LEARNING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM:
KOREAN STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE

by

Eunsil Lee

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Judith L. Shrum, Chair
Dr. Jan K. Nespor
Dr. Bonnie S. Billingsley
Dr. Barbara B. Lockee
Dr. Han K. Song

November 7, 2005
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Interaction, Communication, Sociocultural Theory, Short-Term Study Abroad, Second Language Acquisition, Second Culture Acquisition, Qualitative Study

Copyright 2005, Eunsil Lee
Learning Language and Culture outside the Classroom: 
Korean Study Abroad Students’ Experience

Eunsil Lee

(ABSTRACT)

This qualitative study examined seven Korean students’ language and culture learning experiences in a study abroad context. The purpose of this study is to gain insight about the processes of students’ social interactions and development of communicative competence outside the classroom. My understanding and learning was guided by the framework of various communicative competence models, interactional practices, sociocultural theory, and cultural learning processes.

The findings of the study show that participation in outside-the-classroom interactions enhances students’ language and culture learning in study abroad situations. However, living or working with native speakers did not necessarily mean that there were meaningful interactions. Social interaction with native speakers was challenging for language learners because of the cultural distances, discontinuity, and conflicts between them. Despite the difficulties in social and cultural interactions in the target culture, active participation in social interactions was still an important factor in language and culture learning. Verbalizing cultural issues such as cultural differences, misunderstandings, and observations of the target culture was an indication of the learners’ cultural awareness and development.

Students believed that knowledge of grammar was an important factor for successful communication. At the same time, students were anxious about misunderstandings and miscommunication. I found that students easily engaged in interactions with their international peers, and these were less stressful than interactions with native speakers. This peer interaction eventually created opportunities for language learning. Students expected native speakers to correct their errors and to take roles as teachers of the target language even outside the classroom, but they also learned to initiate self-repairs and to ask for help. Engagement is the key to making a good conversation. The underlying condition for engagement is negotiation between two interlocutors to understand meanings.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. ii
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. iii
List of Table, Figures, and Excerpts .................................................................................. vi
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... vii
Dedication .......................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1
Background of the Study ................................................................................................... 2
  Study Abroad .................................................................................................................. 2
  Interactions outside the Classroom .............................................................................. 4
  Development in Sociocultural Framework .................................................................. 6
Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................... 7
  Epistemological Perspectives ....................................................................................... 7
  My Stance and Qualitative Study ............................................................................... 9
Purpose of the Study ......................................................................................................... 10
Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 11
Nature of the Study .......................................................................................................... 11
Limitations of the Study .................................................................................................... 12

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 14
Second Language Acquisition ......................................................................................... 14
  Individual Factors ....................................................................................................... 15
  Oral Proficiency Improvement .................................................................................... 16
  Interpersonal Communication ..................................................................................... 17
  Communicative Competence Models ........................................................................ 19
  Interactional Competence Theory ............................................................................. 23
  Sociocultural Theory ................................................................................................ 24
Second Culture Acquisition ........................................................................................... 28
  Cultural Learning ......................................................................................................... 28
  Intercultural Conflict .................................................................................................. 31
  Adaptation .................................................................................................................. 33
  Intercultural Communicative Competence ............................................................... 34
CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 39
Site Selection ...................................................................................................................................... 40
Virginia Tech .................................................................................................................................... 40
English Language Institute at Virginia Tech ...................................................................................... 40
Participant Selection ............................................................................................................................ 42
Participant Profiles ............................................................................................................................... 43
Getting Started .................................................................................................................................... 46
Data Collection ..................................................................................................................................... 49
Interviews ............................................................................................................................................ 51
Focus Group Meeting ........................................................................................................................... 53
Participant Observation ........................................................................................................................ 54
Field Notes .......................................................................................................................................... 57
Recording Conversations ...................................................................................................................... 58
Summary of Data Collection .................................................................................................................. 62
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................................... 63
Content Analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 63
Interactional Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 64
Conversation Analysis ........................................................................................................................... 65
Pragmatic Analysis ................................................................................................................................. 66
Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability .................................................................................. 67
Role of the Researcher ............................................................................................................................ 68
Summary of Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 68

