistic challenges, though he, too, had the desire to improve his spoken German at the outset of the sojourn. And yet it appears that Joe felt that the only way he could succeed academically while abroad was to de-emphasize his potential for language learning by writing laboratory reports and taking some exams in English. His de-emphasis of learning German can also be seen in his decision not to take formal German courses. Katie prioritized speaking English in order to express herself meaningfully, and Joe did this as well, at least in an educational context with the goal of maintaining his high grade point average. In the end, however, Joe was shocked to discover that language had little to do with his eventual academic success, as he maintained a perfect grade point average regardless of whether the class was taught in English or German. The data do not suggest that this result caused Joe to wish he had made learning and using German a priority earlier on in the year. However, it does appear that his academic success at a German university in both English and German-language seminars began to alter his views on language and language learning more generally.
All of my participants re-negotiated their linguistic desires over the course of the sojourn, through community participation, the negotiation of rich points, and the need to be meaningful to the people around them. No participant completely lost the desire to learn German, though all grew frustrated by the constant challenges associated with using German. While Joe emphasized just getting by from the outset, Katie and David initially stressed their longing to become more proficient in the language (Questionnaire 1). Brad and Mark were less likely to mention particular language learning goals in the first place, focusing instead on their desire for a change in scenery via study abroad (Questionnaire 1). Sarah discussed her desire not to be seen as an American who only speaks English, hoping to improve her German in her first interview, though she was vague about how she would go about doing so (Interview 1, winter semester). This vagueness is important to mention, since she too did not seem to pursue formal language learning opportunities after the pre-semester language course. Later in the year abroad, all of the participants had re-negotiated their linguistic desires. Whether through Katie’s decision to focus on her social life, Brad’s Muay Thai objectives, Sarah’s emphasis on travel, Joe’s high academic hopes, or David’s need to re-negotiate his views of German and English, not one person’s linguistic desires remained the same over the course of the year.

6.3.2 Travel desires

In my study, two participants contribute to a common travel trope. Gore (2005) points out that the dominant discourse surrounding study abroad for Americans often espouses a modern-day version of the Grand Tour tradition that originated from the education of the British elite in the eighteenth century, where studying in a foreign context was more about expanding one’s cultural horizons and leisureliness than focusing on education and productivity (Kinginger, 2008, p. 19).
Mark emphasized the need for taking advantage of travel opportunities while in Europe. He stated that travel was one of his main goals, and during later interviews, pointed out how much he had already traveled, noting he planned to do more. Further, this emphasis on travel, and achieving this goal of travelling as much as possible, may have also helped Mark to hide behind the fact he was less successful in other arenas, including his German language abilities and his success with dating foreign women. Mark’s conceptualization of travel played a key role in his own study abroad narrative and was not included as a part of “real life” back home. This depicted a view of study abroad that is similar to crossing completed items off of a list, which is in fact something that Mark alluded to doing (Interview 2, winter semester). In fact, both Sarah and Mark adopted survival strategies akin to Ailis, a participant in Kinginger (2008) who viewed the study abroad experience as a way to grow and mature by consuming European travel and culture.

As I have discussed in chapter 5, Sarah contributed to the desire for travel by regularly emphasizing its central role in her study abroad experience. She frequently left Marburg for the weekend to visit other cities and towns, and went on a large European tour of over twenty cities during the approximately four week semester break. For her, this desire for travel was of utmost importance. Upon her return from this trip, Sarah began to participate more locally in the fraternity in Marburg because her friend Evelyn gained access to this community via a project she was working on about fraternities in Germany. At this point, Sarah’s regular weekend trips almost came to a halt. The German men and their fraternity events became a clear priority for Sarah and Evelyn, who were regularly invited to participate. Sarah became more invested in this community and less concerned about her travel desires not because she shifted towards becoming interculturally or even translingually and transculturally competent, but because participating in fraternity events allowed her to explore her desire to meet and date German men. Given that she did so much traveling in the early part of the year, perhaps she viewed it at this point as having been checked off of her list and no longer essential to pursue further.
In my study, all participants expressed their desire to do some traveling and see Europe. However, Mark and especially Sarah appeared to espouse the view of the European study abroad experience as growth and experience through the consumption of language, culture, travel, and surface-level relationships with many Germans and/or international students. Neither participant took reflective stances on their Grand Tour-like orientations, though their participation in Marburg communities towards the end of the year abroad may have been a sign that they began to situate themselves more locally. I have shown, however, that particularly Sarah’s local participation at the end of the year was not based on mindful reflection of her own and others’ salient identity issues, rather, on her fairly naïve and apparently unchanging desire to meet and date German men. By comparison, the other four participants, Katie, Brad, David, and Joe, provided far greater detail about their deep participation in local communities and events, and they did so much more consistently throughout the year. They invested in their personal relationships with others as well as in themselves through mutual participation and reflection in their communities. The fact that Katie, Brad, David, and Joe did not list travel as their top priority may have been due at least in part to financial limitations that restricted their potential for taking many trips. However, more importantly, it is also quite likely that their engaged local participation made them feel more connected to their communities and contexts in comparison to Sarah and Mark, and as such, they preferred to spend more time in Marburg.

6.3.3 Friendship desires

Every participant in my study imagined meeting a lot of German friends, and regularly talked about their continued hopes to meet Germans and make German friends. Some even made efforts to become members of local or online communities before going abroad. Given the prevalence of this desire, it appears that participants felt that finding German interlocutors would
be the best way for them to speak more German. Not one student made note of the potential for
meeting other international students, instead hoping for German friends and interlocutors. The
storyline of the highly-motivated American student who goes abroad with the goal of becoming
fluent by communicating regularly with target language interlocutors is a common trope found in
the study abroad literature (see Isabelli-García, 2006; Kinginger 2004; 2008). Perhaps study
abroad participants’ desire to take part in communities with German native speakers is also a way
for them to state their wish to be viewed differently from stereotypical Americans who they feel
are viewed as only wanting to speak English, as mentioned earlier. Parallel to their shifting views
and desires regarding language learning while abroad, my participants often found themselves
frustrated by how difficult it was to become full participants in communities with German native
speakers, often blaming these difficulties on Germans and their unfriendly demeanor, rather than
considering what role they may have played these interactions. Many of my participants were
also amazed to discover how important the international student community became for them. For
most of my participants, international exchange students were the individuals with whom they
connected the most, whether as friends, L2 interlocutors, a social support system, or as travel
partners during their year abroad. This was not what they had imagined pre-sojourn. To some
extent, it appears that pre-sojourn, my participants viewed themselves not so much as future
foreigners in another country, but rather as worldly, highly-desirable American interlocutors with
whom Germans would want to communicate. Once in-sojourn, many realized that they were
facing many of the same challenges as other international students, and Joe and Katie in particular
reflected on what they learned from this experience regarding the plight of foreigners who must
to find a place for themselves in a new country.
6.3.3.1 Social desires pre-sojourn

Before going abroad, both Brad and David searched out German interlocutors online, though for very different reasons. In my first interview with Brad, he notes that he took up email communication with the Marburg Muay Thai gym a few weeks before leaving, hoping to find out whether or not he could continue his training while studying in Germany. Brad often talked more informally about how good it was to get away from home, but his Muay Thai training was one thing he was not as willing to leave behind. With this email exchange, Brad intended to gather information regarding participation in the club, and was not thinking in terms of future friendships. However, the fact that he sought out this contact says a lot about his own desire to continue with Muay Thai in Marburg, and how he was already visualizing himself in the study abroad context. Clearly, distance was not a hindrance in his pre-departure plans. His pre-departure emails with the Marburg Muay Thai club also show that Brad was not afraid to reach out and make his own decisions regarding whom he could contact and the best means for doing so.

David’s story is very different. David’s experiences with second language use and online forums highlight the potential of language learning in online, contextualized environments. Years before going abroad, David sought out German interlocutors online for the sole purpose of improving his German communication skills. He did not necessarily do this as a way to prepare for a sojourn in Germany directly; instead, he attempted to find a way to connect his love of learning and using German with his general hobby of surfing the internet. He searched out opportunities to practice his German online, stumbled upon these forums, began posting, and was eventually welcomed and accepted by the people in these forums as a core member and contributor. By the time that David was in fact going abroad, he had already built up an extensive network of online friends from Germany, most of whom were middle-aged women from forums.
about general newsworthy topics. David was involved in these online communities and
maintained close and personal connections with its German members, highlighting the fact that he
could recognize and reflect upon cultural specificity in online interactions, and therefore saw
deeper levels of engagement with German-speaking communities years before his time in
Marburg (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002).

As noted elsewhere, David stated that he finds it hard to meet new people and make
friends in face-to-face situations. The fact that he searched out friends online – in a place where
appearances can not immediately be judged – is thus not surprising. However, his decision to visit
the online forum members in person once in Marburg seemed more unexpected, given his careful
and reserved nature. It is important to remember, though, that over the years, David had come to
know these people and accepted them as close friends, and vice versa. He was therefore not
particularly nervous about meeting these people once in Germany. They were already his friends,
a constant for him in a new world. Visiting these friends was almost like returning to something
familiar and David felt comfortable around them. Kramsch and Thorne (2002) write that there is a
need to look at such digital spaces like online forums as social spaces (p. 85). Given that these
forums were an everyday dimension of David’s social communicative activity pre-departure, they
were indeed important social spaces for him. David’s contacts and subsequent friendships were
entirely mutual and sustained for years, and they provided a way for David to hold onto
something familiar while in an otherwise new environment. At the same time, this familiar
community helped David navigate the new linguistic and sociocultural challenges he faced in his
sojourn context. Both David and Brad’s actions show, in very different ways, their different and
yet active ways of preparing for a year in Germany prior to leaving. Both of their actions show
that they were intentionally investing in continuing current social identity trajectories and ways of
being seen in Marburg. In this way, David and Brad attempted to bring pieces of the familiar to
an unfamiliar context, and were also simultaneously building the basis for deeper engagement in local communities once abroad.

