

**STUDY ABROAD AND CAREER IDENTITY:  
Three narratives of English language students' journeys  
to English-speaking countries**

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Jenni Trög

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English  
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Jenni Trög

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Kulttuurienväliset opiskelijavaihto-ohjelmat ovat kasvattaneet merkittävästi suosiotaan kuluneiden vuosikymmenten aikana. Kuitenkin vasta viime vuosina on herätty tutkimaan millaisia kokonaisvaltaisia vaikutuksia kulttuurirajojen ylittämällä sekä vieraaseen kieli- ja kulttuuriympäristöön sopeutumisella on vaihto-opiskelijoiden identiteetille. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella seuraavaa kysymystä: millaisia vaikutuksia kansainvälisellä opiskelijavaihdolla on opiskelijan ammatilliselle identiteetille.

Tutkielman aineisto on kerätty temaattisella ryhmähaastattelulla. Siinä kolme opiskelijaa kertoo opiskelijavaihtonsa aikaisista kieli- ja kulttuurikokemuksista sekä pohtii identiteettiään ja ammattiaan. Haastateltavat ovat englannin kielen opiskelijoita, jotka matkasivat lukukaudeksi englanninkielisiin maihin. Haastattelu nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin. Aineisto analysoitiin narratiivisen analyysin periaattein, eli tarinoista tuotettiin kolme tapauskohtaista kertomusta.

Analyysin tuloksista käy ilmi, että opiskelijavaihto vieraaseen kieli- ja kulttuuriympäristöön vaikuttaa matkaajan tiedollisesti, taidollisesti, maailmankatsomuksellisesti sekä altistaa jäsentämään uudelleen identiteettiä. Lisäksi tulokset kertovat, että on mielekästä yhdistää keskustelu ammatti-identiteetistä ja opiskelijavaihdosta. Opiskelijavaihto voi vaikuttaa opiskelijan ammatillisen identiteetin kasvuun seuraavilla tavoilla: vahvistaa opiskelijan kuvaa itsestä kulttuurienvälisenä toimijana, avata ovia ja luoda mahdollisuuksia kansainväliselle uralle sekä rohkaista opiskelijaa kansainvälisen ammatti-identiteetin rakentamiseen. Lisäksi vaihto voi antaa opiskelijalle avaimia ammatilliseen kasvuun ja toimia merkittävänä tienristeys-kokemuksena, joka rohkaisee opiskelijaa arvioimaan suhdettaan uraansa ja jäsentämään uudelleen ammatillista identiteettiään.

Tutkielman tulokset kertovat, että opiskelijavaihdon vaikutuksia opiskelijan ammatillisen identiteetin rakentumiselle olisi tarpeellista ja ajankohtaista tutkia lisää. Kulttuurienvälisen vaihdon sisältämät mahdollisuudet tulisi hyödyntää opiskelijoiden parhaaksi kotimaisissa korkeakouluissa sekä muissa ammatillisissa oppilaitoksissa.

Avainsanat: learner characteristics, professional development, study abroad, narrative research, English language

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Study abroad in applied linguistics .....	7
2.2 Study abroad and career in the University of Jyväskylä .....	9
<b>3 IDENTITY .....</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Interest in the individual .....	11
3.2 The self, culture and language .....	12
3.3 Theoretical definitions of identity .....	14
3.4 Identity negotiation .....	16
3.4.1 The identity negotiation of cross-cultural sojourners .....	16
3.4.2 Negotiating communities of practice .....	18
3.4.3 The role of agency.....	20
3.5 Identity and narrativity .....	22
3.6 Identity and career.....	24
<b>4 PREVIOUS STUDIES .....</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1 Language and cultural learning on study abroad.....	26
4.2 Identity reconstruction through cross-cultural experiences.....	29
4.2.1 Immigrants.....	29
4.2.2 Short- and medium-term sojourners .....	30
4.3. From study abroad to an international career.....	33
<b>5 RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1 Aims of the study .....	35
5.2 Methodology .....	36
5.2.1 Studying experiences .....	36
5.2.2 Qualitative case studies .....	37
5.2.3 The narrative inquiry .....	39
5.3 Data collection and analysis .....	41
5.3.1 Choice of participants .....	41
5.3.2 Data collection with a thematic group interview .....	41
5.3.3 Data analysis as narrative analysis.....	43
<b>6 THE STORIES .....</b>	<b>45</b>
6.1 Storyline and the dimensions of the analytical framework.....	45
6.2 Johanna's story: analysis .....	46
6.2.1 Expectations and language and cultural experiences.....	47
6.2.2 Identity .....	52
6.2.3 Career identity .....	56

6.3 Marjukka’s story: analysis .....	58
6.3.1 Expectations, cultural challenges and learning experiences .....	59
6.3.3 Identity .....	67
6.3.4 Career identity.....	71
6.4 Helena’s story: analysis .....	73
6.4.1 Motivations and language and cultural experiences.....	74
6.4.2 Identity .....	78
6.4.3 Career identity.....	82
7 DISCUSSION.....	85
7.1 Language and cultural experiences .....	86
7.2 Identity-related experiences .....	88
7.3 Study abroad and the sojourners’ career identities.....	90
7.4 Value, implications and restrictions of the study .....	92
8 CONCLUSION .....	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	98
APPENDIX 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM PRIOR TO INTERVIEW .....	103
APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS FOR THEMATIC GROUP INTERVIEW .....	104

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, globalisation has become a norm and characteristic of how the post-modern West is organised. In addition, globalisation affects how individual actors construct their identities in society. As Arnett (2002: 774) observes, it is possible to construct either local or global identities today, and choose the worldwide culture for one's framework of identification. These observations are fundamental to the present study which examines the identity reconstruction processes of individual cross-cultural sojourners. The study is placed in an applied linguistic framework and is related to the academic fields of education and career.

It has been estimated that approximately a quarter of a million students are sent abroad each year by the U.S alone, as part of their professional education (Angulo 2008: 84). Added with the Asian, African and European exchange and business students, the numbers explode. Consequently, there has been a huge need for different institutions to assess the quality of their study abroad programs and to consider the impact that these journeys may have on the individual travellers. During the past decade, the number of studies concerned with the influence of crossing cultures has fortunately grown. These findings suggest that crossing cultures for short to medium periods will have positive impact on the sojourners' language and cultural skills (Dufon and Churchill 2006: 26-27) and on their sense of self in deep, unexpected ways (Ting-Toomey 1999: 247).

In spite of the increasing literature on study abroad related topics, there are still relatively few studies on the 'psychological ramifications' of studying abroad (Angulo 2008: 1). In fact, there is a noticeable gap in these studies regarding the impact of study abroad on the sojourners' career identities. Moreover, although the sending institutions mainly aim to prepare students for career, the professional benefits of study abroad are currently up to the individual travelers to reap. This gap in research was one of the main factors that motivated me to conduct an applied linguistic study on English language students' study abroad experiences and career identities. In addition, I was motivated to study the topic because of the impact that my own

profession-oriented cross-cultural experiences had on my personal identity and career identity development.

Against these kinds of motivational factors and background of previous theory, the present study aimed at studying the impact of study abroad on the individual sojourners. The goal was to answer to the following question: what kind of impact does study abroad have on the sojourner's career identity? In order to answer to this, the study carries through three major themes: foreign language and cultural experiences, identity reconstruction and the impact of study abroad on career identity. The same three themes are present throughout the study: in the preview of theory, in the narrative analyses and in the discussion of the findings. In the heart of this qualitative study are the unique study abroad stories and the tellers of these stories.

In practice, the empirical part of the study was carried out as a thematic group interview in which three participants discussed their study abroad experiences relating to language and culture, identity and career. The three participants were chosen from those English major students in the University of Jyväskylä who had been on study abroad in different English-speaking countries. These choices gave the study a context in which study abroad was in a close connection with the participants' career training as future English language professionals. The interview was recorded and the data was transcribed word for word. The data was analyzed as three different case stories written out as three narrative analyses. These aimed to plot out and give voice to the experiences of the participants. Lastly, the analyses culminated in answering the study question.

In order to begin, I will introduce the structure of the report. Chapter 2 talks about study abroad which is the contextual framework of the present study. Chapter 3 discusses the complex concept of identity, from definition perspectives to specific dimensions that are relevant for the present topic. Chapter 4 presents previous theory on study abroad versus language and culture, identity and career. Furthermore, chapter 5 discusses the methodology of this study and chapter 6 presents the three narrative stories. The significant findings of the analysis and the implications of the

study are discussed in chapter 7. Lastly, the particular challenges and learning experiences of conducting the study are addressed in the concluding remarks in chapter 8.

## **2 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

Applied linguistics and its related fields, second language acquisition and language learning and teaching, have been shaped much in the post-modern time. Whilst the previous decades located language learning in a classroom with theories and practical language learning methods, the 21<sup>st</sup> century linguists have become increasingly interested in the various contexts and ways in which languages are studied around the world. This change of paradigm and the expanded agenda of topics that have been recently included in linguistics have been given the name the 'social shift' (Block 2003). Moreover, one central aim of applied linguistics is to learn how individuals' lives are coloured or changed by foreign language learning over time *and* to give voice to these experiences (Cotterall 2008: 126). These changes and viewpoints provide the basis for the theoretical discussion of the present study.

Next, in section 2.1, I will look at how study abroad situates in applied linguistics and define this and other related concepts central to this study. Further on, section 2.2 will discuss how study abroad and career appear in the context of the present empirical study, the English language program of the University of Jyväskylä. These topics will begin the review of theory of this study.

### **2.1 Study abroad in applied linguistics**

Along with the social shift in applied linguistics, also the world of the second language (L2) learner has changed (Ushioda and Dörnyei 2009: 1). In today's globalized world, foreign culture and language encounters colour language learning, and it has been acknowledged that multilingualism and L2 learning have in fact characterised life in

many ethnic communities for centuries. These changes in society and thinking have opened doors for many context sensitive topics in linguistic research: such as ethnicity, identity and crossing cultural borders. At the same time, the number of educational culture crossing and language learning journeys has increased. The vast amount of studies conducted from these experiences shows that cross-cultural learning is currently given great value. As viewed by college students themselves (Kitsantas 2004: 441), a cross-cultural educational journey is an opportunity for socializing, gaining cross-cultural skills and deepening one's knowledge in the subject matter.

There is different terminology connected to short- and medium-term educational travels. In this study, these journeys are talked of as *study abroad*, as in much of the topical research literature used in this study. This term is chosen because it refers directly to the educational purpose of the journey and includes a reference to its context – another cultural environment. Moreover, it is important to remember that study abroad contexts are diverse due to the different home and target countries of the travellers (Regan, Howard and Lemée 2009: 11). In this study, the English language is an important characteristic of the target environments.

Furthermore, the students going on study abroad are called *sojourners*, *travellers* and *border crossers* in this study. These particular terms are the most common ones used in the topical research literature. They refer to the short- and medium-term length of the journeys, traffic across cultural boundaries and include a degree of commitment to learning and cultural adaptation that is generally higher than with casual visitors (see Patron 2007: 16-19 for comparison). In addition, the travelers have certain things in common (Patron 2007: 16-19). First of all, they go abroad voluntarily. Secondly, they go there in order to learn from language and culture, for education and for personal development. Thirdly, their journeys are limited by time and so have an anticipated return. Also the consequences of the journeys separate them from the others. Characteristically, an individual on study abroad often travels a cycle consisting of culture shock, adaptation, acculturation, reverse culture shock and re-adjustment (Patron 2007: 16-19). At least these conditions separate the sojourners from other migrants, especially immigrants and refugees.

In addition to language and cultural adaptation, study abroad is a rich ground for examining various identity-related themes. The reason for connecting these topics is that the intense nature of study abroad may compel or encourage the traveller to go through different identity-related change processes (Angulo 2008: 84). In this study, these processes are talked of as *identity reconstruction* or *identity change*. Furthermore, as noted by Angulo (2008: 84), a holistic understanding of the impact of study abroad on the individual traveller is necessary for an industry that sends hundreds of thousands of students, if not more than a million, to the world every year.

The next section will present the study abroad sending practices of the particular institution, the University of Jyväskylä, in which the present study was conducted.

## **2.2 Study abroad and career in the University of Jyväskylä**

In the University of Jyväskylä (JYU), study abroad is defined as a short period of one or two study terms during one's degree studies (JYU Kansainväliset palvelut 2010). The studies abroad can be separate subject studies or courses relating to one's major or minor subjects. In addition, they can be language studies. Moreover, one has to study full-time in the target university although the number of due courses is not further defined. Under these conditions, study abroad in the JYU is an academic journey relating to one's professional development (JYU Kansainväliset palvelut 2010). Also the English section of the department of languages in the University of Jyväskylä aims to prepare its students for working life in several ways. The goals of the teaching are to help the students develop a basis for their careers and knowledge and skills needed in them. Moreover, the goal is to help the students become experts in the English language (JYU Kielten laitos 2010). In order to arrive at these, the department recommends studying abroad for one or two terms.

Elsewhere, it has been stated that students who study languages at university and go on study abroad in this target-language environment are in particular able to view the journey for their professional development (Byram 2006: 2). This relationship is

examined in the empirical part of this study. In general, the reports of these and other students give reason to believe that study abroad is usually a positive experience for the students. Reflecting the global development, the statistics show that the number of Finnish higher education students going abroad has grown steadily in the past ten years. More specifically, in the year 2009, over 9000 Finnish students studied abroad for a period of more than three months (Garam 2010: 7). Further on, JYU sends dozens of students abroad from each faculty every year. Study abroad is, thus, a recommended practice at the home university despite the fact that these stories have not been told in local studies before.