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 70
Social Interactions outside the Classroom ............................................................................................. 70
English Language Environments ............................................................................................................ 71
Social Interaction as Cultural Interaction .............................................................................................. 76
Active Participation in Interactions ......................................................................................................... 86
Cultural Learning and Interactional Competence .................................................................................. 89
Development of Communicative Competence ....................................................................................... 94
Grammatical Competence and Communicative Competence .......................................................... 95
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction ..................................................................................... 116
Purpose of the Study ........................................................................ 116
Research Questions ......................................................................... 117
Findings .............................................................................................. 117
Final Discussion ................................................................................ 119
  Language and Culture Learning ......................................................... 120
  Social Interactions .......................................................................... 120
  Development in Communicative Competence .................................... 121
Conclusion .......................................................................................... 123
Implications ......................................................................................... 125
  ESL Classroom Instruction .............................................................. 125
  EFL Classroom Interaction ............................................................. 127
  Preparation for Study Abroad ......................................................... 128
Further Research ............................................................................... 130

REFERENCES .................................................................................. 133
APPENDICES ..................................................................................... 148
VITA .................................................................................................... 168
LIST OF FIGURES, TABLES, AND EXCERPTS

LIST OF FIGURES
Figure 1. Focus of the Study --------------------------------------------------------------- 13
Figure 2. Three Major Interactions in Learning Language and Culture ----------------- 124

LIST OF TABLES
Table 3.1 Classes at the ELI ------------------------------------------------------------- 41
Table 3.2 Participant Profiles and Background Information ----------------------------- 45
Table 3.3 Data Collections ------------------------------------------------------------- 50
Table 3.4 Interview Places ------------------------------------------------------------- 52
Table 3.5 Color and Participant Match -------------------------------------------------- 58
Table 3.6 Types of Conversation Recording Conditions ---------------------------------- 59
Table 5.1 Organization of the Study Findings ------------------------------------------- 117

LIST OF EXCERPTS
Excerpt 3.1 MG’s Getting an Oral Consent at KFC I ---------------------------------------- 60
Excerpt 3.2 MG’s Getting an Oral Consent at KFC II -------------------------------------- 61
Excerpt 4.1 Interview with MA about Speaking only English ----------------------------- 72
Excerpt 4.2 MG’s Opinion about American Individualism -------------------------------- 78
Excerpt 4.3 HO’s Conversation about a Bad Dream ---------------------------------------- 80
Excerpt 4.4 Interview with MA about Non Smoking Rule --------------------------------- 84
Excerpt 4.5 KB’s Ordering a Meal at Subway --------------------------------------------- 88
Excerpt 4.6 KB’s Conversation about a Shower Curtain ---------------------------------- 91
Excerpt 4.7 KB’s Conversation about Taking Shoes off ---------------------------------- 92
Excerpt 4.8 KB’s Conversation about a Famous Baseball Player -------------------------- 97
Excerpt 4.9 JN’s Conversation about Articles ------------------------------------------- 98
Excerpt 4.10 KB’s Conversation about Ordering Pizza by Telephone --------------------- 100
Excerpt 4.11 MG’s Conversation with YS about Honey ----------------------------------- 104
Excerpt 4.12 JN’s Conversation with MA about Daily Routines -------------------------- 105
Excerpt 4.13 HO’s Conversation about HO’s Father’s job ------------------------------- 107
Excerpt 4.14 KB’s Conversation about Pizza -------------------------------------------- 108
Excerpt 4.15 KB’s Conversation about Milk --------------------------------------------- 110
Excerpt 4.16 SI’s Conversation about PDAs -------------------------------------------- 113
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must express my sincere appreciation to the major participants in my study: seven Korean students at the English Language Institute (ELI) in Blacksburg, Virginia: HO, JN, KB, LY, MG, SI, and YP (pseudonyms). Without their friendly participation, I could have not done this job. I thank all seven for their patience; they had to constantly bear with me while I asked questions and followed them around both day and night. I wish them the best of luck as they continue their lives and their language learning as well.

I thank Dr. Judith Shrum, who has been my advisor since 1996 when I entered Virginia Tech as a master’s degree student. She always welcomed me with open arms and warm smiles whenever I returned to Blacksburg from Korea to continue my doctoral work. My dissertation has arrived with her valuable feedback and critical guidance. I also thank Dr. Jan Nespor. I started to see the world from a different point of view since I sat in his class in Fall 2001. In his class, I learned not only about ethnography but also about genuine interests in research. I will remember him as a great ethnographer and a great professor.