6.3.3.2 Social desires in-sojourn

There is no doubt that globalization and modern technologies have changed the nature of study abroad. American undergraduate students who study abroad are increasingly avid users of online communication tools and connect to their friends, family and local worlds through these tools. Through internet mediation, language learners have the opportunity to communicate globally based on “fairness, mutuality and hope in a common global future” (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002, p. 100). As we have seen, some may use these tools to communicate in a manner that emphasizes trust-building rituals, and some may not. Kinginger (2008) also notes that online communication has changed the options that sojourners have for contextualized language learning while abroad, and that some of these new options may cause limited engagement in local communities in favor of a constant virtual connection to home (p. 97).

This regular contact to family and friends was very important for many of my participants, David in particular. As mentioned, for years before going abroad, David used the internet for this purpose through his community of online forum friends; later, early in his sojourn, he tended to use technology to stay connected with home in an effort to avoid anxiety and emotional instability. Pre-departure, David had envisioned continuing to identify as the same David he had been at home, but with more sophisticated German speaking skills and knowledge of Germany. It turned out that these virtual connections with friends and family back home were vital for him because this was what maintained his emotional security in those early months. His contact with family and friends back home made him feel as though he was still connected, needed and significant for those communities. In this way, he tried to protect his core self,
original goals and emotional security, though his self-isolation eventually led to feelings of alienation and depression. Benwell and Stokoe (2007) note that people tend to make a distinction between virtual and “real” identities, for example, instances of cyber-violence are treated as legally distinct from physical crimes in real-life courts (p. 245). However, the authors also note that many online participants view virtual events as intimately real, perhaps even more real than “real-life” (p. 245). In Marburg, early virtual contact to home kept David from actively changing his path and taking up new subject positions. It contributed to his initial loneliness, even though it gave him great emotional security to have constant contact to loved ones back home. David eventually realized that doing something to change how he felt was necessary, and this is something that he commented on himself, showing that he was aware of his own need to act (Interview 1, winter semester). Contact to home remained vital, but soon he discovered that the German women he had been spending more time with in Marburg found him to be an integral part of their community, and this gave him the confidence to participate more in the local context. As the year progressed, David’s close contact with those back home became more about general support and less about intervention. Importantly, his initial orientation to using global communication networks supported his participation in his “real” life back home, and also limited his participation in local communities in Marburg. Soon, however, he actively found a balance through the support of his family, friends and pastor back home.

Through David’s use of online communication tools, as well as through local support from his group of online German female acquaintances, he eventually gained a heightened awareness of how his genres and social environments back home differed from those in Germany. David continued to desire having German native speaker friends, but soon realized that he needed local support in Marburg from those who might be experiencing similar feelings of homesickness or identity crises. As such, David constantly reflected upon his own goals and shifted them from a somewhat rigid expectation that he hoped to control to a more fluid way of being that allowed for
many intersecting thoughts and ideas. Participating in the online forum shaped both how he came to and eventually navigated these rigid expectations. Through his successful participation in this online community over the course of many years, David had developed an expectation of meeting a plethora of German speakers who would want to interact with him regularly once he finally got to study abroad in Germany. His participation in this online forum community drastically improved his German language abilities in many ways, and once in Marburg, his experiences and friendships in the online forums also helped him to navigate his shift in expectations and actions in order to participate more meaningfully, focus on speaking as much German as he could, and still maintain his emotional security in the sojourn context. In this way, he developed as an intercultural speaker, and began to develop as a translingual and transcultural speaker as well.

The other participants in this study maintained contact with loved ones back home to various degrees. Some used Skype and Facebook to converse with family and friends multiple times weekly, some less often. Overall, however, the issue of contact with home was not something that the other participants highlighted as important. Sarah, for example, had almost no connection to the internet in the final three months of the sojourn and barely complained or made mention of this in the interviews. She used Wi-Fi at the university when possible, or borrowed friends’ computers when visiting other dorm rooms. The fact that Sarah and the others rarely emphasized the importance of maintaining contact with home tells me that either they were far more engaged in and influenced by other goings-on while in Marburg, or they found communication with loved ones back home to be self-evident and thus not worthy of mention in interviews.

As mentioned earlier, David was initially adamant that he would only make German friends, stressing his view that native speakers make the best interlocutors when it comes to improving one’s language skills. Only later, after experiencing severe homesickness and depression, did David begin to actively invest in friendships with international students and other
Americans. As he reflected on his own preconceived notions of what the study abroad year would be like, his goals and expectations with regard to friend-making shifted. As he came to terms with these changing goals, David was able to open himself up to a number of very fulfilling friendships and opportunities for German language practice and supportive discussions in either German or English about shared experiences and beliefs. Ironically, precisely at the point that David became more open to friendships with non-Germans, he also began to develop closer friendships with the group of German women in Marburg whom he met in his first months in Marburg. Becoming a full participant, and thus deeply engaged with this group of German native speakers, also boosted David’s confidence and self-esteem, as it allowed him to position himself as more successful than other international students, who, in his view, had trouble developing such close relationships with native speakers. David’s changing views on making friends demonstrates a growing recognition on his part that meaningful interactions may take place in either language, and a person may be made more aware of various concepts and routines if they are pointed out in their native tongue (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2005). From a second language socialization perspective, David’s experiences highlight the meaningfulness of both L2 and L1 use, as learning how to make meaning in an L2 and develop as a translingual and transcultural speaker occurs through exchanges in and through both languages (Kramsch, 2012). Such developments often lead to more nuanced understandings of not only the host culture, but also one’s own home culture.

Brad also heavily emphasized his desire to meet a lot of new German friends in the beginning, and later he commented on how hard it was to become close with Germans. His statements about finding it impossible to meet Germans are interesting, given that Brad was fully participating in the Thai boxing community at that time, ostensibly with other Germans. Perhaps Brad’s full participation in the Muay Thai community was only about training as a fighter, and friendships with the fellow members at the gym had not yet developed. Perhaps the other
members in Brad’s Muay Thai gym community did not fall into Brad’s description of what being German meant to him, since many were not ethnically German. He also talked about casually chatting with these gym members in the locker rooms after training sessions, when elsewhere he would state that Germans were terrible at small talk. In any case, Brad spoke very highly of fellow gym members, later happily discussing how seeing pictures of him in the new gym collages made him feel like a part of the Muay Thai family. Though these reactions show his intense feelings of belonging, he still never labeled these young fighters as German friends. Perhaps the subject positions that his Muay Thai friends took up were in direct opposition of what was considered “being German.” In any case, for Brad, the Muay Thai community appeared to be outside of his definition of German, and yet was very important for him and he identified very strongly with the men there. The ways in which he perceived his friends at the gym gave him a way to differentiate between the Germans he perceived as closed and unfriendly and the Muay Thai family as open, affirming, and supportive.

Mark was initially very excited to meet all kinds of new people in Marburg, marveling at the diversity of fellow exchange students. He had so desired this newness and diversity that was exotic compared to both his smaller home and college towns. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) discusses personality features of the potential wanderer, noting that they are likely to be outgoing, curious and interested in the other more than the same, and Mark certainly fits this description (p. 67-68). Throughout his time abroad, Mark invested a lot of time in international communities, particularly one that contained a number of French women. However, by the beginning of the summer semester, he began to question his level of participation in this primary group of friends, worried he would become too invested in this group, because this would only heighten his sadness about returning to the United States. It seems unlikely that Mark would suddenly become homesick so late in the sojourn. A self-proclaimed lover of change, he never once mentioned a desire go home in the early parts of the year abroad. I believe that Mark’s social isolation in the
early part of the summer semester was linked to his failed attempts to date a particular French woman in this community of international students. Disappointment and sadness regarding this unfulfilled romantic desire would explain his pulling away from that community. This sequence of events shows the importance of imagination and desire not only for community participation in general, but also for becoming a deeply engaged full participant in a particular community. Going through romantic rejection at home is already a destabilizing experience. Dealing with this in a foreign context while navigating other new linguistic and cultural norms likely caused Mark great emotional insecurity. In turn, this rejection likely affected his desire to participate and engage fully in this and other related communities. Mark’s words also show how important issues related to imagination and desire can be for identity construction. Mark’s disappointment over the French woman leads him to suppose that all romantic interactions with European women might lead to similar disappointing outcomes, and he does not appear to reflect on other ways of orienting to relationships in comparison to his own at that time. This particular experience could have led to new ways of understanding how others approach friend-making and relationships, but instead, Mark pointed out that they were the ones who did not understand, and that this was something that he simply could not change. In this way, it was very clear that that Mark did not develop as an intercultural speaker.

6.3.4 Romantic desires

Many students expect to place little emphasis on academics while abroad, emphasizing instead new and exciting experiences outside of academics. Living for a short time in a foreign, exotic environment, many students espouse the notion that anything goes. While my participants openly discussed their linguistic desires in the first meeting, few addressed their more intimate desires until much later in the year. Previous research has looked at the gendered nature of
Americans’ study abroad experiences, including how American women who study abroad may complain of sexual harassment, limiting how they feel they are being positioned in interaction (Kinginger, 2008; Polanyi, 1995; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). This was not the case in my study; instead, some participants complained about how they could not figure out how to meet or date Germans or Europeans, showing that indeed, many participants desired these kinds of relationships in the study abroad setting, as seen previously in the case of Mark. Currently, there is little research on the role of desire, romance and sex and language learning in sojourn contexts, though there appears to be a pervasive folk understanding of the importance of these subjects for study abroad students.