The next chapter on identity will examine the central theoretical foundations in the crossroads topic of the present study. As was suggested in section 2.1, identity-related topics have become part of applied linguistic research because L2 acquisition is currently viewed as development that touches on the learner's self. Furthermore, identity-related change processes accompany culture-crossing journeys. These connections are the viewpoint to identity in chapter 3.

### **3 IDENTITY**

“When language learners speak, they are constantly reorganizing a sense of who they are.” (Norton 2000: 11)

In the spirit of the quotation above, chapter 3 will discuss the concept of identity in the light of multi-faceted theoretical insights. The chapter is divided into the following sections: 1) interest in the individual, 2) the self, language and culture, 3) theoretical definitions of identity, 4) identity negotiation, 5) identity and narrativity and 6) identity and career. The purpose of sections 3.1-3.3 is to establish a theoretical foundation for talking about identity in the present study. Further on, sections 3.4 and 3.5 will discuss two dimensions of identity that are particularly significant in the context of the present study. Lastly, section 3.5 will connect identity with career and discuss how a career identity may develop and to what kind of identities and orientations it may relate.

### 3.1 Interest in the individual

In addition to the context sensitive directions in today's linguistic research, the field has become characterised by a shift towards the individual learner. Instead of methods and method based learning theories, the aim has become to understand how individual learners' lives are coloured and possibly changed by foreign language learning over time (Cotterall 2008: 126). Furthermore, the goal is to give voice to these experiences. In the background of this shift of interest is a larger paradigmatic change in the culture of knowing, across disciplines. In other words, subjective meaning-making has become an established means of explaining human activity (Syrjälä 2007: 229).

In applied linguistic research, the shift towards the individual is seen in the change of research foci, in the means of conducting research and in the theoretical frameworks that are drawn on. For example, one new research focus has been the role that language plays in the learner (e.g. Regan, Howard and Lemée 2009; Jackson 2008; Dufon and Churchill 2006; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). As for the means, the use of autobiographies and life stories has increased in the social sciences and in applied linguistics in such an amount that it is possible to talk of a narrative or a life story turn (Syrjälä 2007: 203) These foci and means can be addressed and used in the light of different theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the turn for subjective meaning-making questions what can be known of society through generalizations and emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual's thinking, acting and of his/her experiences (Syrjälä 2007: 230-31). Moreover, regarding the individual as an active part of the language learning process turns learning into *subjective experiences* that involve his/her body, emotions and *identity* (Kalaja, Menezes and Barcelos 2008: 3).

The growing appreciation of subjective experience is visible also in applied linguistic research conducted on cross-cultural sojourns, and study abroad experiences. Much of the data has been collected as narratives and stories revealing the deeper influence that culture crossing and developing second language proficiency have on identity. This particular crossroads of themes – change in language and cultural circumstances,

identity reconstruction and the narrative telling of them – has proven insightful for understanding how the individual and the social forces may interact (Pavlenko 2004: 34). In the present study, this crossroad of themes opens a window to the individual experience. In the following section, I will begin to examine the theoretical foundations on which such a study can be conducted.

### **3.2 The self, culture and language**

Concerned with the identity of language learners, the applied linguistic field still lacks a theory for identity (Norton 2000: 4). However, in the crossroads of identity, culture and language, the theoretical foundations of much late research and theory have been built on sociocultural assumptions of the world (e.g. Block 2010; Jackson 2008; Dufon and Churchill 2006; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). With roots in anthropology and developmental psychology, the sociocultural theory explains how language, culture, society and the self intertwine and consequently, why sojourning in a new cultural setting can influence a person deeply (Jackson 2008: 14). Thus, the ability to examine the previous concepts is essential for research on cross-cultural and intercultural processes (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 57). In the present study, the understanding of the self, culture and language must start from the foundations of the theory. These will be discussed next in the light of mutual constitution and mediation. After these, I will define culture and language in greater detail.

The foundations of sociocultural theory lie in the observation that the world and the human mind are *mutually constituted*. In other words, the two are constructed in relation to one another or as described, in ‘dynamic interdependence’ (Markus and Hamedani 2007: 4). In practice, the sociocultural theory understands that the human mind develops in and through a social context. Moreover, by learning to use its affordances – signs or material artefacts – the individual reciprocally transforms the world around him. Consequently, both the social context and the human mind are continuously constructed. And thus, human activity occurs in culturally organized

settings and ways, with a long sociocultural history (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 57, 64-5).

The second key concept, *mediation*, further describes how human mental activity develops and how humans act on the world in sociocultural thinking. That is, in addition to its biological inheritance, human mental activity – such as memory, emotions, rational thinking, learning and language – develops in social connections: through participation in cultural activities, through cultural artefacts and cultural concepts (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 59-62). Thus, one's relationship to the world is direct as well as mediated. Later on, mediation stands for the process in which a person uses these cultural means to regulate the material world or his/her own or other's social and mental activity (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 79). In other words, a person develops through participating in cultural activity, which is why one key to understanding this person are the surrounding, changing cultural circumstances (Rogoff 2003: 4).

Explaining *culture* in the light of sociocultural theory, Rieber (1997: 106) offers one broad perspective stating that “in the broadest sense... everything cultural is social” because “culture is the product of human social life”. Taking this definition for culture, the term comprises every activity, artefact and concept that human social life has produced. By another sociocultural definition, culture is the force that “infuses social relationships and the historically developed uses of artefacts in concrete activity” (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 1). In light of these definitions, the term culture will be viewed as a cultural-social construct in the present study.

In a similar fashion, Lantolf and Thorne (2006: 5) discuss the concept languaculture to refer to *language* in a context sensitive way. Here, the term refers to the activity – language and culture – by which people make sense of the world. In other words, language develops as one of human higher mental functions that are socially and culturally determined (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 57). Thus, with culture comes language and vice versa. Furthermore, language points to two directions: outward as a unit of social interaction and inward as a unit of thinking. Therefore, it can affect both

the language user as well as the environment (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 18). In order to understand what complexities L2 learning entails, the post-structuralist view divides language into three levels. On the first operational level, language is compiled of signs to which a linguistic system gives meaning. On the second level, there are signifying practices by which the signs can be interpreted, characteristic of each linguistic community. On the third level, language includes ongoing change and variety in the culturally created signifying practices, and social struggle in who holds the power behind them (Norton 2000: 13-14). Thus compiled, L2 learning is a holistic process into the perceptions, values, attitudes and practices of a community (Holmes 2001: 337-8).

Grounded in these insights, the applied linguistic field often views identity as a sociocultural construct that emerges and develops in certain cultural settings as individuals engage in social activities (Block 2010: 337). The foundations leading up to here will help the reader understand why a study abroad as a cross-cultural experience is likely to have a profound, holistic impact on a person. In the light of the previous discussion, I will next look at how identity is thought in the post-modern age and define its theoretical framework for the purposes of the present study.

### **3.3 Theoretical definitions of identity**

The term *identity* is used broadly in everyday life as well as in academic discussions – in philosophy, psychology, social studies, etc. Although there is no widely agreed definition of the term, many researchers understand it similarly – as a person's understanding of who he/she is (Taylor 1994: 25, cited in Chik and Benson 2008). Grounded in the sociocultural observations and this definition, the following section will discuss how identity is viewed in recent literature and address the essential characteristics of identity for the present study.

According to Erikson (1980: 22), the sense of having an identity is based on two simultaneous observations: a person's awareness that his/her self is unchanging and continuous *and* the perception that other people recognise the same two aspects.

Therefore, identity is connected to the 'I am' experience while at the same time this personhood is perceived by others. Due to these dimensions, researchers have been traditionally plagued by the following dichotomy: whether to approach identity through the individual or social lenses (Widdicombe 1998: 192). Also in the present sociocultural frames, identity can be perceived from these two viewpoints: on the one hand, people construct identities from the surrounding cultural capital while on the other, people's unique circumstances shape their development (Block 2010: 338). In other words, identity is constituted by the sociocultural context while people act on the same social environments, simultaneously reshaping and constituting them (Block 2008: 143).

In order not to divide identity between the subjective and the collective perceptions, one way to conduct research on identity is to understand the concept as a tool for research, thinking and analysis (Hall 1999: 5). In other words, instead of viewing identity as an existentialist concept, it can be used as a viewpoint to examining the *dialogue* between the individual and the social reality. Furthermore, contemporary literature encourages one to perceive identity as a *process*, not a fixed product (Hall 1999: 14). Therefore in this study, the participants' identity perceptions could thus be seen as a viewpoint to the ongoing dialogue between their study abroad experiences and their future with a career.

Although connected to the discourse of completeness and continuity, the stagnant idea of identity has become much problematized in recent research literature (Skeggs 2008: 11-50). In fact, the post-modern view of identity is characteristically inharmonious, and the idea of an essentialist identity has been replaced with an idea of hybrid or pluralised identities (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 16-18; Block 2008: 142). Similarly, post-modern literature views identity construction as an ambivalent process amidst the evolving social, cultural and historical structures (Block 2010: 338). One response to the confusion is to view identity through the fundamental aim people have for completeness and continuity. Or, to focus on the discourses that incessantly shape identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 14). Thus, discussing identity can

provide a framework by which a person may find coherence and balance for one's fragmented experiences of the self (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 18).

In sum, the previous perceptions of identity as dialogue, a process, as changing and fragmented allows a nuanced and a socioculturally informed view to the theme (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 3-4). In addition, many applied linguists today attach features such as narrativity, negotiation and demographic categories such as ethnicity, migration, gender and language to identity (Block 2010: 338). Moreover, identity is viewed in relation to engagement in different communities of practice. Through focusing on some of these features, recent applied linguists have examined varied issues ranging from language learning and use to particular dimensions of identity (Block 2010: 338). In the present study, the important features are identity negotiation, narrativity and identity in relation to career. These features and dimensions will be discussed in the following sections.

### **3.4 Identity negotiation**

#### **3.4.1 The identity negotiation of cross-cultural sojourners**

In general, the term identity negotiation refers to identity work that takes place in the human self, defined above as changing, dialogical and process-like. Different applied linguistic authors define the term in different ways: as interplay between reflective and interactive positioning (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 20); as the process of asserting, defining, modifying, challenging and supporting one's desired self-images (Ting-Toomey 1999: 40); or as self-ascription and self-positioning amidst one's social, cultural and historical circumstances (Block 2010: 338). From a subjective viewpoint, identity negotiation enables a person to conceptualize one's place in the world and include alternative meanings or possibilities in one's identity (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 17). This section looks at identity negotiation from a cross-cultural perspective and addresses the role of language in it.

As recent research on the topic and the growing amount of studies prove, identity negotiation is particularly relevant in the case of cross-cultural sojourners. Due to the change of cultural circumstances, cross-cultural experiences are likely to make a person to negotiate one's identity as new values, practices, attitudes and worldviews are encountered (Jackson 2008: 54). In the Identity negotiation theory (INT) by Ting-Toomey (1999: 39-45), certain principles guide people to negotiate their identities in cross-cultural situations. The principles of the INT relevant to the orientation of this study are presented below. These will be helpful for recognizing the influence that the change of cultural environment may have on the sojourner's identity.

First of all, the principles of the INT build on the assumption that all people have a basic need for identity security, inclusion and connection. The same principle applies to both one's personal and in-group identities (Ting-Toomey 1999: 40-41). In addition, a person is likely to experience identity security in a familiar cultural environment. These observations form a basis through which it is possible to look at the changes that culture-crossing may bring. Firstly, stepping into a foreign cultural setting is likely to cause some degree of *insecurity*, which has the potential to condition one for identity negotiation. In addition, the loss of one's old net of relationships may cause insecurity, whereas successful cross-cultural relationships tend to create new trust and emotional security. In order to arrive at these, one must become mindful of the new cultural context, learn new interaction skills and be willing to reconstruct one's identity-based knowledge. Thus, a person is likely to experience identity change or transformation in an unfamiliar cultural environment – or identity chaos at the negative end of the process. In addition to the basic need people have for security, inclusion and connection, a satisfactory identity negotiation outcome includes being understood, respected and affirmatively valued (Ting-Toomey 1999: 40-41). In the end, whether in relation to border crossing or not, identity negotiation aims at belonging and at the essential relationships through which one may have a desired view of oneself.

Language, too, has a significant role in identity negotiation. On the one hand, language forms the medium through which identities are negotiated and employs the cultural discourses prevailing in the particular cultural environment. On the other, identity

guides the ways in which people use linguistic resources to express themselves (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 14). Based on this kind of observations, it is argued that language learning – learning to express oneself through a foreign language – is likely to condition a person to reconstruct one’s identity (Norton 2000: 11). Placed in the Identity negotiation theory, language forms the core of people’s personal and group membership identities. Therefore, inability to communicate or feeling unpredictability in interaction with culturally unfamiliar others may build distrust, or moreover, cause a biased view of the other (Ting-Toomey 1999: 40-41). In this way, language permeates the entire social experience of a person.

### **3.4.2 Negotiating communities of practice**

Discussed already in the previous section, belonging is central to the reconstruction of identities. Because the present study approaches identity as the lived experience of an individual in a social setting, it is important to look at the build of the social dimension and one’s commitment to it – community and belonging. In this discussion, the idea of personhood is connected to the practices of specific communities (Wenger 1999). Elsewhere, putting such a strong emphasis on communities of practice has been criticized as a simplistic view to identity, since it narrowly defines identity as movement towards community membership (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 40). However, to understand identity negotiation with regard to belonging and community, the concept will be examined in this section as a person’s membership to different communities. Similarly, in the Identity negotiation theory, taking part in interactional communities is a prerequisite for becoming understood, respected, affirmatively valued (Ting-Toomey 1999: 46).