I would like to pass my sincere thanks to Dr. Bonnie Billingsley and Dr. Barbara Lockee for their support in the process of obtaining a doctoral degree. I thank them very much for participating in all the exams and comforting me with their generous concern. I really appreciate their open hearts toward me. I also thank Dr. Melanie Uttech and Dr. Megan Boler. They are no longer at Virginia Tech, but I remember them as wonderful professors who led me to a place and space where I could find my passion in both teaching and learning.

I give the sincerest thanks to Dr. Han K. Song. He has been a great mentor, supervisor, and teacher. I know that whatever words I use to thank him are not enough. I will always thank him whenever I have the chance no matter where I go. Thank you very much, Dr. Song.

My sincere thanks go to my special friends: KC, Cathee, and Matt who found time to read my drafts and correct grammatical errors. They sacrificed their valuable time helping me improve my writing, and I will remember their kindness and sincerity that is the most important lesson to me. When I have a chance to help others later, I will remember what they did for me, and I will do the same thing. I really thank them for being an important part of my dissertation process.

I also thank Judy Snoke, the English Language Institute (ELI) director, and teachers of the ELI for allowing me to be around them, for inviting me to their field.
trips, and for sharing their teaching philosophies. I also thank all the students, secretaries, volunteers, and conversation partners I met through the ELI. Ongoing thanks go to the participants’ interlocutors inside and outside the classroom who allowed tape recordings of their conversation such as: KB’s roommate Tomoki; Taiwanese student YS; JN and MG’s host mother MA; HO, JN, KB, LY, SI, and YP’s conversation partners; and anonymous cashiers at fast food restaurants and supermarkets. I also appreciate the anonymous Korean transcribers.

Through this journey, I met wonderful friends who shared similar interests in second language teaching and learning: I-Ping, Lourdes, and John. I was lucky to know them and share their friendship. Studying abroad can be a lonely journey, but friendship makes it far less lonely. I thank Yoonjin, So-Young, Jiyeon, and Yoon-Joo for being there for me. They were my nice neighbors and wonderful friends who made my journey less lonely and also more fulfilling. I should give my thanks for being a big sister to Moonkyo Yun, Youngeui Kim, and Eunjoo Lee. More thanks should go to Pastor John Jeong and his wife, Bun-nam Jeong. I deeply appreciate their care and prayers for me and for the baby I lost. I am thankful for Hannah Chung’s heartfelt prayer for my family and me. I thank Kelly in New York for her dearest friendship.

I am thankful that I could work at Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching (CEUT) as a graduate assistant. I am thankful to all the tutors at the Writing Centers at Lynchburg College and Virginia Tech who helped me polish my written English. I remember when Dr. Janice Rice, my advisor at Lynchburg College, sat down with me at the computer and helped me to revise my honors paper. This event changed me, and I began to enjoy writing more from that moment when she showed herself as a model teacher who really cared for her students.

I thank my parents for everything. They are the utmost reason why I am here today. They are my roots, sky, and land. They are my beloved teachers who have been teaching me how to live my life. Mom and Dad, thank you. I love you. I also want to thank my father-in-law and mother-in-law who understand and care for me. I also thank my aunt and uncle, Okshin Park and Yangsoo Huh, for showing a great love and faith in me. I want to say thank you to my brothers and all my friends in Korea for understanding my absence on the important occasions in their lives over the past decade.

I would like to give all my heart to thank my husband, Yooshik. He has been a wonderful husband in our 10 years of marriage. Thank you very much for having faith in me and for loving me no matter where life takes us. I love you and will love you forever. I must say thank you to our daughter, Carol. She is such a warm and loving daughter. Her love has kept me strong. She has been wise enough to understand that her
Mommy had to study. Carol was my research assistant during my fieldwork. She was with me everywhere I went to observe my participants. You did a good job, Carol, my love always.
DEDICATION

For

Dongsoon Lee & Oknam Park

and

Yooshik Yoon & Myeong-Eun Yoon