It was not only Mark who expressed a desire for a European romance while abroad. By the summer semester, Sarah informed me directly how she had always hoped to meet some “tall gorgeous German men” (Interview 3, summer semester); though at no time did she appear to actively search out German contacts herself, relying instead on the access she gained to a German Verbindung community through her friend Evelyn. Although a regular participant at Verbindung events, her participation appeared to remain peripheral at best, though she seemed somewhat oblivious to this. At the same time, in her descriptions of these parties, Sarah often noted that through attending these parties she was accomplishing her goal of getting to know German men and she might get to date one. Overall, Sarah’s view of German men as objects of desire was driven by her belief in the exotic fairy tale of finding her German prince charming, evidently the lucky fate of a previous sojourner from her college. This desire was grounded in her imagination of what study abroad could lead to (i.e. marrying a German), and this had great implications for how she positioned herself and with whom she communicated. In fact, her imagination led her to obliviously position herself as a more integral member of a community that, according to my fieldnotes, appeared to almost mock her for both her youthful naïveté as well as her perceived linguistic shortcomings. Sarah neither reflected on, nor challenged, her own romantic desires, and
simply saw her goals as having been met. The end of the fairy tale never came to pass and through personal communication, I know she had a hard time transitioning back into life in the United States. She missed the exciting and exotic life she felt she had had in Marburg, most particularly the idea of having a German boyfriend and close friendships with German fraternity men. However, Sarah rarely examined the categories by which she compared herself to others, and as such, her participation remained peripheral at best, and little personal growth seemed to occur as a result. Unfortunately for Sarah, her relationship with the man in the Verbindung she did end up dating, Jan, dissolved as soon as she left Germany. Though it is perhaps not surprising to the outsider, both Jan and Sarah’s levels of engagement in their own relationship appeared somewhat superficial and further show her lack of development as an intercultural speaker. Sarah’s imagination consisted of having a German boyfriend, and later marrying him – whatever was to happen between these two points remained unimagined territory. This community and her relationship with Jan were ideal venues for German language use. While Sarah likely spoke more German in this context than anywhere else, her information lets me know that she rarely conversed with the men on more in-depth topics. Sometimes they even spoke English. As such, her linguistic proficiency did not see a lot of improvement. This was a place where Sarah could have encountered many rich points or loci of conflict, but she seemed to shy away from the need to deal with anything that she could not make sense of through her prevailing worldview. Her relationship with Jan would have been another way for her to use more German and reflect on linguistic and cultural differences, but it appears that either her interactions with him were extremely superficial or time was too short. I believe that the answer is actually a mixture of the two.

Brad and Katie, too, imagined that their time abroad could lead to romance, but their potential romantic encounters took on very different paths compared to Sarah and her quest for a German boyfriend. Brad’s relentless pursuit of one young Spanish woman, Karmen, led to both
romantic rejection and a strengthened friendship. Though he never dated Karmen, Brad’s relationship with her contained much more meaning than the surface-level relationship that Sarah appeared to have with Jan. Katie also had fantasies of romance in the early parts of the year as she found herself falling for her new German friend, Stefan. Like Brad, she too experienced romantic rejection when Stefan informed her of his homosexuality. And yet she also maintained a very meaningful relationship with Stefan, though they obviously never dated. Katie’s friendship with Stefan led her to re-negotiate some of her own orientations towards difficult topics in her personal life, and she began to reflect on the ways in which she had been dealing with them. It seems that Brad’s relationship with Karmen did the same, as they remained very close friends even after his feelings came to light. Sarah, on the other hand, appeared to maintain only surface-level relationships with the German fraternity men. It is hard to say what would have happened if she had spent more time with Jan; her time with him was limited by the fact that the sojourn was coming to an end. Still, similar to her orientations to travel, Sarah’s romantic actions seemed focused not on quality, meaningful engagement, but rather on the mere fact of the relationship itself. In this way, Sarah showed little to no development as an intercultural speaker through her international experiences.

Interestingly, many of my participants referred to romantic stories and relationships back home as real life and constructed the events taking place in the study abroad environment as existing outside of that. This conceptualization views a year outside of real life as highly desired, and that this separate study abroad life contains actions and events that study abroad participants may normally not take part in or find acceptable. Certainly, this plays an important role in why Sarah’s relationship with Jan would not and could not develop. If the relationship itself begins as a simple box on a checklist, how can one situate that relationship in and around one’s future trajectories back home?
6.3.5 Academic desires

Gore (2005) discusses the dominant discourse surrounding study abroad in the United States as one that sees academics playing a minor role in the overall experience of the American study abroad student. Certainly, Gore (2005) and her notion of a modern-day Grand Tour is a useful concept for some of my participants; from Katie’s emphasis on her social life and active neglect of her studies while in Germany, to Brad skipping a university exam in favor of a Muay Thai seminar held by his Thai boxing hero. All six participants spoke about their classes at different points, though Sarah and Katie often talked about the people in their classes rather than the content of those courses, and that they had to start focusing on studying at the end of the term, implying that up to that point they had not invested much time and energy in their academic courses. However, not all participants orient to the sojourn context in this way, further emphasizing that there are many important sojourner voices and stories that do not participate in the dominant discourses of study abroad (Gore, 2005).

Joe, as noted in the previous chapter, spent most of his time studying fervently or preparing for lab reports. He also spoke regularly about the superiority of European education systems and constantly negotiated how he should situate himself within it. This view of Joe’s is in direct opposition to one of the dominant beliefs listed by Gore (2005). The commonly held belief in the United States that education abroad may somehow be inferior to an American education is demonstrated by the fact that the allocated resources are very limited for international education compared to domestic education (Gore, 2005, p. 68). Joe’s main concern, however, was to take advantage of education in the hard sciences while abroad, since he believed that a European education in science was superior and more advanced compared to that of a science education in the United States. In fact, both Joe and Mark noted early on in interviews that they revered the European education system, and they discussed this at great length.
As Joe navigated taking various chemistry courses in German, he was given permission to write some laboratory reports and complete some oral and written exams in English. That he asked for these special language arrangements further demonstrates that advanced language learning was not Joe’s primary goal in this context. Towards the end of the first semester, Joe's view of himself as a student in Marburg began to change, as seen in the new images and perspectives he began to have. Joe had always been a very active participant in his academic experiences, but when he received his final grades from the winter semester, he was surprised to discover he had even outperformed a large number of German students. As he became more confident about his ability to succeed academically in Germany, Joe tried new and challenging tasks, like answering homework questions in German in front of the class. His newfound awareness that his language skills had little to do with his excellent performance in chemistry also coincided with his more regular participation in communities with German friends from his chemistry laboratory. It could be that these German friends also had new perspectives of Joe as their chemistry equal; he had proven his intellectual prowess to them, regardless of language. Importantly, Joe began to see German students just as students, similar in many ways to the American students he complained about back home, noting, “after being here I realized that they’re just the same as the American students and I still excelled here” (Interview 4, summer semester). Joe began to develop as an intercultural speaker through his newfound ability to reflect and examine the categories by which we compare ourselves to others. None of the other participants oriented to the study in study abroad quite in the same way as Joe did, and his experiences remind us that the role of academics in the minds of American undergraduates may be more varied than many believe.

Katie, for her part, lamented how much harder learning a foreign language was in Germany. She found that the supposed equivalent for her Spanish proficiency level in Germany was far too advanced for what she was capable of, which she chalks up to Europeans learning
new languages more quickly than Americans because they learn more languages in general. This viewpoint parallels the assumptions Joe made about Germans having more advanced experience in fields of study than their American counterparts. Joe, Mark and Katie all positioned Germans as academically more advanced in various topics (chemistry, Spanish or learning languages in general) and, as such, initially positioned themselves as being potentially inferior and having less expertise than German students. Joe drastically changed his views on this through his own academic experiences in Marburg, while Mark and Katie did not.

Katie's academic experiences in Marburg left her frustrated not only with her linguistic abilities, but also in her ability to navigate a university system that was foreign to her. In addition to viewing Germans as experts in her Spanish classes, in her academic life in Marburg we see another example of how Katie readjusts her goals midway through the year to maintain emotional security. Whenever she had a sense that doing well in a seminar was going to be a larger uphill battle that required more of her than she felt she could give, she aimed simply to pass the course. This is quite similar to how she oriented to using German in Marburg. Upon realizing that using German in Germany would be at once much more difficult than she had originally conceived, Katie adjusted her goals from becoming as fluent as possible to simply improving. In that way, her goals would still be attainable, and she would not disappoint herself. As such, her non-participation with regard to learning and using German, and learning and participating in Spanish class must be seen as intentional acts. Katie’s general avoidance of participation in academic endeavors while abroad, particularly where using German and Spanish were involved, was reasoned and intentional.
6.3.6 Conclusion

How participants imagine themselves before and during the sojourn, and how they negotiate their desires can tell us a lot about why they act in certain ways. These images, desires and actions (or non-actions) inform us about the process of becoming more self-aware. These can also tell us about the particular identity trajectories that participants wish to explore, and how these desires shape their identity construction. We may also discover more about the identity trajectories that participants do not explore, perhaps due to worries of challenges that may lead to emotional insecurity. The agentive and consistent taking up of subject positions can inform us of when and how changes occur in how the participants in this study view themselves in the world. For example, as David’s images and desires shift, he appears to become more aware of how these images and desires shape his experiences. This caused new identity constructions and new ways of being, as he was able to situate himself in the SA context anew. Once David realized that through his approach to making friends he was isolating himself and contributing to, or even shaping, his overall homesickness, he began to actively change his routine and ways of thinking. He had a hard time imagining that any other version of David could be legitimate, no matter what the context. What was real, was the David he knew up until that point. Soon, however, he negotiated what it meant to be David, and his relationship to German and English languages began to change. This led to new ways of understanding local and home contexts, and the beginnings of development towards translingual and transcultural competence. In another case, Katie originally desired to become more fluent in German. She soon realized that her desire for fluency required extensive efforts that would cause great emotional insecurity and make her seem slow-witted, unable to express herself in any kind of complex way. This can also be seen in her decision not to take formal German courses in the winter semester. Instead, Katie preferred to appear meaningful and relevant, and for her this meant emphasizing interactions that could take
place in English, or a mixture of English and German. As such, her experiences highlighted a lot of personal growth and realizations, but little in the way of development towards intercultural communicative competence. Joe, too, saw how his own desires and goals shaped his experiences, though he never strayed from his initial goal of maintaining a perfect grade point average. Joe did, however, begin to develop as an intercultural speaker in that he began to understand that doing well in his subject area did not depend upon having mastered German in any way. Mark withdrew from his original desires of meeting a lot of new people by isolating himself in the early summer semester. Later, he seemed aware that this action shaped his experience negatively, and he made great efforts to maintain a social life in his final months abroad. However, in isolating himself socially in the early part of the summer semester, perhaps also as the result of a failed romance, Mark seemed to highlight the temporariness of the sojourn, and that he could simply ignore his problems and issues there because he would soon be back in his real life in the United States. As such, he did not show signs of developing as a transcultural speaker. Sarah, for her part, seemed unable to process/understand how her desires and images shaped her experience, or at the very least, she was unable to articulate an awareness of the need to re-negotiate her desires and images. As a result, we see little development towards intercultural competence, let alone translingual and transcultural competence.