In Wenger’s (1999) topical work, the term community of practice is explained through the two joint terms, community and practice. Firstly, the term *community* is defined as mutual engagement in a joint enterprise that gives birth to a shared repertoire of meaning that develops in larger historical and sociocultural settings (Wenger 1999: 72-84). In other words, as people engage in mutual practical actions whose meanings they define, keeping the enterprise together and using shared resources that develop over time to negotiate meaning, they are engaging in communities of practice. In addition,

the term *practice* refers particularly to the negotiation of meaning. This is characteristically a dynamic, interactive and a loosely bordered activity (Wenger 1999: 72-84). Due to their build, communities of practice can provide their members with two kinds of social experiences: meaningfulness or experiences that actually hold them back (Wenger 1999: 85). Thus, communities of practice are not essentially positive or negative. Characteristically, they are a force of relationships, knowledge, negotiation and engagement in action. As such, they have real influence on people's lives (Wenger 1999: 85).

A community of practice based view of the social dimension suggests a specific approach to identity. In greater detail, identity here equals to participating in specific communities of practice (Wenger 1999: 151). Simultaneously, as the communities renegotiate meaning on a constant basis, identities are being worked by the individual members (Wenger 1999: 151). In practice, communities define identity through participation and non-participation. As a full member in a community of practice, one knows how to interact, control oneself, understands the discourses of meaning-making and shares the resources of acting in that environment. These equal to identity competencies (Wenger 1999: 152). In addition, a person's identity is defined by one's commitment to varying communities of practice. In sum, identity negotiation with regard to communities of practice refers to the movement that one makes between different communities, in the level of one's commitment, membership and growth in competences. On the other hand, even though one may never become a full member of a community of practice, that community may still become significant for one's identity. In other words, it may provide a person with access to certain resources and meaning-making or guide the future life of that person (Wenger 1999: 152-3). In the end, a sense of trajectory thus gives meaning to one's lived experience of identity.

Sustaining an identity in crossing cultures, and so across the borders of different communities of practice is generally demanding. In culture crossing, the new communities of practice that one enters open up an entire field of new identity options – with the potential to influence one's identity (Wenger 1999: 156, 158). However, one's commitment to communities and competencies within them are not

changed and forgotten in an instant. Instead, individuals always belong to many communities of practice simultaneously, called as the nexus of multimembership (Wenger 1999: 149). Those who cross cultures nevertheless move physically from one community of practice to another. Thus, they often experience a need for change in their identity (Wenger 1999: 159-60). The work of reconciliation, meaning the negotiation of commitments and belonging is the means for balancing this competition. In fact, because of how essential this work is to being a person, Wenger (1999: 160-1) suggests the work of reconciliation to be called identity. Lastly, joining new communities contributes to the sojourner's identity but so does leaving one. In other words, finding a way out of a community of practice requires one to form new relationships, seek oneself a place in new social settings and see the world and oneself in new ways (Wenger 1999: 155).

### **3.4.3 The role of agency**

In juxtaposition to community membership, a lot of personal developmental potential related to one's desires, creativity and agency is included in identity development (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 40). In other words, in contrast to the need people have for belonging and community, they are in themselves also a resource and distinct from others (Skeggs 2008: 11-50). In recent applied linguistic works, this potential or agency is talked of as personal investment to learning and development (Norton 2000), agency and intentionality (Lantolf & Thorne 2006: 142) or as self-reflection and self-thematisation (Chik and Benson 2008: 156). Essentially, identity provides the framework in which personal agency is used. Thus, identity negotiation enables a person to search for one's place in the world and to balance one's fragmented experiences and desires (Lin 2008: 211). At the extreme, contemporary possessive individualism suggests that a person becomes oneself by owning one's experiences (Skeggs 2008: 11-50).

In the communities of practice thinking, agency refers to a personal investment on identity either through association or differentiation. Moreover, it refers to the amount of control that a person has over the meanings in which identity opportunities locate in a community of practice (Wenger 1999: 188). Thus, agency has a role in

identity reconstruction. In theoretical discussion that puts slightly more stress on the individual, the new identity opportunities are viewed as discourses that open a door for identity expansion and change. They can be either embraced or abandoned. Similarly, agency can guide identity reconstruction through both participation and non-participation (Wenger 1999: 190). All in all, including the role of agency in identity reconstruction may suggest identity to be spoken of as identification. Identification – occurring as *engagement* in practical actions and the negotiation of shared meaning, *imagination* as a creative process of building new images and *alignment* as accepting and connecting to certain purposes – is a subjective experience in the social reality (Wenger 1999: 189). Thus, the three listed means help to expand identity through space and time in different ways.

The role of commitment and intent in becoming a member of the new community defines what kind of development takes place in a cross-cultural sojourner (Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000: 171). Moreover, whilst some identity options may be forced on the sojourner (e.g. foreigner, stranger), agency can be worked simultaneously by positioning oneself in the cultural environment, resisting identities, producing new identities and attaching alternative meanings to one's sense of self (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 20). In this way, cross-cultural sojourners are not only conditioned by new identity options but have the potential to become multilinguals who are able to move around in multidimensional social spaces (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 8). Therefore, agency does show as engagement, imagination and alignment also in the case of border crossers. In myriad ways, post-modern language learning travels can help individuals beyond imagination and desire, into real life social communities that have the potential to expand their scope of reality and identity. However, as with imagination (Wenger 1999: 177-8), cross-cultural sojourners may experience lack of belonging in their lived community membership, which may detach them from these communities and leave a person in a state of uprootedness.

In the next section, bearing in mind the theoretical discussion so far, I will examine the dimension of narrativity in relation to identity.

### 3.5 Identity and narrativity

As was discussed previously in sections 3.2 and 3.3, the human self is characterized by two essential needs in the post-modern fragmented society: the need to make sense of the lived experience and to produce oneself upon the world. One way to establish social value is telling stories of oneself (Skeggs 2008: 11-50). Therefore, it is also meaningful to examine personal stories in order to approach identity. In research or in everyday life, the term narrative can refer broadly to stories of personal experiences that are being told either verbally or through writing, via the tool of language (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2006: 4). This approach to stories and in fact, to identity, is discussed in this section.

The main argument behind connecting identity with the narrative form is that life and identities are built as stories that can be told and heard (Dutra and Mello 2008: 52). Moreover, many researchers accept that narratives characterize the way the human self is organized. In the fragmented world, narratives can create a sense of purpose, coherence and continuity for identity as they bind together fragmented life experiences and project their meaning for the future (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 17). Therefore, having a storied identity and experience of life is even necessary. All in all, the things that narratives are able to tell about a person's life and identity are "the story a person chooses to tell about the life she or he has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible, what is remembered of it, and what the teller wants others to know of it" (Atkinson 1998: 3, cited in Block 2010: 340).

In practice, many contemporary researchers agree that each utterance in a narrative can reveal aspects of one's identity (Block 2010: 340-42). More specifically, these utterances tell of one's ongoing identity search in varying social circumstances. Under such terms, narratives bind together three aspects of one's story of identity. They are one's past, present experiences and expectations of the future (Block 2010: 337-38). Moreover, narratives are not static but dynamic productions that help to understand how an individual might see one's future, and interpret oneself (Dutra and Mello 2008: 52-53). One useful account of what the narrative dimension means has been given by

Bateson (1990: 29-30, cited in Plunkett 2001). It says: “composing a life involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative”.

Emerging in particular temporal settings, narratives are always affected by their sociocultural context of birth. In fact, social, cultural and historical context define the possibilities one has for constructing narratives (Cohler and Hammack 2006: 151). Moreover, since the individual’s life is inseparable from culture, narratives show a dialogue between the cultural context and individual agency and have the potential to open new understanding of culture (Syrjälä 2007: 238-9). Similarly, in the community of practice thinking, mutual engagement offers a way to enter personal stories from a shared base of resources (Wenger 1999: 156). Therefore at the extreme, a community of practice equals to a shared story or history. However, the perspective used in this study stresses that narratives are primarily subjective, a means to define identity for oneself and for others as a demonstration of agency (McAdams, Josselson and Lieblich 2006: 4). In this approach, the viewpoint to society remains somewhat subjective.

In the case of transnational movement – such as migration or culture crossing – narratives offer particularly important frames for identity negotiation (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 18). While testing the vast new identity options of a new cultural environment, identity narratives work as a stabilizing link helping a person to turn identity chaos into an experience of coherence (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 18). However, as language and cultural change provides individuals with new life options, it may force them to define themselves in new ways. This may lead to discovering new ways of being that did not exist in one’s old cultural environment (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 19). On the other hand, the significance of a temporal culture crossing on a person’s identity can be defined only by its location on the person’s life trajectory (Wenger 1999: 155). In the present study, the participants tell stories about their cross-cultural experiences and interpret their impact on their future careers as language professionals. Across sciences, these kinds of crossroads narratives have been coloured by change, growth and personal development (Pals 2006: 189).

Leading up to the next section on identity and career, the SLA theorists Dutra and Mello (2008: 53) propose that narratives might prove useful in examining professional aspects also in applied linguistics. Combined by similar elements with identity narratives, career narratives are also helpful in making sense or balancing the complex and fragmented process that professional identity is today (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 41).

### **3.6 Identity and career**

In this section, I will look at the joint topic of identity and career based on the discussion on identity run so far. The section talks about what is understood by the term professional identity, how the personal and professional intertwine in one's life history, careers in narratives and lastly, what kind of identities and orientations may be included in a person's professional identity.

The term *professional identity* is generally understood as one's experience about oneself as a professional actor (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 26). Adding to this definition, professional identity also entails a person's subjective assessment of, ethical meaning, value and goals given to work (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 26, Olesen 2001: 291, 297). Moreover, in line with the earlier discussion on identity perspectives, professional identity can be approached in two ways. Firstly, as something that is defined and worked subjectively by the owner, or as something born in/through culturally constructed social communities. In this study, the perspective chosen to identity (see more in section 3.3) offers a tool to view professional identity in the potential crossroads of the lives of the participants and study how they are influenced by their career linked cross-cultural journeys (Olesen 2001: 151).

In a person's life history, profession-oriented learning and personal development are likely to intertwine so that it would be difficult or unnecessary to separate the two (Plunkett 2001: 291-2). Further on, these dimensions of learning often proceed hand in hand, as codependent and mutually inspirational (Ropo and Gustafsson 2006: 73). As a

result, the renegotiation of a person's professional identity may follow the significant experiences in a person's life history. In order to gain this kind of a holistic approach to a person's career life, many recent theorists have conducted research following the terms of the narrative research tradition. In this field, the focus is on how individuals produce professional identity through stories (Rehfuss 2009, Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 41).

Producing career identity narratives is meaningful for research but also with regard to one's own personal and professional life and development. First of all, they can provide tools for building a professional identity in the fragmented career world. Further on, they can help to shape one's personhood in the crossroads of life or when one's relationship to work and profession is still fragile (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 41-3). Moreover, stories of professional identity can aid in producing reflective meaning to one's professional self and competence. The same authors remind that these stories should nevertheless not be considered true selfhood but constructions of it. In the post-modern age, it should also be understood that a person's career identity is a process. Today, people can be engaged in processing their career identity throughout their adult working lives.

To be more specific, a person's evolving professional identity is taken in the present study as a formation of subjective aspects and the cultural models prevalent in society. According to Plunkett (2001: 158-159), the particular challenges of each developmental phase – for example a career oriented study abroad – shape and give meaning to career identity. Moreover, while renegotiating the influence of these periods, making sense of them or forming narratives, one is often involved in constructing personal goals and ideals and in assessing one's achievements in relation to these goals (Plunkett 2001: 160). All in all, career can have diverse meanings in people's lives. With regard to the English language, Block (2008: 144) understands an English-mediated career identity as expertise developed in the English language to which the career actors are exposed to. Thus, an English-mediated career identity can be seen as one's emerging affiliation to, attitudes towards and affective connection to English. Lastly, some see career as a central constituent of personal identity whereas

others see it as a tool for achieving other important goals in life (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 32).

In the frames of the present study, the purpose is to look for connections between one's cross-cultural and identity linked experiences and career, but not to go into deeper examination of what kind of career identities the participants have formed. Next, I will look at research conducted in the present cross-disciplinary field of studies: in applied linguistics and in the international career field.

#### **4 PREVIOUS STUDIES**

Language learning travels, identity reconstruction in culture crossing and international career opportunities have been studied in increasing amounts in the past ten years. This chapter will discuss essential findings related to these three topics that combine in the present study. Each section from 4.1 to 4.3 will introduce findings on one area of these, emphasising those that have surfaced in the field of applied linguistics.

##### **4.1 Language and cultural learning on study abroad**

Recent research findings support the general idea that study abroad is likely to have positive impact on the sojourner's language and cultural skills. In this section, I will mainly consult the works of Dufon and Churchill (2006) and Regan, Jackson (2008) and Regan, Howard and Lemée (2009) who have summarised findings from a number of research projects including their own, and describe the gains as well as the particular challenges related to language and cultural learning on study abroad.

In the recent years, the main research focus in topics related to study abroad has been on how the language travellers acquire linguistic skills (Dufon and Churchill 2006: 26-7). Discussing language learners in study abroad contexts, the previous authors have observed that residing in one's target language environment intensifies the learning of

one's speaking and listening skills. More specifically, these skills are fluency, proficiency, pronunciation and grammar (Dufon and Churchill 2006: 26-7). All in all, study abroad is likely to enhance the sojourners' language skills and increase their ability to interact with members of another linguistic community. Thus, study abroad is a "worthwhile investment" for a foreign language learner (Dufon and Churchill 2006: 142). One condition for cross-cultural learning is still time. Even though not all researchers agree on these results, it is believed that the longer people stay in the foreign cultural environment, the more they increase in various skills (Dufon & Churchill 2006: 23).

Another area of interest in language learning on study abroad is concerned with sociolinguistic development. In general, study abroad as immersion in the target language context is likely to aid the development of the sojourners' sociolinguistic competence (Regan, Howard and Lemée 2009: 135). However, in order to develop in this area of language skills, the individual learner has to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the foreign linguistic setting. In particular, choosing to socialize in (or with members of) the host culture appears to have the best influence on sojourners' sociolinguistic skills (Regan, Howard and Lemée 2009: 135). In other words, simply going abroad is not enough. From the perspective of the sojourners themselves, study abroad was seen as an opportunity for gaining cross-cultural skills (Kitsantas 2004: 441).

Beyond language, Jackson (2008) studied the study abroad journeys of three Chinese-speaking university students to England. In her participants' cases, the journeys were in significant roles in bringing about multi-faceted cultural learning (Jackson 2008: 212-14); firstly, the students had increased in their awareness of the other; secondly, the journeys had helped them grow to accept cultural differences. Thirdly, the students' foreign cultural encounters had led them to examine parts of their own cultural value system with new insights. Fourthly, the students had learned new social skills and developed in their ability to communicate successfully across cultures. Lastly, they had become more sensitive to a broader worldview and learned to appreciate their own culture more. All in all, giving a common name for these cultural learning results, the

study abroad journeys had increased the students' ability to *negotiate aspects of two cultures* (Jackson 2008: 208). As a viable result, the journeys had led them to create meaningful relationships with members of the host community in the target language.

In order not to give a too simplistic view of the study abroad, the same authors have reported also of language and cultural learning challenges faced commonly on these journeys. For instance, inadequate culture-specific knowledge of how to participate in interactional situations in the target language environment can create problems for further cultural learning and linguistic development (Regan, Howard and Lemée 2009: 28). Also in Jackson' study, each of the participants faced difficulties on the journey. Many of these appeared as symptoms of a culture shock, a state of misfit and anxiety due to cultural differences and failures in a foreign cultural environment. From another viewpoint, the stress caused by (the symptoms of) culture shock is a feeling of disorientation and discouragement that builds from unmet expectations (Hall 2005: 272-3, cited in Jackson 2008). In the same study, culture shock followed a utopian period in the new culture. Moreover, the students' need to maintain openness for learning in language and cultural issues had led to temporary exhaustion and frustration in the study (Jackson 2008: 206-7). On a smaller scale, these emotions have been referred to as language shock and psychological stress due to tensions between the sojourner and the host language and culture (Chik and Benson 2008: 155).

As discussed in this section, study abroad is likely to have various positive effects on the sojourner's language and cultural development. In addition, the sojourners may face challenges and barriers felt as negative during the process of learning and adjustment. All in all, language and cultural learning on study abroad is connected to one's willingness to learn and continue further dialogue with the target culture (Jackson 2008: 208). In the next section, I will consult more research on what impact the described language and cultural experiences may have on a sojourner's identity.

## **4.2 Identity reconstruction through cross-cultural experiences**

In recent years, several studies have addressed the relationship between short- to medium term culture crossing and identity reconstruction. The topic is relevant to the field because identity change occurs particularly in connection to changes in one's temporal, cultural and situational contexts (Patron 2007: 15). This is true also of study abroad. In addition to the program designers and those who brief students to go, also the individual sojourners need to learn how to cross cultural borders effectively – and how to return successfully. The following observations about identity reconstruction are central to include in a holistic approach needed to meet this challenge.

### **4.2.1 Immigrants**

In the overall discussion about culture crossings and identity, it is acknowledged that *sustained* contact with a new cultural environment is the key condition for a person to experience internal changes in his/her sense of self (Ting-Toomey 1999: 233). Thus, one group of border crossers that has already stood out in earlier topical research are the immigrants whose stay in the new culture is open-ended or final. Some findings about their experiences are helpful in understanding those of short- and medium-term sojourners. The starting point for studying the identity of immigrants is conflict: sustained contact with a new culture and new communities of practice often forces one to deal with conflicting forms or individuality and competence (Wenger 1999: 160). Moreover, immigrants are likely to engage in identity negotiation as they face the conflicting values and practices of their old and new cultures and communities (Wenger 1999: 168).

The immigrants' adjustment to the new culture is influenced by several social factors: by social conditions, personal attitudes, cultural distance from home and by being positioned by others. Furthermore, there are several individual factors affecting the outcome: motivational orientation, expectations, cultural knowledge and personality. Lastly, there are interpersonal factors: contact network, ability to manage psychological stress, to communicate effectively and ability to establish meaningful relationships (Ting-Toomey 1999: 235-44). The same should be at work in the case of

short-and medium-term sojourners, although with different intensity. All in all, both the reconstruction and the maintenance of an identity across boundaries require hard work (Wenger 1999: 160).

In the case of immigrants, the outcomes of cultural adjustment can be viewed as four-fold (Ting-Toomey 1999: 254). The options are that one stays traditional-oriented, becomes bicultural-oriented, becomes a member of the larger culture by assimilation or loses contact with one's both ethnic identities resulting in marginalisation – in alienation and loss of identity. In the same way, all newcomers in a foreign culture must battle with rootlessness and an identity of in-betweenness which can result in everything from personal development to identity loss (Ting-Toomey 1999: 258). As coping strategies, the newcomers may develop new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving and succeed in developing a third culture perspective to the new environment. At its best, this may enable individuals to integrate the benefits of the two cultures and do relationships creatively. They may become able to interpret behaviour from a variety of cultural frames of reference and become more committed to social change and to correcting social injustice (Ting-Toomey 1999: 258-9). Describing well the ambiguous process of intercultural adaptation, Ting-Toomey (1999: 259) writes: "One has to forgo stability in order to regain stability. One has to experience differentiation in order to regain inclusion. One has to risk losing trust in order to regain trust. Finally, a newcomer has to be willing to 'become' anonymity in the unknown territory in order to 'be' a full-fledged, recognised member of the new culture."

#### **4.2.2 Short- and medium-term sojourners**

The group of sojourners that is the most relevant to the present study are those who cross cultural boundaries for lengthy but close-ended periods on study abroad. Depending on similar factors as with immigrants, the study abroad sojourners will also be "inevitably transformed" on their journeys on cognitive, affective, behavioral and identity levels (Ting-Toomey 1999: 247). This section will discuss 1) general findings about their identity processes, 2) identity change related to situatedness and openness, 3) identity change related to expectations and agency and 4) that related to

homecoming. Recent topical authors have viewed these situational and personal factors as significant regarding the identity change of study abroad sojourners.

Firstly, in the work of Gill (2010: 372), the most significant impacts of study abroad on the sojourners' identities relate to qualitative changes in their sense of self, ways of seeing and perceiving the world, and in values and ethics. Consulting several topical authors, he argued that study abroad had helped individuals in general to a) gain an integrated and inclusive worldview, b) become more open and flexible in thinking and communicating and c) to adopt a third-space perspective to both their home and other cultures. In these ways, study abroad had impacted individuals in areas of personal growth and transformation (Gill 2010: 361). At the extreme, as the result of speaking another language and living in another culture, some sojourners had adopted a new self-identity.

In another two studies by Alred and Byram (2006) and Ehrenreich (2006), the sojourners were asked about the most important experiences of their study abroad. All in all, the sojourners reported positive experiences and spoke of major cultural learning. General identity-related changes that followed the journey were increased self-understanding, changes in self-perception, personal development and maturity. For these reasons, study abroad was seen as a crucial episode in life (Alred and Byram 2006: 211). Some sojourners had also begun to feel strongly about their identity, environment and otherness-issues (Alred and Byram 2006: 230). Also in a study by Ehrenreich (2006: 190) sojourners reported of personal development and growth due to study abroad. However, where the study abroad was experienced as negative or difficult, opportunities for change were consciously rejected (Alred and Byram 2006: 230). Moreover, since positive and negative experiences go often hand in hand on study abroad, the journey was suggested to be a major but an ambivalent cause of identity change (Ehrenreich 2006: 190).

Secondly, Angulo (2008) talked about *situatedness* in relation to identity transformation influenced by study abroad. According to her, study abroad is a fertile ground for identity change because it cuts a person's access to familiar contexts and to

people who support his/her previous identity (Angulo 2008: 32). In this way, new cultural contexts can limit one's access to self-verifying feedback and make the human need for belonging and connectedness to become strongly activated. As a result, new situational identities are more likely to emerge (Angulo 2008: 29-30). Furthermore, the characteristic of *openness* was related to identity change on study abroad. In other words, seeing oneself open to the new culture predicted the sojourners' identification with the host country and those who viewed themselves as open also experienced more change (Angulo 2008: 78).

Thirdly, in the study of Tarp (2006: 160-61) *expectations* had a crucial role in the identity reconstruction of study abroad goers. In general, expectations seemed to determine the areas on which cultural learning and change occurred and also how the students sought out to fulfill their agendas (Tarp 2006: 166, 179). Similarly, other authors have emphasized the role of agency in bringing about change. According to Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 8), some identity options may be forced on the border crossers (e.g. foreigner, stranger). However, these sojourners should be viewed as beings with an agenda who seek to *position* themselves, *resist* identities, *produce* new identities and *attach* alternative meanings to their view of self. In the end, one's willingness to learn and continue dialogue with the target culture is what matters – letting the target culture invade one's norms and self (Jackson 2008: 208). Two major change-opposing factors in the culture crossing experience may be that change is not seen as a necessity or that adaptation would clash with the desired identity of the sojourners (Dufon and Churchill 2006: 14).

Fourthly, it has been observed that not only successful journeying but also successful *returning* can become an identity enhancing experience. The restricted time-frame of the short- and medium-term journeys may motivate sojourners to stay determined in managing in the new environment (Ting-Toomey 1999: 252). Similarly, determination is required in returning home. After the experience of likely ups and downs, going home may cause ambivalent feelings for the sojourner, both relief and sorrow (Ting-Toomey 1999: 247-50). Furthermore, the returnees can be divided into three categories. These are the *re-socialized*, the *alienated* and the *proactive* returnees

(Adler 1997, cited in Ting-Toomey 1999: 253). More specifically, sojourners in the first group are those who do not recognize their newly learned skills in the foreign culture, or changes in their sense of self. Individuals in the second group have difficulty applying the new knowledge into their home culture, and feel dissatisfied. Lastly, the third group represents those who are highly aware of the changes in themselves the new values and skills learned abroad. Moreover, sojourners belonging to the last group will try to integrate their experience into the home culture, and return with new knowledge and skills and an enhanced image of oneself

In the proceeding ways, crossing cultural borders may affect a person's identity. All in all, the consulted works reinforce that study abroad as a short- to medium-term cross-cultural travel is an inner as well as an external journey that may influence the sojourners' life histories and identities in unique ways. In the last section of the theoretical background for the present study, I will look at findings related to the impact that study abroad may have on a person's developing career identity.

#### **4.3. From study abroad to an international career**

The crossroads topic of study abroad, identity and career has been little examined in recent research literature. So, in order to find recent studies that address both study abroad and career, one must partly move beyond the applied linguistic field toward business and career. In comparison, no previous works could be found addressing study abroad and its possible impact on the sojourner's career *identity*. In general, talking about international careers links to the issue of globalization. Similarly, the increase of different study abroad programs is a result of globalization, which involves cultural change and ability to work across different cultures (Tams and Arthur 2007: 94-95). These opportunities can guide individual career actors to construct professional identities and agency globally today (Tams and Arthur 2007: 94-95). The following findings address the impact of cross-cultural journeying on the sojourner's career paths.

As a grounding remark, the works consulted below talk about the impact of study abroad on the sojourner's career in unison as possibilities and opportunities. Moreover, several factors affect how the opportunities created by study abroad are welcomed. In Alred and Byram (2006: 230-31), those who enjoyed their study abroad were more likely to add an intercultural component to their career. In contrast, those who did not were more likely to end up in careers where intercultural competence was not required. In a study by Festervand and Tillery (2001), study abroad was observed as likely to provide the sojourners with academic validation and keys for professional growth. However, numerous individual factors guided the utilization of these opportunities. All in all, Alred and Byram (2006: 30-31) note that the relationship between cross-cultural experiences and the subsequent seeking for an intercultural career is complex. In addition, the experience may lead individuals to unexpected, not always international career directions. In the work of Norris and Gillespie (2005), study abroad increased the sojourners' *possibilities* to create an international component to their career. These individual studies are a narrow take from the larger career and business field of studies that are relevant to the topic of the present study.

In the area of language education, one comprehensive study by Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie (2009) has addressed the impact of study abroad on global career paths. Looking at long-term career directions of U.S. study abroad goers, the study confirmed that study abroad can have a lasting impact in encouraging the sojourners to pursue a career with a global focus. In general, because of life changing experiences in the areas of personal development, worldview, intellectual and cultural interests, study abroad was found to impact the sojourners' career decisions, help them grow in skills that enable them to pursue their individual careers – whether international or not – and assist the sojourners on them (Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie 2009: 385-6). However, the study abroad goers in particular were likely to get a job overseas, work for a multi-national organization or include an international component to their career (Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie 2009: 387-9). In the vast amount of cases examined, international careers were not always planned before study abroad but followed the cross-cultural experience. In other words, study abroad sojourners were more likely to add an international dimension to their future career than those who stayed home, and the

more international experiences a person had the more likely he/she was to develop an international career. Also relationships that were formed abroad often became professional contacts afterwards (Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie 2009: 388).

All in all, the lack of topical research literature on study abroad and career paths development suggests that there is still a need for further studies in this field. This lack is obvious regarding career identity development. To sum up the small amount of studies consulted in this section, study abroad is to be viewed as a catalyst of skills, personal growth, and relationships and as a provider of opportunities that can shape a person's career and lead that person towards an international career.