Discussions about travel also frequently appeared in my participants’ narratives. European ERASMUS students may already have a lot of mobility capital by the time they study in another European country. As discussed in chapter 5, mobility capital refers to the enhanced skills that a person may have due to the richness of the international experience they gain by living abroad (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 51). While some of my participants desired frequent travel while abroad, others did not. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) notes that “travel is constructed in the (…) wanderer’s imagination,” and some simply may not have imagined themselves as wandering much outside of the local context (p. 77). American undergraduate students may be less
accustomed to crossing borders compared to European students, and thus often have little foreign travel experience. This may also mean that American students are not as used to adapting to new and foreign contexts. The participants who did not list travel as one of their major goals appeared to have more significant local level participation, something that Kinginger (2008) listed as significant for a number of her participants as well. In my study, Sarah and Mark emphasized travel very frequently. They were also the least engaged locally overall. Even when Sarah was invested in the fraternity community, it is clear that her level of engagement did not cause her to operate between German and English and reflect upon and re-negotiate her goals and actions. Brad highlighted that he would like to travel, but that his funds were limited. What may have seemed like a limitation to him actually led to him investing time and energy into local communities that shaped his experience in numerous ways. Joe, David and Katie also discussed their travel desires, but were not as adamant about them as Sarah and Mark. Joe even criticized those who partied a lot or took frequent weekend trips, wondering how they managed to maintain their grades. David and Katie invested heavily into local relationships and communities in Marburg, and thus travel became less of a priority compared to spending time with their friends.

6.4 Emotion

Tales of individual study abroad experiences are brimming with both joyful and precious memories as well as frightening, destabilizing and emotional encounters. This broad range of sentiments and emotional disruption may well lead sojourners to question who they are in this new space, as well as how they must act in order to gain access and legitimately participate in various communities. In second language learning contexts, it has been established that how adult learners conceptualize emotion may be a source of tension, internal struggle and emotional insecurity (Pavlenko, 2005). Considering how participants view themselves and the world they
live in, as well as how their sociohistoric contexts have shaped those views, helps us understand why learners conceptualize emotions in the way that they do. For David, emotions are crucial in framing and discussing his homesickness and subsequent plan of action. Brad talked directly with me about his history with depression, and much later, noted he was no longer depressed due to how happy he was in the study abroad context. Katie, on the other hand, discussed her major frustrations with not being able to properly express her emotions in German, especially in relation to personal topics, like her father’s homosexuality.

6.4.1 Negative emotion

David’s bouts of homesickness were difficult for him, and he expressed his thoughts and emotions during this time in a very detailed manner. Perhaps this was in and of itself therapeutic. Later, he reflected constantly on the deep emotional strain that his homesickness caused him. Pavlenko (2005) discusses negative emotions and foreign language learning, noting that language learning trajectories can be accompanied by feelings of contradiction, sometimes positive, and sometimes negative (p. 215). Specifically for individuals who take up a language later in life, feelings of depression and alienation from the language and its speakers can be quite significant (p. 215). This is precisely what David experienced. For most students, studying abroad offers them a chance to create more mature and sophisticated selves, as well as completely new selves in the second language. David did not want that. He wanted to continue on the second language path he had started down back home. David’s history with and investment in German was indeed quite storied, especially when considering the quality of his long-term online forum interactions. In coming to Germany, he simply envisioned his life continuing on that path, just in a new city. Unfortunately, he was not prepared for the very different ways of being that he would need to negotiate in a new space. For David, it was not so much about wanting to create and explore new
ways of being; rather, he did not want to create a new self, yet found that at the same time he could not remain the same. David was overwhelmed by the fact that who he imagined himself to be in the United States and the ways of living and being he had grown accustomed to simply would not be possible in Germany. Eventually, he was able to begin creating a life for himself in Marburg, with the support of German, international and American friends. David became aware that his original desires and images of living in Marburg would not be possible, and slowly he began to negotiate new desires and expectations. He invested in communities he had originally said he would not invest in. He spoke English with people in those communities in order to maintain social ties, when he had originally said he would not. Through all of these new experiences, David developed not only in terms of his language proficiency and general self-awareness, but also as an intercultural speaker. David also began to show some signs of greater eloquence and critical distancing skills, which are part of the symbolic competence that Kramsch (2010) discusses. This can be seen when he thoughtfully took a step back from his previous orientations to the German language and language learning to re-negotiate his orientations to both the German and the English language. As such, David does show signs of beginning to move towards translingual and transcultural competence.

Brad spoke of his depression quite nonchalantly in the first interview. Later, at the beginning of the summer semester, he noted that his depression had completely disappeared, and worried he might become depressed again once back in the United States (Interview 3, summer semester). Brad attributed his depression to growing up in a small, homogeneous town in the United States, dealing with family problems, and having no way out. On the other hand, Marburg made him feel different. It offered Brad an exotic and exciting life in a foreign country, plus he had made lots of friends and had romantic interests – there was simply no room for depression in this new space. At the same time, Brad ensured that there was one important constant between the United States and Germany – his Muay Thai boxing. Benwell and Stokoe (2007) point out that
identity cannot be seen as just happening within talk and text, but identity also manifests itself in other practices, such as bodily movement in physical space (p. 208). In a sense, by actively participating in the Muay Thai community in Marburg, Brad carved out a familiar space within the completely new and foreign place – namely, Marburg – that contrasted so drastically with his home town in Pennsylvania. Through his experiences in Marburg, Brad began to view himself in a completely different way; instead of positioning himself as a depressed, lost soul stuck in the rural Northeast United States, he began to frame himself as a groomed fighter. His fighter metaphor did not reference violence so much as taking control of his own destiny. Brad talked about this new, stronger trajectory through references to Muay Thai and certain family challenges back home. The myriad of cultural influences he came to know and understand through his ERASMUS community led to experiences he simply could not have had in quite the same way back home. These experiences informed and began to change how he spoke about himself. The intersections of all of these perspectives allowed him to see himself differently, and he used what he knew, Muay Thai, to help mediate his view of himself as someone who does not give up. He depicted himself as a fighter who works hard and strives to improve. And these depictions were not just words, Brad actively searched out and continued very intense participation in Muay Thai, and also thoughtfully selected the kinds of people that he wanted to hang out with, and hoped they would want to have meaningful relationships with him as well. Picturing and discussing himself in this way appeared to shape and be shaped by his desire to invest in himself and in quality relationships through his experiences abroad. This was something that he had in mind for his time in Europe and felt he could not do in rural Pennsylvania (Interview 1, fall semester).

Certainly, Brad’s own intent here is important for bringing about these very personal changes in how he viewed himself. Months into his time in Germany, he began to view himself vis-à-vis depression in new ways. I would also argue that these personal changes reflect his development towards becoming an intercultural speaker, as Brad began to come into contact with different
belief systems, and thus different ways of seeing and being. For example, when one clubmate told him that he should not speak English in Germany, Brad’s trainer immediately confronted the clubmate with a differing viewpoint, saying that Brad could teach them all something about speaking English. Brad negotiated these two viewpoints by demonstrating that he understood why many people thought that foreigners should speak only German in Germany but also felt validated as a valuable interlocutor and person, regardless of language. These instances played a major role in his development towards intercultural competence as he began to view himself as someone of worth in general and to his Muay Thai community in Germany.

6.4.2 Emotional expression

As discussed previously with regard to her frustrations with the German language, Katie found it very difficult to express herself in German, and she was worried that she would be viewed as cold and uncaring by her international and German interlocutors. Katie espoused some of the frustrations that Pavlenko (2005) discusses in relation to negative emotions, in that Katie found herself completely unable to express emotions in German, and felt infantilized by her inability to portray herself as the creative, smart, funny, and caring adult person that she knew she was. Her German emotion vocabulary was not comprehensive enough to express herself in the way that she would in her native language. As such, Katie found herself with only a handful of vocabulary and terms to describe a wide range of emotions and feelings. Faced with such challenges, she resisted finding a voice in German, though improving her spoken German had always been her original goal for studying abroad. This moment could have been one in which Katie took the necessary steps towards developing her linguistic proficiency, even if it meant she would not always speak with complete accuracy. Instead, Katie was too afraid of what others would think of her non-native German. She surrounded herself with international and American
friends and Germans with whom she could also speak English. With these people, she could express her emotions in ways to which she was accustomed. Having the ability to speak English gave her great emotional security; however, it may also have kept her from having to negotiate conflict in German. With many American friends, Katie had fewer cultural struggles to negotiate and reflect upon, though her relationship with her German friend Stefan did provide her with a local and European perspective. In this way, her development as an intercultural speaker was limited, though she did see a lot of personal growth.

Through her friendship with Stefan, Katie was able to begin to change the way in which she viewed difficult personal issues back home. With Stefan, she had full emotional security, because speaking English was an option. In her community with Stefan, Katie was able shift her previous orientations towards talking about her father’s homosexuality. These small changes show signs of Katie's reflection on and initial re-negotiation of this issue. In her case, Katie’s German language proficiency scores showed some significant gains over the year. In addition, she was able to re-negotiate her perspectives and goals to continue to be meaningful and relevant regardless of language. Through this re-positioning, other changes occurred as well, and she began to reflect on issues that she had previously ignored, most pointedly by finally coming to terms with and being open with others about her father’s homosexuality. Katie began to act on new orientations to difficult topics in her life, and as such, some identity constructions began to take shape. What this shows is that there is a significant value in SA far beyond purely linguistic gains. Katie may not have reached her pre-sojourn goal of becoming fluent, but she did experience significant changes in her German language skills and also went through astounding personal growth due to encountering different views regarding homosexuality and having to re-negotiate her ways of thinking and being. However, the fact is that there is little evidence of Katie having developed the ability to operate between languages, and as such, her development as an intercultural speaker remained extremely limited.
David was the only participant to record oral reflections in both German and English and at times, he did so in ways strategic to his expression of various emotions. That he recorded in both German and English also shows that he also felt more willing and able to reflect on various topics and express his emotions in German. David recorded the first four oral reflections entirely in German. In each recording, he spoke in an animated fashion, with few mistakes and a large range of vocabulary. David had the most advanced proficiency of the group, including a very wide range of vocabulary. This is a very obvious reason for speaking in German in some of the oral reflections. However, it appears that his reasons for doing so may be far more complex. The oral reflections that he recorded in German were about making plans, going to Kassel, the feeling of pride he had after speaking German with an elderly lady at a bus stop, and the feeling of shame he had after speaking with a floormate in the dormitory kitchen. Later, he told me informally that he switched to English in later recordings because of a discussion we had had about how it felt more natural to speak with other English native speakers in English. As such, it appeared at that time that he was going to simply continue recording in English. I find it interesting, however, that David’s reasons for switching to English were not due to any realization that it may be more difficult to express himself in German in potentially emotional circumstances, such as oral reflections. Seven recordings after our discussion in the winter semester, David recorded one random reflection in German. I realized that this choice to use German may not have been random at all. In this particular recording, David outlined the shame that he had felt when his floormate had insinuated that David’s weight and larger stature were the primary reasons why he looked American. It appears that reflecting on this in German may have served as a way for David to tell the story, and yet distance himself from the severe shame, sadness and general negativity he felt after finding out how others in Germany may have perceived him. Perhaps he also chose to record it in German due to the fact that the exchange occurred in German. Either
way, it is clear that David’s choice of speaking and reflecting in German shows that he did not see his second language as a barrier to his ability to express his emotions.

6.4.3 Conclusion

Both positive and negative emotions, as well as difficulties regarding the expression of emotions more generally, were themes of great significance for many of my participants during their study abroad year in Germany. Sojourning students are often away from home for the first time, and thus find themselves negotiating linguistic and cultural differences at every turn. Importantly, the way in which they approach these differences may cause them to reflect on the foreign, host culture, and may also give them new insights into their own worldviews and beliefs. Negotiating new insights and constructing new identities and ways of being can lead to negative emotion and struggle. Negative emotions can shape a student's experience quite drastically; even the most enthusiastic and well-intending SA participant may wish they never set foot in this new place due to such intense emotions. In general, participants may also find themselves unable to express their emotions in ways they are accustomed to, leaving them feeling even more isolated. I have found that through reflection and re-orientation to one's own actions and intentions, students have the opportunity to re-examine the objectives that they set out for themselves. When looking at participants’ re-examinations of their own goals and desires, one must also consider language choice, emotions and identity narratives. Strong emotional reactions may lead to identity crossroads, where new spaces for self-reflection, identity negotiation and transformation may exist.
6.5 Discussion Summary

The analysis of the roles that imagination and emotion play in the data show that these constructs are useful arenas in which one can investigate participants’ levels of mutual engagement and identity negotiation and construction during study abroad. Additionally, imagination and emotion informed the various participants’ levels of engagement and how they fluctuated, since individuals and their participation may move in various directions, for example, from peripheral participation to non-participation or from peripheral participation to full participation. The data demonstrate that the move towards full participation may not be linear or unidirectional, because as intentional human agents, learners invest in their experience by actively making decisions based on their own desires and the status of their emotional security (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Participants may also be granted access or be blocked from participating in a particular community for various reasons. The theoretical framework of this study, that is, a communities of practice orientation to second language socialization, is useful in allowing one to discuss participation in communities that have a common central objective. As a theoretical framework, however, it may insufficient in capturing the SA experience and the types of spaces in which students take part. Not every participant in this study gained access to local communities, nor did every student seek out opportunities to participate in local communities, as seen to varying degrees in the cases of Sarah and Mark. It is also likely that other observations and activities that students take part in outside of CoPs can heavily inform their own experiences, and thus our understanding of study abroad students’ development as well. My data do show, however, that one can investigate students’ community participation and trace personal development in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the students who indeed are participating in local communities.
My participants reflected on their objectives, beliefs, and experiences through the themes imagination and emotion. Many of my participants moved towards full participation in local communities, allowing them to feel and be viewed by others as meaningful communicators and contributors. I have shown that for four participants, the need to make meaning and maintain emotional security overrode their original linguistic desires for oral fluency, even in the case of those who originally wished to embrace the German language and culture at every turn. Three participants in particular acted, negotiated, and reflected on rich points in an empathetic way that saw them maintaining access to their local communities. Mark, on the other hand, could not reflect on his French interlocutors’ salient identity issues, and thus either did not maintain access to that particular group of friends, or chose to invest his time in communities that supported frames of reference that were more familiar for him. The results show that participants in SA settings often have to re-negotiate their original goals, carefully reflect, and take up new subject positions in order to actively participate in local communities. Through these challenging experiences, participants are far more likely to begin shifting towards becoming intercultural speakers, or even translilingual and transcultural speakers.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Discussion of Findings

The present study aimed to investigate community participation and identity construction in a study abroad context from etic and emic perspectives. As shown in chapter two, current research in the area of study abroad and language learning has included etic research perspectives, or accounts of behaviors or beliefs by outside observers, as well as emic research perspectives, or descriptions of behaviors or beliefs in ways that are meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor. Such learner-centered accounts come from people within the culture being investigated. In this study, I illuminated the complexity of the study abroad experience and language socialization process by considering learners’ perspectives regarding their personal goals and desires regarding language, academics, social life, and their experiences in various communities of practice in a study abroad context. I also investigated the way in which they negotiated, constructed, and transformed their identities through the linguistic and cultural differences that they faced in their communities of practice. The results show that studying abroad can be a very beneficial, albeit challenging, experience as far as students’ linguistic and identity development is concerned. It is clear that some learners who take part in study abroad become central participants in local communities, whose members may include more experienced users of the second language. In my study, participants who engaged more centrally in their communities frequently reflected on their beliefs and perspectives about various issues. These participants also were more likely to take up new subject positions as they navigated the different linguistic and cultural experiences. Those who were mutually engaged in local communities and
also reflected on their own and others’ salient identity issues were also more likely to experience larger identity transformation.

The first research question asked the following: in which communities of practice do participants take part, and what are their levels of engagement in these communities? I have shown that Katie participated in a community of mostly English-speaking study abroad students. The primary objective of this community was to support one another in their navigation of the study abroad context. They were a group that encouraged familiar ways of being in order to understand what was going on around them. One German native speaker, Stefan, was also a central part of this community, and he served as a way for these students (including Katie) to talk and learn about a German student’s perspective on life in Marburg. It also allowed the group to consider another worldview from a non-threatening space, though the group spent most of their time contributing and supporting familiar, emotionally-secure identity trajectories. Katie was a central participant in this community, and her friendship with Stefan was particularly notable.

Brad participated centrally in a Muay Thai boxing community that shared the common goal of improving not just fighting skills but fitness levels as well. By the end of the year abroad, he was a mutually engaged participant in the community, and reflected on this by discussing how it felt to see his picture on gym wall collages. Sarah participated in very few communities until she gained access to a German fraternity community through her close friendship with a British study abroad student, Evelyn. How she imagined herself in this fraternity community showed just how important this particular group was for her. Although I observed that her own engagement in the fraternity was not mutually recognized, Sarah saw her participation in this group as extremely central to her life in Marburg. David participated centrally in two different communities of German women. One, a local community of German women, shared certain convictions about religion, academics, and friendship. His central participation and mutual engagement in this group made David feel very happy, and indeed lucky, to have such a close group of German-
speaking friends. Another community of importance for David was his online forum community. His deep engagement in this community began years before his time abroad; yet while abroad, he continued to be in close contact with many of the members, and even traveled to visit two of the women from the forum. Joe was deeply engaged in an academic community, namely the university chemistry department. He spent a lot of time working with professors, students, and labmates. At first his goal was to do well academically, but he soon began to view the academic community as one that also had social implications. After his many academic successes, Joe gained more access to the community of students in his chemistry lab. They began to invite him to social events, and he made sure to take part. Joe’s mutual engagement in the university chemistry community made him feel like a recognized member of the department. Mark developed many close friends early on, but never seemed to be involved in many communities. In this way, his local engagement in communities was limited at best.

The second research question attempted to find out if there was an interaction between participants’ levels of (mutual) engagement in individual communities of practice and their identity negotiation (and vice versa). Katie’s friendship with Stefan led to instances of identity negotiation vis-à-vis her father’s homosexuality. When Stefan officially came out to her, he also told many of the English-speaking community members. Katie saw that everyone unequivocally accepted Stefan for who he was, regardless of his sexual orientation. Her mutual engagement in this mostly English-speaking community helped her reflect on and re-shape her own feelings regarding how she viewed, presented, and talked about her father’s homosexuality. Similarly, Brad’s deep mutual engagement in the Muay Thai boxing community saw him begin to negotiate who he was, in that he gained new understandings of different worldviews and perspectives on language and culture. For example, negotiating his English and German language use and others’ reactions to this use in the Muay Thai gym context caused him to re-negotiate his own views of self and his future trajectories. This led to new ways of viewing his own experiences with
depression. Through his engagement in Muay Thai, Brad actively began to imagine himself differently, and in discussing these future plans, he also began to see himself as a person who could succeed regardless of the challenges ahead. Sarah, who engaged in various events held by a local German fraternity community, viewed her participation in this community as vital to her life in Marburg. However, her participation in this community seemed to be peripheral at best. Her one-sided engagement in that community did not lead to any kind of identity negotiation. David’s mutual engagement in his local community of German women led to many instances of identity negotiation, in that through the relationships developed in the community, he began to reflect on both his and their actions, as well as his relationships with both the German and the English language. Joe’s participation and eventual mutual engagement in the university chemistry community led to many instances of identity negotiation regarding his own status as a foreign student at a German university. Through his own academic successes, he re-negotiated his initial assumptions that foreign language learners would find it nearly impossible to maintain their GPA in Germany. Through his own attempts to maintain his perfect GPA, Joe spent a lot of time in the lab and eventually gained more access to social gatherings with his lab friends, whether being invited to watch soccer at a labmate’s apartment or to participate in lab research. This kind of access allowed him to see himself not just as a person who could make valuable contributions to the community, but also as a person whose contributions to that community were valued. Mark had a few close friendships in Marburg, but was not mutually engaged in a local community. He also showed very few signs of negotiating who he was; rather, he spoke about Germans, Americans, Europeans, or the French, in what appeared to be fairly essentialized categories. He reflected very little on these categorizations, and thus did not show signs of re-thinking or problematizing his own views of himself, or others.