## **5 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **5.1 Aims of the study**

The aims of the present study whirl around one major theme which is the experiences of study abroad sojourners. In the past few decades, much research literature across disciplines has surfaced in this field, and as was seen in chapters 2-4, also the sojourners' identities have become explored. Thus, there has been much valuable research to consult regarding the overall theme of the present study. However, the career identity dimension links this study to a theoretical discussion that is still fresh in or almost previously unconnected with the applied linguistic field.

The topics study abroad and career are connected in the present study through the participants; they are English degree students who travelled to English-speaking countries as part of their professional studies. As was suggested in the end of section 4.3, the present study fills a gap in research by looking at the impact that a person's cross-cultural experiences on study abroad, an educationally bound journey, may have on his/her career identity. The specific cases and context are the heart of this study. The reason behind choosing this particular context rose from my researcher's experiences of staying in an English-speaking country as part of my English language

studies. Moreover, the period was influential to my career identity. On these grounds, I decided to collect experiences like or unlike mine, and explore where they would lead in terms of career. More specifically, my research question was the following:

q) What kind of impact does study abroad have on the sojourner's career identity?

I decided to approach the question through an empirical study. The study took place in the local context, that is, the English language degree program in the Department of Languages, the Faculty of Humanities in the University of Jyväskylä. In the following section, I will discuss the methodology and means by which I conducted the empirical part of the study. The focus of the section are narrative experiences.

## **5.2 Methodology**

The term methodology used in the title of this section refers both to the *method* and the *means* by which the empirical part of the present study was conducted. As defined by Laine (2007: 31), the narrower term method stands for a “way of thinking” or an “approach”, followed by separate means of collecting and analysing data. In other words, there are various *ontological* and *epistemological* ideas, understandings of what reality is and how it can be analysed. The methodological discussion that addresses identity, experience and explains how they connect with the social, cultural realms in the present study locates in the field of social sciences. Below, I will discuss the methodology that directed the course of this study.

### **5.2.1 Studying experiences**

As described above, the present study deals with experiences and individual understandings of cross-cultural, identity and career issues. According to Laine (2007: 36), there is a fundamental difference between conceptions based on general knowledge and experiences, as to what kind of knowledge they elicit. More specifically, conceptions are impersonal, informative knowledge based on what is generally believed whereas experiences dig deep into the memory and thinking of the

individual. Deep, more personal knowledge is thus what I am looking for as I examine experiences.

On the level of definition, experiences reflect a person's *experiential relationship* with his/her reality of the world (Laine 2007: 29). Moreover, experiences are born in interaction with the real world and so they represent one's relationship with other people, culture and with meanings given to different practices in society, for example to career. Secondly, as Laine (2007: 29) continues, experiences reveal intention and yet again, intention reveals meaning wherefore *experiences help to uncover structures of meaning* between a person and a phenomenon studied. Therefore, research on experiences can make visible what has not yet been consciously thought of – subjective realms, societal dialogue, relationships and intentions. This happens by interpreting utterances (Laine 2007: 31). As regards their value in research, experiences are unique, which means that they may lack certain generalisability. Thus, research based on experiences often knowingly emphasizes quality rather than quantity. Despite their subjective character and their rise in unique historical circumstances, experiences nevertheless do reflect what is general in society (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 135).

The previous ontological view to experiences arises from *phenomenology* on which much qualitative research is based (see more in Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 22). Thus, the ideological grounds for the present study are essentially qualitative. Through the following observations it is possible to locate the study more precisely as regards method and understand the features that link with those of the far end of the qualitative research category.

### **5.2.2 Qualitative case studies**

In general, *qualitative* or *quantitative* research methods are used in conducting empirical studies (Hakala 2007: 13). However, rather than divided categories, the two represent the opposite ends of a continuum with different but equal pros and cons (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 1). Therefore, the following section does not speak in favour of either but describes the particular features of qualitative research, which

spoke in favour of choosing a case study approach to cross-cultural experiences in the present study context.

The unique qualitative features addressed below are spatio-temporality, link to values, lack of objectivity and hypotheses, and process-like nature. First of all, qualitative research is not timeless and placeless but takes place at a particular time in history and in unique historical circumstances (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 16). Therefore, the social makings, the culture and life history of the individuals and the institutions to name a few, and every other contextual factor in the making of the present study will be reflected in the findings. Secondly, qualitative research is value-based; there are always certain values, attitudes and appreciations in the background of asking certain questions (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 16-7). Thirdly, certain lack of objectivity characterizes qualitative research because its findings are mostly other than facts or numbers: the role of the researcher is central unlike in most quantitative research (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 20) Lastly, qualitative research rarely begins from hypotheses because the answers that are sought are mostly not yes/no, but have descriptive value. Moreover, being able to understand relationships and phenomena and to examine complex issues that may take the researcher on a journey of discovery is characteristic to qualitative studies (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 20).

In addition, a well-considered take is an important factor in conducting a qualitative study (Eskola and Suoranta (1998: 18). The authors suggest that this means abiding with a relatively small amount of cases, choosing the cases on a well-argued basis and giving firm frames to what is being studied. In fact, Eskola and Suoranta (1998: 66) suggest that by these limitations all qualitative studies are *case studies*. Hence, generalisability and replicability cannot be considered to be the primary aim. The strength of limiting the cases down to a few is in gaining detailed, intensive knowledge in order to shape the phenomenon studied (Saarela-Kinnunen and Eskola 2007: 184-95). These views coincide well with what kind of knowledge experiences are thought to provide, and what is sought after in the present study (see section 5.1). Thus, it is purposeful to conduct this study as a case study. The detailed case and participant choices of the study are discussed in section 5.3.1.

To sum up the qualitative features reviewed in this section, there is first context. The unique contextual circumstances of the present study include the global, post-modern western society, where education and career have long history, and where one can cross cultural borders with relative ease. Furthermore, there is the local university, the language program, the participants and the researcher; there is a university in the target country and cultures on both sides. In addition, there are individual histories and relationships, and discourses. That is to say, the present context is *unique*. As for values, there is a positive understanding of cultural differences and of work and education in the study and there is an emphasis on subjective experience, interpretation and personal knowledge. Furthermore, there are certain ontological views to society, language and culture, identity and the individual, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Lastly so far, there is a belief that it is possible to learn from a societal phenomenon by studying experiences in a small number of cases.

Before moving on to the means of data collection and analysis, I will discuss the last component of methodology – narrativity – which proved significant in making choices regarding the means.

### **5.2.3 The narrative inquiry**

Narrativity or looking out for stories is a possible approach to qualitative data because humans analyse reality through stories, just as they do through logical thinking (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 22). In addition, Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 18) claim that narrative is the best way of dealing with experience because narrative thinking is the form in which experiences occur. On these grounds, I will use this section to discuss how the narrative inquiry approach is applied in the present study.

To be clear on the terms, which are many, a *narrative* itself is not a method but a textual production, much similar to any traditional story (Riessman 2008: 6). These two terms will be used interchangeably in this study, as do the authors quoted here. Furthermore, Riessman (2008: 6) explains that narrative is a text on three levels: a story told by the participant, an interpretation developed by the researcher and thirdly, the story the reader composes after engaging with these stories. Thinking in

wider terms, the *narrative inquiry* is a way of conducting case-centred studies (Riessman 2008: 11). To the core, it is a way of understanding or making meaning of experience; stories that are lived and told (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 20, 80). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) present a three-dimensional inquiry space for conducting research with the narrative inquiry – fitting with the previous theoretical discussion. Their understanding of how to view stories that are “lived and told” provides the framework for thinking experience through the narrative lens.

The three realms of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space are *interaction*, *continuity* and *situation* (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 50-1). Given these terms, any particular narrative inquiry must account for the following realms. First, the personal and the social must be considered, in a suitable balance between the two. Secondly, any narrative inquiry must address temporality, the main feature of narrative experience, in view of the past, present and future. Thirdly, one must take into account that the stories happen in a unique place, or a sequence of places. Furthermore, as in most qualitative studies, it is impossible for the narrative inquirer to be objective to the studied matter. Moreover, Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 71) suggest that in the making of narratives of experience, there is a relationship between living a story, telling a story and retelling a story. Thus, the result of any narrative inquiry is a story of the lives of both the researcher and the participant.

The narrative inquiry approach adds the final idea to the methodology of the present study, which is that experience and story are linked. Consequently, the purpose in this study is to search for stories of study abroad experiences that are lived and then told, in order to answer to the posed study question. In the next section, I will move from methodology to how the empirical study was conducted in practice. First, I will discuss my choice of research participants, the cases of the study, secondly, describe the means and process of the data collection and finally, explain how the data was transcribed and analyzed.

### **5.3 Data collection and analysis**

#### **5.3.1 Choice of participants**

In literature, there are no instructions telling how many participants make a ‘well-considered take’ for qualitative case studies. Nor when it comes to experiences. However, considering the aims and nature of the present work – the emphasis on the individual, interest in personal knowledge and narrativity – it is purposeful to try and keep the number of cases relatively small. Within the local university context, I restricted my participant choices to those English language students (with a professional view to the English language and culture) who had been on study abroad in English-speaking countries. All these students were sent an invitation to participate in the data collection, of whom four replied. Of these four I chose three to end up with three different countries. These were Ireland, Canada and the United States.

The three participants to the empirical study were all female. I did not see this as a major problem regarding the aims because the focus was on individuals, not categories. The participants had returned from their study abroad from four months to one and half a year ago. They all had continued with the English degree programme after their exchange and were one to three years away from career life. For more details, there will be a description of the background of each participant in the beginning of sections 6.2-6.4. However, for the sake of anonymity, nothing specific about them or their places of stay will be said. In addition, I asked the participants to create themselves pseudonyms. As regards the participants, Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 175) remind that the people with whom a narrative inquirer engages and who “once seemed settled and fixed” may become “a shifting ground”. Within these restrictions, this study will present the participants’ stories as honestly as possible.

#### **5.3.2 Data collection with a thematic group interview**

This section will present the means I chose for data collection in the present study, and description of the collection process. The following choices were made consulting literature on the narrative inquiry approach and qualitative case study methods.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 78) make a fundamental claim saying that the narrative inquiry is *a way of living in the field*. Most often, the method is used in longitudinal studies and the data is collected in several phases, which is not the case in the present study. Similarly, McCormack (2002) describes that the narrative inquiry process may go back and forth between the researcher and the participant(s). As regards this study, the adoptable fact is that narrative inquirers may use different data collection means, and so there were several ways to consider for collecting stories and study abroad experiences. These were at least autobiographies, written memoirs, visual memoirs (photos) and different kinds of interview, or several of these (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 101-15). Considering the topic, study abroad, I decided to use interview which was well accessible in the local context and less burdensome for the participants than for example written memoirs. Moreover, interview would mean direct contact with the participants and bring me closer to their experiences than many other means (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 14). In general, interview tells of the appreciation of subjective knowledge and respondent interpretation (Eskola and Vastamäki 2007: 24-26).

As for the interview model, I chose group interview. The following observations spoke in favour of it (Eskola and Suoranta 1998: 95-99). First, a group is ideal for rounding certain phenomena. Secondly, participants are more likely to produce more versatile data in a group than separately. Thirdly, people in groups can encourage, inspire and help each other, and remember things better than individually. Fourthly, misunderstandings do not occur as frequently in a group as with individuals. On the other hand, controlling the interview quality, balancing participant voices and caring for the atmosphere at the same time would challenge the researcher. In the recent years, interview has given up some of its traditional question-answer structure and more interaction has been included (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 48). So instead of the traditional question-answer model, I decided to manage the interview (or rather discussion) with the help of three themes: cross-cultural experiences, identity and career. Next, I will describe how the data collection process unfolded.

The data collection took place in the home university library, presumably on everyone's comfort zone; the room had arm-chairs and good privacy. Before the interview, I let the participants fill in a basic information form (see Appendix 1) and introduced them to the theme and purposes of the study. Coffee and snacks were available before the start. In the beginning of the interview, there was tension in air and the speech turns were short. During the first lines that I prompted with exact questions, the atmosphere in the room relaxed, which encouraged the participants to share more vivid stories and experiences. I guided the interview with pre-planned themes and question (see Appendix 2) and taped the interview with an mp3 recorder. Despite calling this event an interview, I let the participants discuss quite freely the memories and thoughts they felt significant within the themes, guided by my prompts and own recollections. None of the participants seemed to control or get lost in the discussion, on the contrary, all kept their rights to their stories and corrected on their behalf, if necessary, the general claims that were produced. Noticeably, the participants often agreed, nodded and fortified by words as they recognized familiar parts in each others' experiences. After two themes, I felt that fatigue began to affect the quality of the talk, and attempted to have an ending to-the-point. All in all, the interview resolved relatively well – despite my own tension. The end result was one hour fifteen minutes of recorded discussion.

### **5.3.3 Data analysis as narrative analysis**

In the following paragraphs I will discuss how the data of this study was processed. All in all, there are several trusted ways to analyze qualitative data produced in thematic interviews. Also data within the narrative paradigm can be worked on in different ways. The choices made here were based on the purposes and values of the study.

There are two frameworks of analysis within the narrative research paradigm: 'analysis of narratives' and 'narrative analysis' (McCormack 2002). These are the frames available for those conducting a narrative inquiry, even if the data collection methods were shared with other qualitative research. First, the analysis of narratives gathers stories and analyses them for themes, classifications and categories using a thematic, structural or dialogic/performative methods of analysis (McCormack 2002: 220; Block

2010: 340). In juxtaposition, the outcome of a narrative analysis is a story (Chik and Benson 2008: 158). Here, the researcher gathers descriptions of events and actions to produce personal experience stories as well as composes stories through emplotment, aided by the experiences (McCormack 2002: 220). In a practical sense, the researcher's task in narrative analysis is to develop or discover a plot that unites the data elements into a story, which culminates in a solution to the posed questions (Chik and Benson 2008: 158). Moreover, these storied analyses can be conducted at least in two ways, as a process of storying stories (for details, see McCormack 2002) or through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional framework.