Finally, research question three asked: do levels of (mutual) engagement in communities of practice change over the academic semester or year, and does the amount and intensity of
identity negotiation lead to identity development over time? Katie’s level of mutual engagement in her English-speaking community of university students became stronger throughout the year, due in part to her limited German proficiency and the decision to place emotional security above challenging herself by exploring new cultures, and/or doing what it takes to become more fluent in German. Still, this community presented challenges to her ways of dealing with difficult issues. The amount and intensity of her identity negotiation allowed her to take up new subject positions vis-à-vis her reflections and discussions of her father’s homosexuality. These particular instances of identity negotiation did not see Katie developing as an intercultural speaker. Her negotiations are better characterized as signs of personal development that may have been fostered or enhanced via international experiences. While Katie showed some understanding of concepts specific to Germany and Germans in terms of how they appear to think, feel, and act, she lacked the ability to mediate between people of different origins and identities, and thus did not show that she was developing intercultural communicative competence.

Brad showed signs of identity development through his mutual engagement in the Muay Thai community. It appeared that he was developing as an intercultural speaker as he became very aware of language use in his Muay Thai boxing club, and reflected on these vis-à-vis his own cultural background and history with depression. Through these experiences, he seemed even more open to learning new things about language, and continued to play with colloquial German speech. Through his participation in the Thai boxing community, Brad also began to learn many local concepts that came from more colloquial usages of German, especially as they were related to fighting and Muay Thai. Brad also learned many new words from other languages represented at the Muay Thai gym, including Turkish, Russian, and Arabic.

Sarah showed very few signs of identity development, if any at all. She thus did not develop as an intercultural speaker. Her experiences were also fairly limited. She reflected very little on her own beliefs, and her only attempts to come into contact with local groups were meant
to fulfill her romantic and social desires without attending to the salient identity processes of those with whom she was in contact.

Through his mutual engagement with a local community of German women, David developed the ability to distance himself from his previous viewpoints and those prevalent in Marburg, and began to reflect on his own relationships with Germany and both the German and the English language. He became able to re-think his own views of Germany and the German language, and surprised himself by learning that his evaluations of language now had to consider context. As such, he showed that he was beginning to develop as a translingually and transculturally competent speaker. David and perhaps Brad were the only participants in this study to make such strides, and certainly, their German proficiency and oral fluency are closely related to this development.

Early in the year abroad, Joe made many comments about Marburg, Germany, the German education, and German students in general. Very few of these were reflective at first; most of his recordings placed negative value judgments on various cultural issues that had come up. Later, he began to reflect on his views vis-à-vis his academic success in Germany. These reflections and various invitations from professors and students led to some changes in how he attended to the local context. Instead of staying in his room for hours on end, avoiding the world outside, which he had previously associated with the need to navigate many linguistic and cultural differences, Joe began to take part in social events with colleagues. As such, Joe started to develop as an intercultural speaker as he began to feel able to mediate between speakers of different languages and cultures. For example, when his own roommate came to him for help with a chemistry exam, Joe felt that his identity as a chemistry student who happened to be a foreign speaker of German was validated. This was an encouragement to Joe, and he began to reflect on his previous presuppositions, going beyond simply experiencing an international year abroad towards understanding and developing interculturality. Though Joe never developed the
linguistic eloquence that is typical of translingually and transculturally competent speakers (Plews, personal communication), his intercultural development in the study abroad context was quite notable.

Mark experienced very few instances of identity negotiation and this may have been related to the fact that he did not centrally participate in any local community. As such, he showed very little signs of identity development. For Mark, this was an international experience with little reflection on events that happened locally. His friendships with Germans or other foreign students led more to essentialized statements of how people are, rather than reflective practices on why and how people conceive of, believe, or do things in the way that they do. As such, little to no development of interculturality can be seen in his case.

In using ethnographic case studies as a methodological approach, I was able to gain more insight into the contexts and dynamics of learners’ perspectives and identity constructions, and how students negotiated and developed these perspectives. Looking at participants’ beliefs, actions, and engagement in communities informed me about their in-sojourn experiences including new perspectives and paths. In my study, David re-negotiated and constructed new identities vis-à-vis the German language. He showed signs of beginning to develop as a translingually and transculturally competent speaker. Brad began to reflect on his own views of himself and ways of being, and centrally participating in the local Thai boxing community was significant for these new personal trajectories. Brad showed development as an intercultural speaker. Joe put a heavy emphasis on his academics, heretofore not seen as typical of the dominant discourse on the American study abroad experience (Gore, 2005). Through his deep engagement in academic communities, Joe re-negotiated his own beliefs about language use and language learning. He began to move towards becoming an interculturally competent speaker. Katie re-negotiated her way of thinking and talking about her father’s homosexuality and constructed new ways of being in light of her reflections. She developed personally through her
international experiences, but did not show many signs of developing intercultural competence. Sarah and Mark experienced little reflection and did not re-negotiate personal beliefs and goals based on local participation in the study abroad context. As such, they did not develop intercultural or translingual and transcultural competence. The international program through which they came to Marburg left them to experience another culture in an unguided way, and did not do much to emphasize reflective engagement within that culture. Brad and Joe had different experiences only because it was a very open and unguided experience, and thus depended very much on the objectives and actions of the individual. Very little development thus occurred in Sarah and Mark’s cases. The findings of my study shed light on the importance of encouraging students to reflect on cultural and linguistic encounters in order to participate more centrally in local communities of practice. In this study, an in-depth analysis of the oral reflections and semistructured interviews helped to show that investigating imagination and emotion provide another way to look at and understand how participants framed their own perspectives regarding community participation, language learning, and identity construction in a study abroad context.

7.2 Implications and Future Directions

As noted elsewhere, institutional perspectives on study abroad and language learning seem to suggest that a sojourn abroad is the primary way that language learners move directly towards advanced proficiency in a foreign language. However, research has shown that this path towards improved linguistic performance is often neither direct nor straightforward (Freed, 1995; Kinginger, 2004, 2008, 2009; Pellegrino Aveni, 2005; Schumann & Schumann, 1977). The results of this study support these findings. Previous research in study abroad and language learning has investigated students’ L2 proficiency gains, oral fluency, social-psychological variables, pronunciation, L2 pragmatics, as well as learner perspectives and subjectivities (see
e.g., Block, 2007; Kinginger, 2009). Some of these studies have looked at gains post-sojourn and some have followed the students’ learning processes and experiences in-sojourn (e.g. Kinginger, 2009). In many of these studies, however, the interaction between engagement in community participation in-sojourn and identity negotiation has not been fleshed out. The central argument presented in this project is that deeper levels of engagement in communities while abroad will bring about instances of identity negotiation, and ultimately, identity transformation. In encountering a new language and culture one is socialized not only to use that language but also through the use of that language. Through these second language socialization processes, one encounters difference and conflict, which may lead to instances of identity destabilization. How a study abroad student acts (or does not act) can help to inform us about their local participation (or lack thereof), thus contributing to a better understanding of the whole experience of the individual study abroad student. My findings indicate that one cannot understand the quality of the sojourn experiences and what goes on locally by looking solely at objective measures, such as L2 proficiency (e.g. oral fluency, listening, or reading comprehension) that are measured and analyzed quantitatively. One must also consider the learners’ perspectives and their participation and engagement in their sojourn communities, as well as their own reflection and identity negotiation. Such data gives us a more informed understanding of an individual student’s whole experience in their study abroad context, and thus provides a more comprehensive understanding as to whether or not language development occurred.

As the researcher of this qualitative study, it must be noted that my subjective role as researcher not only shaped the current study but was also shaped by the participants, their experiences, and developments. As such, I also experienced changes regarding the ways in which I view language learning and identity in study abroad. It became very clear to me through being in the same study abroad environment as my participants that simply being in an international context was not always enough to see major intercultural development in and of itself. Having
read a lot of the literature in language learning and study abroad, I was naturally aware of this as a research finding. However, my own experiences were very different from what many of my participants went through, and this was indeed surprising for me at times. As the primary researcher, I also underestimated the complex ways in which I would get to know the participants. I became a close friend with two participants, and was well acquainted with two others, which may have both encouraged and limited data collection in different ways. On the one hand, the participants who I was close with may have felt more comfortable opening up to me. On the other hand, those same participants may have been more precautious in what they divulged in the case that the lines between friend and researcher were too blurred for their own comfort. The same may be said for those with whom I was not close; they may have felt comfortable opening up to me as someone who played no part of their everyday lives. On the other hand, they too may have shied away from sharing a lot of information with someone whom they did not know well. Another instance of personal change through conducting this research is related to my own assumptions about study abroad participants’ goals. Before going to Marburg, I assumed that my participants would have similar proficiency levels at the very least. This was not the case. I also believed that they would all be as interested and as focused on linguistic development as I was when I first went abroad. This was also not the case for Katie, Sarah, Joe, and Mark. My experiences in this study serve as a constant reminder not to generalize individual student objectives as being the same, or even similar. Each student who sojourns abroad has individual goals, beliefs, and desires when it comes to language learning and study abroad. In particular, Joe’s case reminded me that not all of the students we send abroad end up forgetting about the study in study abroad. This came as a surprise to me, as experiences like his do not often come up in the literature.
7.2.1 Implications for research: community participation, engagement, and identity

The findings of this study show that the participants’ levels of engagement in communities and their identity negotiations and constructions greatly informed one another in the sojourn context. All of my participants experienced instances of identity destabilization as they faced the need to negotiate linguistic and cultural difference in their sojourn communities. Similarly, individual participants’ desires to construct particular identities and take up various subject positions influenced which communities they participated in, as well as their levels of engagement in those communities. Their desired identity trajectories, the subject positions that they either took up or avoided taking up, and the communities in which they wanted to participate mutually informed one another. The participants who saw deeper levels of engagement in particular communities spent more time reflecting on their own initial goals, desires, and salient identity issues. In their communities, Katie, Brad, David, and Joe re-negotiated their beliefs, goals, desires, and identities to varying degrees based on what was needed and possible in order to continue moving towards full participation or reinforce their engagement in their particular sojourn communities. These decisions, actions, and the community acceptance of these actions led to new personal growth. While Katie’s story is one of major personal growth, Joe’s experience goes one step further. He began to be able to mediate between speakers of foreign languages, as seen in his newfound ability to tutor his German roommate in chemistry, completely in German. He may not have fully developed as an intercultural speaker, but he was certainly showing signs of moving toward this kind of competence. Brad, however, definitely developed as an intercultural speaker, as he was not only able to mediate between different foreign speakers, but he also developed an awareness of the specific meanings, values, and connotations of German, as seen in his problematization of the ways that Germans and Americans understand the meaning of the word “friend.” Finally, David showed the greatest signs of identity
development; indeed, he was the only participant who showed an ability to take a step back and re-consider his views of the German language as an American and as an American in Germany. As such, he showed very clear signs of beginning to shift towards translingual and transcultural competence.