Since the purpose of the present study was to explore experiences on *subjective trajectories* from study abroad to career life, it would not have been meaningful to write a content analysis of themes and categories, nor aim at a cross-analysis of the participants like in the analysis of narratives. Thus, I chose to apply narrative analysis to the data *seeking a narrative view to experiences*. This, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 127), is the primary task of a narrative inquirer. Furthermore, I decided to analyze the data through the lenses of the three-dimensional framework, since the roots of the narrative inquiry approach of the present study lie in the same observations. As regards moving from narrative data to three-dimensional narrative research texts, there are no direct guidelines. Instead, there are complex *interpretive-analytic considerations*.

In short, three-dimensional narrative research texts are given shape by considerations of ideological boundaries, voice and signature, audience, narrative form as well as research ethics (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 140-51). In order to produce narratives that are meaningful and socially significant – aims that shape the texts the most – one must ask questions such as these: Do the stories meet the criteria of the adopted research ideologies? What voices and interpretations (both heard and unheard) speak through the text? How to author the work but not dominate what is being said? And what value does the text have for its audience? In addition, McCormack (2002: 233-4) lists ethical concerns as regards caring for the participants. Among these are including the participants in the making of the stories, mindfulness towards their identity and

experience, and finding ways that represent both the individuality and the complexity of a life. Lastly, a researcher must decide on the form of the text. In practice, this means balancing interpretation with description, quotation with argument, and undertaking the aim of producing a “lively textured story of people situated in place, time, scene and plot” (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 155). All in all, the gap from data to narrative research texts is so wide that not many have suggested how, in practice, to cross (McCormack 2002: 220). The stories of this study were composed in the following way.

First, the data of the study was transcribed on an MS Word document, word for word. The length of the conversation was twenty pages, some 6 per each participant. I plotted the experiences of the participants and authored three separate stories. The fact that each participant is given a chapter of her own emphasizes the uniqueness of the stories and the case study character of this study. The stories are also mine, experiences of others’ experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 19). In practice, each of the following narratives will begin with a description of the case and move on to follow the cross-cultural journey of the participants. Lastly, as in any good story, each case will have a closure in which the possible impact of the participants’ study abroad experiences on their career identity and their thoughts of career will be discussed.

## **6 THE STORIES**

### **6.1 Storyline and the dimensions of the analytical framework**

The findings of this study will be reported as case stories in this chapter. The purpose of the stories is primarily to increase understanding of the topic of the study and of how individuals’ lives in the local university context have been impacted by study abroad. Furthermore, the purpose of the stories is to give insight into how a person’s career identity might develop in relation this particular cross-cultural journey. The findings will be build around the preceding storyline, which was found in the data. The storyline or plot carries from 1) career linked and other expectations to 2) language

and cultural experiences to 3) identity linked experiences and to 4) the impact of the journey on the participants' career identities. Despite the common ingredients, each participant's story is unique. Any comparisons or conclusions of how the three stories may reflect the general will be thus found in chapter 7.

In addition to the common plot, the case stories are composed through the dimensions of the analytic framework. The first dimension, *context*, is made visible in the description that is included of the cultural, physical and social environment in which the journeys took place. The second temporal aspect is made visible in the proceeding of each journey: the '*backward*' beginning from the participants' expectations before the journey, and in interpretations of the journeys' significance at present; the '*forward*' in how they planned and projected the journey towards the future. Lastly, the *outward* dimension considers the participant's original voices on the level of signature, and the *inward* dimension the researcher's experience in processing their stories to find suitable interpretations of them. The end result is preferably a balance between original quotations and theoretical insights included in the researcher's individual voice.

Now, in the form of three stories, the reader will acquaint with the study abroad experiences and career thoughts of Johanna, Marjukka and Helena.

## **6.2 Johanna's story: analysis**

Johanna was a twenty-two year-old English MA degree student at the University of Jyväskylä. She started her English language studies in September 2007 and went on study abroad two years after. Her study abroad location was a lively university campus in Europe that had plenty of local city life around and received exchange students from all over the world. Johanna's study abroad journey lasted five months, an autumn semester, and was finished four months before our research interview took place. At the time of the interview, she was living a re-entry period, adjusting herself back to life at home and still frequently thinking of her study abroad memories and experiences.

In addition to the English language, Johanna had studied government politics, political science and Spanish. On study abroad, she took courses in English, communication, politics and public policy. Johanna had still two to three years of university left, and was thus the furthest away from entering career life of the participants of this study. However, she had confident plans of how to advance her studies, including the cross-cultural experiences, and how to prepare herself for her career. Johanna aimed at continuing the political science minor to a graduate level. Johanna's story below – from study abroad to career – is divided in three topic areas; first, language and cultural experiences, secondly identity, and thirdly career. The important plotline of the story moves from career linked expectations to significant language and cultural experiences, to identity linked experiences and to Johanna's career thoughts and career identity.

#### **6.2.1 Expectations and language and cultural experiences**

The university study abroad was not Johanna's first cross-cultural journey or a longer period of stay in an English speaking country. On these grounds, this section will firstly examine her choices regarding the particular study abroad location and the aims that she set for the journey. Secondly, Johanna's expectations and language and cultural experiences will be discussed under the themes 1) language, people and interaction, 2) cultural differences and environment and 3) homecoming.

Firstly, Johanna talked about how her **background of cross-cultural journeys** had affected her choice of study abroad country and expectations:

- (1) 'Lukion jälkeen, silloin kun sain opiskelupaikan täältä, niin mä lykkäsin sitä vuodella ja olin töissä (maassa) silloin kuusi kuukautta... Et sitten jotenkin ehkä jäi semmoinen, kun (maa) ja (vaihtokohde) on kuitenkin aikalailla samanlaiset, niin ehkä siinä oli semmoinen et pääsisi siihen vähän takaisin. Mä oikeastaan sen kohteen valitsin sillä tavalla, et kun mä kuitenkin ajattelin et mä haluan käyttää sitä englantia, et sen takia mä oon alun perin hakenut tänne opiskelemaankin. Mulla ei ole koskaan ollut mitään halua opettaa, mutta mä oon vaan halunnut käyttää englantia. Sen takia mä oon hakenut sitä opiskelemaankin. Niin sitten (vaihtokohde) siinä voitti.

*(After high-school when I got into a university here, I postponed that for one year and went to work in (a country) for six months... So somehow it left a kind of, because (the country) and (the study abroad country) are somewhat similar, so maybe I hoped a bit that I could return there. I actually chose the location because I thought that I want to use English, and that's why I originally applied to study here. I've never wanted to teach*

*but I've just wanted to use English, so that's why I applied to study it too. That is why this (study abroad country) won.)*

Johanna chose her study abroad location for two connected reasons: her previous cross-cultural experiences and her desire to use the English language. A few years before the study abroad, Johanna had spent a year working in an English-speaking country. Moreover, in the background of this journey as well as of her choice to study English in the university, she had had a desire to use the English language. Whilst offered a longer term in Spain, she chose the English-speaking environment. These choices would hopefully lead Johanna to become a user of English also in her future career, in which she was not oriented towards teaching. In addition to the English language, Johanna's first longer cross-cultural journey must have acquainted her with the lifestyle, culture and environment of her country of stay as well. In that sense, the study abroad was for her *a return*.

Due to her background or cross-cultural travels, Johanna had already experiences of using English and interacting with it in an English-speaking culture. Her **expectations of language** are thus connected with culture. About what she had previously learned and expected to return to, she said:

- (2) 'Kun mä olin tosiaan töissä siellä () silloin aikaisemmin, niin siellä oppi tavallaan sen et ne tervehtii sillein et kysyy et 'alright?' Mulla kesti melkein kuusi kuukautta, että mä opin siihen sanomaan pelkästään takaisin 'alright', niinkun yhtä aikaa sanomaan sen toisen kanssa alright. Niin nyt sen tiesi sit tuolla (maassa) et ne luultavasti tekee sillein samalla lailla. Oikeastaan mulla oli enemmän vaan semmoinen, et jes mä pääsen taas (maahan) missä ne tekee sitä ja missä ihmiset huomioi toisensa ja sanotaan anteeksi ja kiitos'

*(When I was working there () earlier, I learned that they greet one another by asking 'alright?' It took me almost six months that I learned to say back only 'alright', like to say alright simultaneously with the other person. So now I knew that they would probably do the same in (the country). – I just felt that yes, I'll get to (the country) again where they do that and where people pay attention to one another and say excuse me and thanks.)*

In terms of language and interaction, Johanna was familiar with her new study abroad environment. Moreover, she was glad to return to the English-speaking culture which different greetings and politeness represented to her. In addition, Johanna herself had already learned to interact according to the norms and rules of the English-speaking culture, which she expected to be similar in her new study abroad environment.

Compared with the other participants, Johanna did not set goals for her linguistic skills development. As she said in extract 1, Johanna was primarily motivated by the opportunity to use her English language skills. In other words, she considered herself to be already a user rather than a learner of English.

The second larger theme in Johanna's expectations and experiences of the study abroad was **people** or **creating relationships**. In the following extract, Johanna talks about her aims and expectations, and tells how they were fulfilled:

- (3) 'Silloin kun mä menin (maahan) niin mulla oli semmoinen kova tahto siihen että tutustuisi niihin paikallisiin. Mulla oli semmoisena odotuksenakin, tietysti toiveena, mutta tavallaan myös pelkona että mitä jos siellä ei olekaan semmoisia ihmisiä, joiden kanssa sitten esimerkiksi (pystyy olemaan). Tietysti kun menee uuteen paikkaan niin on semmoista vähän epävarmaa. Mut sit siellä oli oikeasti niin, et meni ihan niiden kaikkien odotusten yli. Sieltä jäi niin paljon semmoisia... ne ihmiset nyt suurimmaksi osaksi.

*(When I went to (the country) I had a strong desire to acquaint with the locals there. It was an expectation and of course a wish, but I also kind of feared that what if I won't find people there with whom for example to (spend time). Naturally when you go to a new place you feel a bit insecure. But what happened was that it went over all my expectations. I'm left with so many... it were the people in particular.)*

One of Johanna's aims for the study abroad was to make acquaintances with the local people. Perhaps due to her anticipation and hopes, Johanna departed with a small fear of not being able to find people with whom to connect. In the end, her hope of finding acquaintances was fulfilled although Johanna had to balance her desire to meet locals with forming relationships with other exchange students. On this she said:

- (4) 'Vaihtarit yleensä pysyy siinä niiden semmoisessa maailmassa. Mä olin alun perin ajatellut et mä en tee sitä samaa, mutta kyllä me aikailla pysyttiin, me käytettiin erasmus-kupla nimeä, et me oltiin kaikki vähän semmoisessa. Mut sekin ehkä johtui siitä lisäksi, että ne oli niin nuoria ne kaikki (paikalliset) opiskelijat.– Et kun vaihtarit on siinä samassa tilanteessa kaikki, niin sehän on semmoista et vaihtareista tulee sydänystäviä viidessä minuutissa. Et kun sulla on jotain yhteistä sen kanssa, niin sit niihin on tosi helppoa (tutustua).

*(Exchange students usually stay in their own world. I had originally thought that I wouldn't do the same, but we did stay in a kind of a – we used the name Erasmus-bubble – we were all inside that. But maybe it was also because all the (local) students were so much younger. – The fact that exchange students are all in the same situation helps them to become bosom friends in five minutes. That when you have something in common with that person, it makes it easy to get to know them.)*

Johanna's journey was coloured by living in the "Erasmus-bubble", as she called the company of the exchange students. Sharing the mutual cross-cultural experience, these sojourners would communicate easily despite their different backgrounds. Moreover, the company would often become a culture of its own, typical throughout universities. As a consequence, Johanna's study abroad was immensely cross-cultural, although the interaction culture around her was partly more international than a local English-speaking one.

Despite the short frames of her journey and her international company, Johanna found **cultural differences** in the study abroad environment. She talked about aspects of the local culture which she found challenging:

- (5) Mä koin kyllä et (ne) oli tosi mukavia, et oli helppo alkaa juttelemaan pankkijonossa tai... jos teit parityötä luennolla niin oli helppo alkaa puhua sellaisista turhanpäiväisyyksistä, ajautua siitä kouluaiheesta johonkin muuhun. Mutta pääsy sille asteelle et 'tehdäänkö jotain myöhemmin?' on ehkä vähän vaikeampaa. Siinä on enemmän tavallaan semmoisia tasoja. Et nyt me ollaan tämmöisiä 'luokka-tuttuja'. Mut muuten ehkä neljä kuukautta tuntui sen verran lyhyeltä ajalta ettei ehtinyt sinänsä mitenkään ärsyyntyä tai kyllästyä mihinkään, semmoisiin tapoihin. Mut mä nyt kyllä myönnän, että kovasti vietin aikaa niitten vaihtareiden kanssa. Että ehkä siinä jäi niiden paikallisten todellinen luonne vielä (kohtaamatta).