There were also participants who only rarely, if ever, reflected critically on their own goals, desires and salient identity issues and as a result, never re-negotiated their own perspectives, perhaps because they had no awareness of the need to do so in the first place. This too led to the maintenance of already existing identity trajectories, or at the very most, slight shifts in those trajectories. For example, Sarah’s views of German men were mediated by her overwhelming romantic desires and her view towards German men persisted unchallenged. Therefore, her engagement in the German fraternity community was fairly one-sided and she remained only a peripheral member of this community. In Mark’s case, minimal re-negotiation of his own identity through community participation and navigation of rich points meant that he either felt little emotional instability or was simply unaware of the need to navigate newness. As such, his identity shifts seemed minor and not long lasting. Given that Mark handed in few oral reflections, it may be that I do not have the entire picture and as such I may be hard-pressed to discuss why he did not seem to actively transform and construct new identities in the sojourn context. Nevertheless, it is clear that Mark’s decisions to hold back in the data are likely an effort to maintain his emotional security, and perhaps, in doing so, he attempted to avoid having to discuss the negotiation of linguistic and cultural differences that challenged him in his communities.

A view of L2 learning in a study abroad context as “L2 becoming” through engaged participation views learning as the process by which one becomes a member of a certain community (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p. 155). In this process of L2 becoming, how students negotiate emotional insecurity due to moments of linguistic and cultural difference can also give
us an idea of how they (re-)orient and reflect on how they view, understand and maintain their own identities, as well as why and how they construct new identities. The present study contributes to a participation metaphor of language learning that emphasizes contextualization and engagement with others, and thereby highlights the learning process and not just learning products or outcomes (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). An investigation of learning and development that does not consider social engagement to be central can miss crucial pieces of the story. This study highlights the need for language learning research in a study abroad context to continue to emphasize doing, acting, knowing, and becoming, rather than looking chiefly at what is internally had or acquired.

Such findings also inspire us to reconsider how we evaluate language proficiency and intercultural learning, both in study abroad contexts and in the classroom. Traditional testing measures often treat language and intercultural learning as acquired outcomes. David’s advanced scores on the language proficiency evaluation, for example, could not inform us of the fact that he initially avoided taking up opportunities to speak unless with native speakers, and they most certainly could not tell us why. During his extreme homesick phase, David neither took up nor was afforded many chances to use German, actively participate in communities, and become an intercultural speaker. Only as he began to take up opportunities to participate in communities and engage with the communities’ members could David also begin to move towards becoming an intercultural speaker. Without having chronicled this experience, it would appear that David experienced a simple, uncomplicated success story, and yet by looking at his own perspectives regarding his goals, desires and community participation, we know that he overcame a number of personal, social, and cultural challenges in-sojourn.
7.2.2 Implications for language pedagogy, curricula, and program design

My findings show that language learners’ own goals and reflections play a large role in the day-to-day decisions that they make while abroad, and as such, the communities in which they participate, their subsequent reflections, and identities that they construct. The results of this study also show that individuals who study abroad emphasize the desire to make meaning in the L2. Furthermore, the results emphasize that participants want to be able to express emotions and be meaningful interlocutors in their communities, and that this is a major challenge in the L2, making mutual engagement in communities a challenge for Katie in particular. Participants’ attempts to make meaning and be locally relevant led to struggles associated with feelings of emotional insecurity and identity confusion. This may result in limited participation in local communities, or a retreat to familiar communities of international students. Such findings highlight interesting implications for pedagogy, and as such, support what Kinginger (2009) has pointed out as the need for study abroad to be integrated better into the wider language curriculum. Particularly Sarah’s case echoes a finding of Kinginger (2008) that many students need support in the ongoing development of local contacts, as well as with regard to encouraging meaningful participation and reflection instead of detached observation, mindlessness and/or oblivion.

My findings suggest that language curricula should consider students’ perspectives and desires, including the desire to make meaning and contribute in other ways in particular contexts. Language curricula should emphasize and encourage students to challenge their perspectives and desires, and create discussions of new and different ways of seeing things. Students who are about to study abroad are often excited and invested in the idea of making new friends in the host culture. However, they may not understand that becoming a part of a local community in the host culture requires not just an ability to communicate and interact with others in an L2, but also an
ability to be aware of, reflect on, and make room for others’ salient identity issues and perhaps develop new ways of thinking. Having a better understanding of students’ desires can turn teaching and learning into mutually informative discursive spaces where students are encouraged to conceptualize language learning and use as ongoing lifelong processes that require critical thought, reflection, and compassion. In this way, too, L2 learners both at home and in-sojourn may have a better understanding of themselves “as legitimate speakers in their own right, rather than as failed native speakers” (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 295).

Many consider the study abroad context as an experience that provides inherently superior learning opportunities compared to those available in at-home classroom contexts, and as such, much research has focused on either examining outcomes post-sojourn or developments during the sojourn, or both. The results of this study show that not all students come to develop as intercultural speakers simply by having international experiences. Katie, Brad, David, and Joe wanted to be relevant, valid meaning makers in their communities who actively participated and helped construct the ongoing dialogue. In the end, only Brad and Joe showed some signs of developing intercultural competence, while David started to shift towards the development of translingual and transcultural competence. That these developments occur shows us that we should do a lot more than just encourage students to study abroad. We need to better prepare them to participate and engage in local communities, and as such, begin to know what it means to help construct the ongoing community dialogue. A case-study approach to pre-sojourn workshops may help do just that. In presenting various study abroad cases, we may also be able to get students thinking about what it means to learn and use a language in the SA context before they set foot in the host country. We must also do more to encourage SA participants to reflect on their own and others’ linguistic and cultural routines before, during, and after studying abroad. How do we do this? I believe language educators should also feel compelled to start at the beginning, as mentioned. In the elementary language classroom, we can already begin to teach, guide, and
mentor students towards becoming transcultural speakers by emphasizing concepts and meaning through difficult cultural encounters and expressions in order to foster the consideration and understanding of multiple perspectives. This can be done, as mentioned, by making use of a case-study approach of real (anonymous) or made-up narratives of previous study abroad students. Such an approach would foster the consideration of many perspectives, not only that of prospective students, but also that of the previous study abroad student being discussed, as well as those with whom this student comes into contact.

7.3 Limitations of this Study

As with every study, the present study has its limitations. As a typical feature of qualitative case-study research, the processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation are limited by my subjective research interests and viewpoints, though qualitative researchers often find the presence of such subjectivities unproblematic (Duff, 2008). However, it must be stated that the qualitative data collected also deals with students’ interpretations of their own experiences. Thus, in many instances, we cannot know if these experiences actually happened as they were told, either in the oral reflections or interviews. It may also be seen that I am a limitation of this study in that I cannot generalize my findings to other participants in other cities and countries. However, in a qualitative study such as this one, generalization is not a criterion that is under investigation. The perspectives analyzed in this dissertation were of American undergraduate college students studying abroad in Marburg, Germany. Finally, the participants knew their audience for the oral reflections – me. Knowing that I was the audience likely influenced the ways in which they remembered, presented and discussed their experiences. One student in particular, Mark, did not turn in many oral reflections, and those that he did turn in unfortunately lacked critical reflection on various events. As such, I had to rely mostly on his
interviews to garner information about his experiences in Marburg. Certainly, there is a good chance that I am missing more of his experiences in Marburg than the others. Part of this issue may be related to the ways in which he and perhaps other participants recorded and reflected on rich points. This is a useful way to situate the loci of conflict that study abroad participants experience, but the concept of rich points should be explained much more precisely and even modeled to students involved in such a study so as to diminish the potential that students do not understand what it means to experience a rich point or locus of conflict.

The findings of this study contribute to the research that indicates that studying abroad is more beneficial for language learning than not studying abroad at all, as all participants faced major linguistic and cultural differences and had to figure out how to negotiate, reflect, and act based on their experiences. While Sarah and Mark in particular may not have reflected or acted in ways that would lead one towards developing intercultural competence, it may be that some growth did indeed occur, and further sojourns or intercultural experiences at home may contribute to less visible, long-term changes over a lifetime. Furthermore, my study went a step further by investigating where, why and how learners participate in various communities and how they negotiate challenging linguistic and cultural encounters, or rich points. As such, my project contributes to a call made by Kinginger (2009) that more research is needed on the settings most frequented by students while they are abroad.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

This dissertation project has chronicled a year in the lives of six study abroad participants. Their varying experiences demonstrate how different sojourns abroad can be. The six participants had diverse goals, beliefs and perspectives. According to the language proficiency evaluation scores, their German language skills improved to varying degrees, but upon closer
look we can see that the tests do not reveal how or why certain people scored the way that they did. The qualitative data highlight potential reasons for these outcomes. Two participants invested in their time abroad before they even departed; the other four did not. Four experienced intense identity destabilization and isolation, while two were somewhat naïve and oblivious to the need to navigate linguistic and cultural difference in order to develop as intercultural speakers. Three participants developed reflective stances during instances of conflict that helped them to develop into intercultural speakers, and three took few reflective stances or continued to rely on familiar frames of reference. The variation in goals, perspectives, experiences, reflective stances, positioning, and identity trajectories seen in this study serves as a continued reminder that the study abroad context cannot be considered a ready-made language learning experience. As such, we should continue to advocate study abroad to encourage increased international awareness and compassion. Language educators should also feel compelled to help their students better understand and prepare for what they will hopefully come to know as a time of complex but rewarding linguistic, intercultural, and personal challenges.
Appendix A

Language History Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge.

1. Age (in years):

2. Sex (circle one): Male / Female

3a. What is your academic major(s)?

3b. What year are you in (ex. junior, senior)?

4a. Where were you born?

4b. Where did you grow up?

5. What is your native language? (If you grew up with more than one language, please specify)

6. In which languages other than English and German do you have proficiency?

7. At what age(s) did you start learning each of your foreign languages? ('Start learning' = first exposure of 6 months or more) Where did you learn these foreign languages? (i.e. “at school” “at home” “in an immersion environment”)

   German: ______________________

   Other: ______________________

   Other: ______________________

8. On a scale of 1 (not literate) to 10 (very literate), rate your reading proficiency in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: _______  Other: _______

   German: _______  Other: _______
9. On a scale of 1 (not literate) to 10 (very literate), rate your writing proficiency in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: ____________  Other: ____________
   German: ____________  Other: ____________

10. On a scale of 1 (unable to understand conversation) to 10 (perfectly able to understand conversation), rate your speech comprehension ability in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: ____________  Other: ____________
   German: ____________  Other: ____________

11. On a scale of 1 (least nativelike) to 10 (most nativelike), rate your oral proficiency in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: ____________  Other: ____________
   German: ____________  Other: ____________

12. On a scale of 1 (least nativelike) to 10 (most nativelike), rate your command of grammar in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: ____________  Other: ____________
   German: ____________  Other: ____________

13. On a scale of 1 (least nativelike) to 10 (most nativelike), rate your command of vocabulary in each of your languages, including your native language.

   English: ____________  Other: ____________
   German: ____________  Other: ____________
14. On a scale of 1 (least important) to 10 (most important), rate the importance to you of the languages you know, including your native language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. In the boxes below, indicate the use of German and other languages during the past 6 months.

Check the percentages that apply to your personal experience. The numbers should total to 100%.

### At Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check the percentages that apply to your personal experience. The numbers should total to 100%.

### At School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check the percentages that apply to your personal experience. The numbers should total to 100%.

### With Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Check the percentages that apply in your personal experience. The numbers should total to 100%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. At what age were you first exposed to German in school or college? (serious study of at least one semester)

17. Write down the name(s) of the language(s) in which you received instruction in school, for each schooling level:
   - Primary/Elementary School: _____________
   - Secondary/Middle School: _____________
   - High School: _____________
   - College/University: _____________

18. Estimate, in terms of hours per day, how often you are engaged in the following activities with your native and second languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Second Language</th>
<th>Other Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen to Radio/Watching TV</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for fun</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for work</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading on the Internet</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing emails to friends</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing articles/papers</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
<td>_______ (hrs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. In which languages do you usually:
   Count, add, multiply, and do simple arithmetic?  ______________
   Dream?  ______________
   Express anger or affection?  ______________

20. Do you identify more closely with the German culture or the American culture?

21. When you are speaking, do you ever mix words or sentences from the two or more languages you know?

22. Among the languages you know, which language is the one that you would prefer to use in these situations?
   At home  __________  At a party  __________
   At work  __________  In general  __________

23. If you have lived or travelled in other countries, please indicate the name(s) of the country or countries, your length of stay, and the language(s) you learned or tried to learn.

24. If you have taken a standardized test of proficiency for languages other than your native language (e.g., TOEFL or Test of English as a Foreign Language), please indicate the scores you received for each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Name of the Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25. Describe your own personal beliefs and/or views regarding language learning. Why is it interesting to you? (or conversely, why not?) Why do you learn languages?
26. Describe your own personal beliefs and/or views regarding the German language. Why is it interesting to you? (or conversely, why not?) Why do you take German?

27. Describe why you have decided to Study Abroad. What are your own personal beliefs about Study Abroad? Why have you decided to Study Abroad?

28. Describe why you have decided to Study Abroad in Germany, specifically. What are your own personal beliefs about Germany? Why are you going to Germany?

29. If there is anything else that you feel is interesting or important about your language background or language use, please comment below.
Appendix B

Language Proficiency Evaluation

Text 1: Das Schulsystem in Österreich

Text 2: Übersinnliche Phänomene

Text 3: Service-Roboter

Text 4: Heizkraftwerke
Immer mehr Wohngebiete werden über Fernwärme mit Gebrauchswarmwasser und Heizwärme versorgt. Diese Wärmestrom wird hauptsächlich in kleineren Anlagen erzeugt, d.h.
ausschließlich Wärme abgeben. Durch große Versorgungsgebiete werden ne-
Heizkraftwerke errikt, bei denen zunächst elektrische Energie anfällt. Der Anfall Abwärme wird. Heizkraftwerke bestehen bereits mehr als 100 Heizkraftwerke in Deutschland. Die Länge des heutigen Fernheiznetzes beträgt über 2.000 km. Als Wärmeträger kommen hierbei nur noch Warmwasser in Betracht.

Text 5: Die Verteilung des Sozialproduktes
Die erzeugten Güter und Dienstleistungen des Sozialproduktes wurden mit Geld bezahlt.
Appendix C

Instructions for Oral Reflections

You will be asked to record oral reflections on this MP3 player. Your oral reflections include personal experience stories such as reactions, beliefs, and thoughts about interesting encounters in Marburg that you have a strong reaction to. This might include positive or negative interactions with Germans or other exchange students, new cultural or language-related experiences (good and bad), reactions to other international students’ incidents and/or stories, or other general observations that stick out to you. These incidents may happen during our group conversations, at social events, in university courses, at your dormitory, during service encounters (shopping, restaurants, etc.), while traveling, or at other times when you are in a group.

You may record your oral reflections in either English or German. You will be asked to record these as soon as possible after they happen, to best capture what happened and how the encounter(s) made you feel. I recommend that you develop a routine for recording experiences (for example, every night before bed). Please send me your recordings on a weekly basis via email.
Appendix D

Sample Interview Questions

1. Describe your own personal beliefs and/or views regarding language learning. Why is it interesting to you? (or conversely, why not?) Why do you learn languages?
   a. Re-visit in each interview to see if there are changes/developments

2. Describe your own personal beliefs and/or views regarding the German language. Why is it interesting to you? (or conversely, why not?) Why do you take German?
   a. Re-visit in each interview to see if there are changes/developments

3. Describe why you have decided to Study Abroad. What are your own personal beliefs about Study Abroad? Why have you decided to Study Abroad?
   a. Re-visit in each interview to see if there are changes/developments

4. Describe why you have decided to Study Abroad in Germany, specifically. What are your own personal beliefs about Germany? Why are you going to Germany?
   a. Re-visit in each interview to see if there are changes/developments

5. Describe how you decided to go to Germany this year, and the plans and preparations leading up to your departure.
   a. What (if any) goals did you have for yourself?

6. Describe your arrival in Germany and what that experience was like for you. How did you feel? What kinds of experiences did you have getting here?

7. Describe your first few days in Germany and what experiences you had. How did you feel? What kinds of experiences have you been having?

8. What are your living arrangements like? How do you like them?

9. What are courses are you taking? Did you take the language preparation course? Were you involved in the international orientation? What is that experience like?

10. Who have you met so far? Who are your friends/contacts?

11. How much contact have you had with your family/friends back home?

12. Which people or groups of people have been important to you here? Have there been changes over time?

13. How do you feel so far about your university’s support for its students in Marburg?

14. Does your experience so far match what you expected pre-departure?
15. What are your goals now for your semester/year? Have your goals shifted/changed at all? Do you have new goals?

16. Let’s discuss some of your oral reflections (referring to oral recordings that I will have listened to by the final two interviews).

   a. Why did you say ________?
   b. Why did you feel that way?
   c. Why do you think things happened that way?
   d. What changed your mind/didn’t change your mind?
   e. How has this experience affected you?
Appendix E

Transcription Conventions

+ short pause
++ long pause
+++ very long pause
. full stop marks falling intonation
? raised intonation
! loud exclamation
.h short laughter
.hh long laughter
.hhh very long laughter
() single parentheses indicate uncertain hearing
xxx unable to transcribe
= latched utterances
[. . .] indicates that a section of the transcript has been omitted
References


Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five*


Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.


Lafford, B. (2004). The effect of context of learning on the use of communication strategies


intermediate-advanced Spanish L2 university classroom. *CALPER Working Papers Series, No. 3.* The Pennsylvania State University, Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research.


Pavlenko, A. (2002). Poststructuralist approaches to the study of social factors in second
language learning and use. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Portraits of the L2 user* (pp. 277-302).

Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.


VITA

Janice McGregor

ACADEMIC POSITIONS HELD
2012-2013 Visiting Assistant Professor of German Kansas State University
   German Basic Language Program Coordinator Kansas State University

EDUCATION
   PhD German/Applied Linguistics, The Pennsylvania State University, December 2012
   MA German, University of Waterloo (Canada), June 2006
   BA Honours German, Wilfrid Laurier University (Canada), 2004

FIELDS OF INTEREST
Foreign Language Education; Study Abroad; Language & Identity; Learner Beliefs; Qualitative Research Methods

PUBLICATIONS

FELLOWSHIPS
2007-2011 Doctoral Fellowship, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
2005 Canada Graduate Scholarship: Master’s, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

TEACHING AND COORDINATING EXPERIENCE
Kansas State University
2012 - present, Visiting Assistant Professor and German Basic Language Program Coordinator

The Pennsylvania State University
2007-2012, Graduate Instructor

Philipps-Universität Marburg
2009-2010, Language Center Instructor

Wilfrid Laurier University
2006-2007, Instructor

University of Waterloo
2004-2006, Graduate Co-instructor