*(I felt that the () were really nice, it was easy to start and talk with them in the bank office queue or... if you worked together on a lecture, it was easy to start a conversation about unimportant issues, to drift from school issues to something else. But it was more difficult to get on that level where you could ask that 'do you want to do something later'. There are kind of more levels to that. Like, now we are classmates. But otherwise the four months felt so short that I didn't get much irritated or frustrated with any of the customs. But I do admit that I spent a lot of time with the exchange students. So perhaps I didn't yet meet the true character of the locals.*

Despite the common English language and Johanna's ability to use it in interaction, she found cultural hindrances to relating to members of the host culture. In general, Johanna felt that the locals were friendly and receiving. However, she noticed that real bonding required one to cross levels between groups of reference – her exchange student community and the local one. On the one hand, Johanna was sometimes considered part of the local community or 'one of them' (see extract 13). This was due to her native-like English. On the other hand, the cultural barrier remained. All in all, Johanna sensed that there was more to the local character, which the time-frame of her journey did not allow her to fully explore. Thus, cultural differences did not impose

stronger negative feelings connected to a culture shock on her. Moreover, the time-frame made her eager to make most of her intercultural experience (see extract 10) When asked what mental images first came to her about the overall **cultural environment** in her country of her stay, Johanna said 'home'. Moreover, Johanna described her study abroad environment as 'semmonen niinku mun oma paikka' (*in a way like my own place*). Thus, despite that some aspects of the host culture did not open to her as easily, the cultural environment became home-like to her. This answer sheds light on the emotional and involving quality of her study abroad. About the impact of staying in another cultural environment Johanna said:

- (6) 'Mä ajattelen, että kyllä jokainen tällöinen reissu niin Suomestakin sit ymmärtää uusia asioita. – Esimerkiksi sen jälkeen kun olin (maassa\*) ollut, niin sit kun tuli takaisin tänne kesäksi niin mä en voinut ymmärtää sitä et täällä ei tule pimeä. Tietää kyllä et Suomessa on valoisat yöt kesäisin, mut sit kun tulee takasin niin sen ymmärtää ihan eri lailla.'

*(I think that each of these journeys also make you understand Finland more. – For example after I had been to (the country\*), after I came back here for the summer, I couldn't understand that it doesn't get dark in here. You know that the Finnish summers are bright but when you come back you understand it in a whole different way.)*

Johanna's study abroad period (and her first stay in a country close by) essentially familiarized her with another cultural environment. During these journeys, she adapted to and began to feel like home in the target culture. In addition, after journeying deeper into another culture environment she could see the home environment with different insight. Thus, Johanna returned to Finland not only with cultural experiences but with a personal experience of having made home in another country *and* with more understanding of cultural differences regarding language, interaction, character and environment including her own.

After a successful study abroad which Johanna described as 'ihan paras lukukausi minkä oon ikinä viettäny missään' (*the best university term that I have ever spent*), she was challenged with **homecoming**. At the time of the interview, she was living a re-entry period and the study abroad whirled much in her thoughts. About the experience of coming home Johanna said:

- (7) 'Toiseksi tulee kerrottua semmoinen mikä nyt ei enää siihen vaihtopaikkaan niin liity, siitä et miten on niinkun tavallaan ollut vaikeaa tulla takaisin. Et nyt kun mä oon tässä ollut tämän kevään täällä, niin tuntuu sillein niinkun olisi kaikki pausella, tavallaan koko elämä. Et tullut jotenkin silleen kesken ehkä kun on tullut talvella vielä takaisin, niin ei oikein päässyt kiinni.'

*(Secondly I often tell this although it's not directly about the study abroad anymore, that it has been kind of difficult to come back. Now that I've been here for the spring I feel like everything was put on halt, kind of my whole life. I have come back kind of in the middle, and haven't been able to fully grasp things.)*

Johanna returned from her study abroad in the winter, half-way through the academic year. One of the first things she would tell about the journey was that it had not been simple to return: neither from the English-speaking cultural environment or from an otherwise successful journey. In her own words, Johanna felt that her whole life had been put on halt since, and that it was difficult for her to embrace the current frames for it. Looking at the quality of her experiences suggests that crossing cultural barriers also in the reverse direction can be a major task and challenge for a sojourner. Moreover, even the seemingly short frames of a university study abroad can provide the sojourner with opportunities to engage and adopt in its cultural context, and experience reverse culture shock – misfit and anxiety – when coming back home.

Based on these experiences, the following section will look at Johanna's study abroad journey with insights in identity negotiation. This discussion will be a key to understanding her career thoughts and career identity, in section 5.2.3.

### **6.2.2 Identity**

Johanna's study abroad journey offers five viewpoints to identity negotiation. These are 1) self in interaction, 2) belonging, 3) divided identity, 4) lack of belonging and 5) the English language as part of identity. These themes surfaced as Johanna shared her current thoughts about the impact of her study abroad on her identity. In the following extracts, Johanna also compared how her actions and sense of identity differed when she was at home and abroad, looking back and to the present.

Firstly, Johanna talked about her identity from a **self in interaction** perspective. On her first journey abroad, she had learned certain English cultural interaction norms. In this sense the study abroad was a return to this languacultural environment. These journeys had had influence on her sense of self in interaction, in Finnish too. She told:

- (8) 'Suomessa mä monesti aloitan kanssa jos mä nään jonkun, niin mä aloitan keskustelun sillä tavalla että 'no mitä kuuluu'. Mut en mä odota et se alkaa heti kertoa siitä... mä saatan avata sen keskustelun semmoisen tavallisen 'hei':n sijaan sillä että mä kysyn mitä kuuluu. Et kyl se (on siirtynyt suomen kielen käyttöön). – Välillä on turhauttanut vaikei täällä lasketakaan sitä epäkohteliaaksi mutta sit on itte sillei niinku et mikset sä sanonut mitään että, huomaa ittestään."

*(In Finland if I meet someone, I often start the discussion too by how are you. But I don't expect that a person answers right away... I may open the discussion by asking how this person is instead of the ordinary hi. So it does (transfer to Finnish language use. – Sometimes it has frustrated me, even if it were not rude here, but I myself have been like, that why didn't you say anything, I notice of myself.)*

The ways in which Johanna interacted in the English cultural environment had changed her interaction behavior in Finland. Moreover, Johanna attached positive value to the interaction customs of the English languaculture – politeness and outspokenness – and desired to interact with phrases and rules typical of this environment. In addition, Johanna felt occasionally frustrated to notice that the current Finnish languacultural norms affected her backwards. On the one hand, these struggles reveal that the cross-cultural journeys had provided Johanna with broader competences in interaction. As a result, she could act on her identity in different ways whether at home or abroad. On the other hand, Johanna's desire to express herself with a specific identity in interaction including foreign cultural customs suggests that her study abroad had changed her level of commitment to different communities of practice. These changes can be understood as identity-deep, since identity guides a person to use his/her linguistic resources (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 14).

Secondly, Johanna's study abroad stories raise the larger theme of **belonging**. In the following extracts (8-10), she talks about belonging through attachment and feeling divided and misplaced. In the first one, she describes the impact of study abroad on her sense of belonging, through attachment to the new cultural environment. She told:

- (8) 'Musta tuntuu et mä henkilökohtaisesti leimaudun noihin paikkoihin sen takia et kun tietää et sillä on alku ja loppu sillä ajalla minkä sä oot siellä, ni sit siihen kiintyy niin paljon enemmän. Että kun sä tiedät että sullon se koti siellä jossain... mut tää on sulla vaan neljä kuukautta... niin sit se saattaa tavallaan tehdä siitä jotenkin voimakkaampaa näennäisesti, tai ainakin pinnallisesti tosi voimakasta.'

'Kun puhuit leimautumisesta tai kiinnittymisestä, niin mitkä ne on, osaatko sä eritellä niitä asioita mihin sitä tapahtuu suhteessa?'

'No ihan siis paikkoihin, ihmisiin ja käytäntöihin, ihan siihen kaikkeen tavallaan mitä siellä on, et tuntuu tosi tärkeiltä... erilaisiin asioihin just.'

*(I personally become attached to those places because when you know that the time that you spent there has a beginning and an end, you get more attached to it. Cause when you know that you have that home there somewhere... but this you have only for four months... it might make it seemingly stronger, or superficially very strong.)*

*(When you talked about attachment, can you itemize the things you become attached to?)*

*(Well just places, people and practices, to all that there is in a way, they feel very important... to different kinds of things.)*

Through the time spent in her study abroad environment, Johanna felt that she became attached to its language, practices, the environment and people. The temporal frames of the opportunity made it easy for her to detach from home, embrace the foreign culture – and change identity commitments and communities of practice. On the one hand, Johanna felt that her sense of belonging to the foreign culture was only seemingly strong. However, this cultural environment did become very important for her during the journey. Moreover, Johanna not only adopted to the environment but to its language and cultural practices too, embedded with a foreign cultural view of the world. At least temporally, Johanna would thus negotiate her belonging on these levels and relate to foreign communities of practice, even global ones, surrounded by a vast number of identity opportunities. Ultimately, this kind of identity negotiation would aim at belonging. In Johanna's case, belonging could be found after the study abroad within a broader frame of opportunities.

In extract 9 Johanna talked about her feeling of having a **divided identity** or two sides.

In other words, she said that different parts of her came out in Finland and abroad:

- (9) 'Jotenkin mussa on kaks semmoista puolta... et siellä (ulkomailla) ei ole sillä tavalla semmoisia samanlaisia estoja kun sitten ehkä (Suomessa). Mut mä olen kyllä vähän huonosti siirtänyt sen takasin Suomeen. Vähän silleen tuskastuttavastikin huomaa itsestään että ei ole jotenkin pystynyt sillein.'

*(Somehow there are two sides to me. Abroad I don't have similar blocks like (in Finland) but I have not transferred them well to Finland. It's a bit frustrating to notice that I haven't been able to do it.)*

Above, Johanna felt tangibly how being a cross-cultural sojourner affected her identity. Moreover, rather than enjoying the sense of having a divided identity, she was looking for one coherent self by negotiating aspects of two cultures in her identity. In the study abroad environment, she was able to be open and unrestrained, but she found it difficult to be the same in Finland. In other words, the values, attitudes and practices in the foreign culture enabled her to act out different aspects of her identity. Sometimes frustrated, Johanna felt that the cultural environment conditioned how she could act on her identity in Finland.

Fourthly, four months after the study abroad, Johanna experienced a **lack of belonging** that followed cross-cultural sojourning. Using the famous 'life on rent' expression, she told how her stay in the foreign culture and then returning home had influenced her identity:

(10) 'Se on.. muhun itseän silleen vaikuttanut et on niinkun tavallaan jakanut itsensä ympäri maailma. Et sä oot jakanut itseäsi niinkun, ja sitten tuntuu et onkin niinkun jotenkin – et oma elämä on tavallaan niinkun vuokralla, et mihin sitä sitten kuuluu.'

*(It has affected me so that I have in a way distributed myself around the world. You have given yourself and then you feel as if your own life is on rent, so where do you belong then.)*

Johanna felt that the cross-cultural journey had scattered her sense of self or identity across the world. This experience is helpful in concluding that Johanna's study abroad influenced her holistically and profoundly. With regard to belonging, as examined in extract 8, the study abroad had conduced Johanna to relate to foreign cultural communities, or connections that were not immediately present in Finland. Despite her experiences of loss and change, the new environment had offered her new opportunities, which would remain available to her in the current negotiation of belonging. Similarly, resulting from cross-cultural experiences, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004: 8) suggest that cross-cultural travelers are not in the end conditioned by, but agents who learn to move in multi-dimensional social spaces.

Fifthly, the study abroad period had a strengthening influence on Johanna's **linguistic identity** as a user of the English language. She said:

(11) 'Se (englannin kieli) on tosiaan sellanen osa mua itteä. Mä en osaa ainakaan itseäni kuvitella ilman, niistä on tullut kuitenkin niin, molemmista ajanjaksoista mitkä on ollut ulkomailla, niin niistä on tullut niin paljon tavallaan itteen lisää.'

*(It (the English language) is truly a part of me. I cannot imagine myself without either of the periods that I've spent abroad, they have added so much to me.)*

Johanna felt that the English language was part of her sense of self. In addition, both of her journeys related inseparably to her identity by giving her competence to cross cultural borders or as commitments made to foreign local or global communities of reference. Significantly, Johanna gave meaning to the impact of the journeys through the English language. In fact in broader frames, the topic of English as part of Johanna's identity is the meaningful gatherer for all her study abroad experiences. This narrative begun in the past when she became interested in the English language that followed her to university, to study abroad and back and became part of her. All in all, Johanna saw the study abroad as an experience that had become part of her identity.

In the next section, these experiences of identity negotiation will provide the reader with understanding for Johanna's thoughts of career and career identity.

### **6.2.3 Career identity**

Johanna was lastly asked to discuss what her study abroad had meant for her in terms of career. In her case, there is a strong life history plot in how her career choices, study abroad and other cultural experiences link, and how they would direct her towards future career. Still in the middle of her studies, Johanna had a good idea of how she could use her skills and background in her future. The significant topics in the following discussion are 1) linguistic identity and career and 2) international career.

Firstly, in most of her thoughts of career, Johanna talked about her **linguistic identity** and her desire to use the English language in her future career. This goal had been in the back of her mind already when applying to university, and is visible in her plans of

education and career. This is how she answered when asked how she saw herself momentarily as an English language professional:

(12) 'Mä oon aina ollut semmoinen englannin kielen käyttäjä oikeastaan enemmän... koko tämä opiskelualan valinta... että kun mä teen sitä valtio-oppia, ihan olisi tarkoitus tehdä loppuun asti oikeastaan, et mä toivoisin et mä sen mun alan tavallaan löytäisin jostain yhteiskunnallisesta, mut et mä saisin käyttää sitä mun ammattitaitoa englanniksi. Et se on tavallaan ollut mulla alusta asti... Huomaa et se on oikeasti se kieli millä haluaisi toimia. Et jos tekee töitä Suomessa niin sit haluaisi tehdä töitä englanniksi, tai sitten asua jossain missä saa käyttää englantia arjessa.'

*(I have always been more of a user of the English language... the whole choice of study field... I actually plan to do a complete degree in public policy, because I hope to find my career in the societal sector, but so that I could use my professional skill in English. That has been my goal from the beginning... I've noticed that it is the language in which I'd want to work. So if I work in Finland, I'd want to work in English, or then live abroad where one can use English in everyday life.)*

Explaining her relationship with the English language and career, Johanna said she was more an English language user than a professional. The study abroad had not changed but rather strengthened her desire to become a social scientist who could use her professional skills in English. Thus, also the impact of the journey on her career identity relates to building language skills and her linguistic identity. Furthermore, living in the particular English language and cultural environment had made her realize that this was the language in which she wanted to work.

Secondly, the study abroad period affected Johanna's view of her future career opportunities. In other words, after study abroad she did not feel her language skills as a barrier to managing an **international career** anymore but rather as skills that would open her doors abroad. She said:

(13) 'Kyllä musta ainakin tuntuu aika sellaiselta, ettei se (kielitaito) ole tosiaan, tunne sitä enää semmoisena rajoitteena. Et kyllä se on enemmän semmoinen ovia avaava juttu.... (Olen) koko ajan hakenut tavallaan mahdollisuuksia kansainvälistymiseen ja... sitä nyt tietysti toivoo et saisi tehdä sit myöhemmin. Musta tuntuu ainakin itsestä siltä että kun just menee (maahan) niin siellä ei ole ulkopuolinen. Kielitaito on sellainen että sua ei heti ajatella... jos joku huomauttaa jotain niin se on et 'sulla on tosi jännä aksentti et mistä päin (maata) sä oot' tai vastaavaa. Ettei tule sellaista, että mä oon ulkomaalainen vieraassa maassa. Et kyllähän siit tulee semmosta itsevarmuutta. Jos ajattelee että olisi töissäkin vaikka ulkomailla niin onhan se, helpottaa sitä sopeutumista hirveästi jos sä et koko ajan saa muistutusta et sä et ole natiivi-puhuja, tai et sä olet jostain muualta.

*(I personally feel that it (language skills) is not, I don't feel it as a restriction anymore. It's more a thing that opens doors... (I have) all the time look for opportunities to become international and... you naturally hope to be able to do that later on. I feel that when I go*

*to () I am not an outsider. My language skills are such that people don't think... if someone comments something it is that 'you have a weird accent, where are you from (in the country)'. I don't feel that I'd be a foreigner in a strange country. It does bring me confidence. If I for instance worked abroad, it'd be much easier to adjust without that constant reminder that you're not a native speaker, or that you're from elsewhere.)*

When asked whether she would like to move to work abroad sometime, Johanna said 'definitely'. After her cross-cultural journeys, her language skills were not a restriction anymore but a bridge to the international career world, enabling her to manage herself and be confident in the international career world. In addition, Johanna felt that adjusting to work abroad would be easier with good language skills regarding belonging. With these words, Johanna hoped that she would maintain the connection to her cross-cultural experiences in the future. All Johanna's thoughts about how her study abroad contributed to her career have a positive, reinforcing tone.

All in all, the study abroad took Johanna into the language and cultural environment which she liked and began to feel increasingly as her home and her own. Her surroundings were international, and the impact that crossing cultures had on her identity was that she felt shared in parts, and attached to both cultures in her self. Moreover, the journey strengthened Johanna's identity as an English language speaker and user. In terms of career, the journey helped her redefine her skills and opportunities. Thus, Johanna's study abroad was one influential period regarding her career identity formation in her life history so far.

### **6.3 Marjukka's story: analysis**

Marjukka was a 26-year old English major, German minor student who spent four months or one spring semester on study abroad. This was her first stay in an English-speaking country. The study abroad took place in Marjukka's fourth year of university studies, and dated back two years from the time of our interview. Marjukka's target country was outside Europe, an international and diverse environment. In contrast, her place of study within the country was a campus village area that was situated on the outskirts of an average sized town centre. Out of the interviewed, Marjukka had the

most studies completed, including a minor in pedagogy, and was thus oriented in teaching with her two languages. On study abroad, Marjukka took English language courses as well as one course of history. She was planning to graduate from university in the summer following our interview – and was thus close to entering career life.

The plotline in the first section of Marjukka's study abroad story carries through personal and career linked expectations, cultural challenges, language and cultural learning experiences until homecoming. The second section examines the influence the journey had on Marjukka's identity in the light of the topics: interaction and language use, becoming international and identity negotiation. The last part of the analysis will discuss the impact of these on Marjukka's career identity and future career plans.

### **6.3.1 Expectations, cultural challenges and learning experiences**

Based on her previous cultural studies and other experiences, Marjukka had several expectations of her study abroad destination prior to her journey. These expectations are divided here in two parts: those concerning her personal aims and expectations, and those related to developing professional skills. Beginning with personal motivations, Marjukka told of her interests in the following way:

- (1) 'Mä en ollut koskaan ollut missään englanninkielisessä maassa, niin ihan sen takia mä halusin lähteä (maahan). Muuten mä olisin ehkä valinnut jonkin vähän eksoottisemman maan. Mutta just se ihan englanninkielisessä maassa oleminen, mulle se oli kauhean tärkeää. Ensinnäkin mä ajattelin sitä kielitaitoa, varmaan ihan et paranee se suullinen kielitaito ja et saa semmoisen niin sanotun oikean tai 'natiivin' mallin siihen puheeseen. Ja sitten mä kirjoitin siihen motivaatio-kirjeeseen et mua hirveästi kiinnostaa (maassa) se monikulttuurisuus... sitä pidetään semmoisena maana mikä on onnistunut siinä aika hyvin.'

*(I had never been in any English speaking country so that was why I wanted to go [there]. Otherwise I would have chosen a little more exotic country... But just being in an English speaking country was very important to me. First of all, I was thinking about language skills, that my oral language skills would improve and that I'd get a 'native' model to speaking. And then I wrote in the motivation-letter that I was very interested in how [the country] was multicultural... it's seen as a country that has succeeded in that quite well.)*

Marjukka's choice of study abroad country followed her personal interest in a society that was multi-cultural and had succeeded in bringing cultures together. Therefore she knew and expected that the country would be culturally different, however not exotic. Moreover, the fact that the country was English-speaking was important for Marjukka.

First, she hoped to develop her oral language skills and get a native model to speaking English. Secondly, the language aspect and the English cultural environment was professionally important for her. Agreeing with another participant she said:

- (2) 'Mä ajattelin tuota kanssa ihan samaa et just se et tavallaan voi oppilaillekin sitten ihan niinku tavallaan tuoda sitä kulttuuria sillein konkreettisesti että 'kun minä olin (maassa) niin siellä tehtiin näin ja näin'. Et se ei ole niin semmoista, et se on niinkun aidompaa se opetus, autenttisempaa. Sitä. Musta olisi jotenkin ihan naurettavaa valmistua englannin opettajaksi ikinä käymättä englanninkielisessä maassa tai oleskelematta siellä pitempää aikaa.'

*(I had the same in mind, that you can then bring the culture in a concrete way like 'when I was in [the country] they did this and that'. Then it won't be so, the teaching will be more real, more authentic. Exactly. I find it ridiculous that I could graduate as an English teacher without ever visiting an English-speaking country or living there for a longer period of time.)*

Looking forward to her teaching career, Marjukka hoped that the study abroad would provide her with cultural experiences and skills that she could use later in the classroom. In the two text extracts, Marjukka gave a lot of value to the experience of living in the particular culture of the language that she would teach. Descriptively, the experiences she would gain would remain with her on her teacher's career. In addition, Marjukka valued and aimed for cultural authenticity – both in her experiences and in the classroom. For these reasons, the study abroad journey had been very significant for her – enabling her to become the language teaching professional she wanted to be. All in all, Marjukka started her journey with both personal and professional aims and motivations, as well as knowledge of her upcoming country of stay.

With the previous aims and expectations, Marjukka arrived in the wintery scene of the local university campus. In the following text extract, she talked about the campus environment in which most of her language and cultural experiences took place. Comparing her journey with the other two participants, she summarized her experience like this:

- (3) 'Niin no siis mulla ei ollut vaihto kyllä ehkä niin positiivinen kokemus kun se on teillä ollut. Mut ei mulla oo tullut semmoista mitään hirveätä vierauden tunnetta tavallaan, et se ei silleen kulttuurisesti ollut niin erilainen. Enemmän olisin varmaan toivonut jotain eksotiikkaa... ..mua niinkun ahdisti se tietty laitosmaisuuus siellä. Mulla ei tavallaan ollut

mitään tarvetta poistua sieltä (kampukselta) ikinä ja se jotenkin mulla tökki aika paljon. – Se sitten harmittikin aika paljon siinä vaihdon aikana, että mä en koe et mä niinku hirveästi näin siellä silleen mitään muuta kun sitä kampusta.’

*(My exchange was maybe not as positive an experience as it has been for you, but I did not get that big feeling of foreignness in a sense, it was not so culturally different. I had maybe hoped for more exoticism... ...I felt distressed by the institutional setup there. I had in a sense no need to ever leave [the campus] and that bothered me quite a lot. – I also felt sorry quite a lot during the exchange because I don't feel that I saw much of anything else but the campus there.)*

Contrary to her expectations, Marjukka’s language and cultural experiences on the journey were coloured by her disappointment to the settings of the campus area. As she said above, the target culture did not cause her to feel too foreign, but entering the campus frames and the local campus culture were surprising cultural changes for her. To better understand the nature of her cross-cultural experiences, and why Marjukka regarded the journey overall as negative, the following discussion examines her thoughts about the cultural environment, interaction, how learning came about and homecoming. In other words, the following part of the analysis talks about facing cultural differences and finding a personal way to adapt in a new foreign cultural environment, from a homeward perspective.

Firstly, as seen already in extract 3, Marjukka felt distressed by the tight institutional frames of her study abroad. She described the **cultural environment** of her study abroad more in the following words:

- (4) ‘Mä jouduin asumaan ekavuotisten kanssa siellä asuntolassa, eli viis vuotta mua nuorempia, fukseja. Mun piti jakaa huone ja sit mä vielä jouduin syömäänkin siellä aina kun se oli semmoinen järjestely. – Se tavallaan et minä söin siellä kampuksella ja sit siellä käytiin luennoilla tavallaan mihin vuorokaudenaikaan tahansa melkein. Tentit oli joskus silloin kun oli tenttikausi niin lauantaina, ja sit mä kävin jumpassakin siellä yliopistolla kampuksella. – Siellä tehtiin paljon enemmän töitä, et mä en ole Suomessa ikinä niin ahkerasti lukenut ja käyttänyt niin montaa tuntia opiskeluun vuorokaudesta.’

*(I had to live with the first-year students in the dorm, so they were five years younger, freshmen. I had to share a room and then I had to dine in there as well because of the arrangement. – That in a way that I ate on the campus, then you could have lectures almost on any time of the day. The exams were sometimes on Saturdays when the exam season was on, and then I did aerobics too on the campus. – People worked much more in there, I have never studied and spent so many hours studying per day in Finland.)*

The campus environment was a disappointment for Marjukka in several ways. As described above, the campus offered accommodation in shared rooms, a meal contract, pre-arranged study hours and leisure activities. Marjukka's study schedule extended to Saturdays during the exam season and she spent more time studying than ever in Finland. Thus, part of the anxiety she felt came from the set-up, accommodation and study schedules of daily life, which she could not affect. On the other hand, when asked if the campus restricted her access to the normal daily culture, she answered that 'ei, se (kampus) on siis niille semmoista normaalia kulttuuria' (*no, (the campus) is normal culture for them*). Therefore, part of the anxiety brought up in extract 3 resulted from the challenge of crossing cultural barriers. Elsewhere, Marjukka spoke of the same challenge in terms of longing for her familiar cultural setting:

- (5) 'Siis... mä kaipasin, jotenkin se kun () pidetään semmoisena hirmu vapauden maana, niin mun mielestä siellä oli tosi jotenkin... (mun kaupunki) oli semmoinen ehkä Tampereen kokoinen kaupunki, mut se ei todellakaan näyttänyt siltä. Siellä oli pieni keskusta jossa oli baareja ja ravintoloita, sieltä ei löytynyt edes yhtä kunnon ruokakauppaa, siellä oli joku kioski-kauppa. Ja sitten oli näitä ostareita, ne oli silleen hajallaan. Tavallaan sieltä puuttui se kaupungin sydän. Se kampus oli tietysti opiskelijoille sit se paikka missä oltiin, mut mä kaipasin sitä hirveästi, et ylipäättänsä Euroopassa on se ihanaa, kun Suomikin on näin pieni, niin täällä nää kaupunkien keskustat on eläviä.— Siellä on se ostari ja sieltä vaan ostetaan asiaa, ja sitten on koululaitos joka on sellainen instituutio, ja sitten joku keskusta. Mut sinnekin pitää erikseen mennä... oli siellä joku kahvilakin... jotenkin ihan tylsältä tuntui et menenpä vaan kaupungille ja käyn kaupassa ja samalla jossain kahvilla.

*(Well... I longed for,() is somehow considered a land of freedom, so I think... (my city) was about the size of Tampere but it didn't look it. There was a tiny centre with bars and restaurants, not even a good grocery store, just a kiosk. And then there were these malls, they were dispersed. In a way it lacked the city's heart. The campus was of course the hang-out place for students, but I missed it a lot, that in Europe in general and even in Finland even it's so small, that here the city centers are lively. There is that mall where you just buy things, and then there's the school institution, and then some centre. But you have to go there separately... well there was a cafe too... but it felt boring to go downtown and shop and to have a coffee.)*

The infrastructure of the country, the lack of a lively town centre or a city's heart, was another disappointment for Marjukka. In the previous extract, her expectations of the cultural landscape in the country did not coincide with her local experience. In addition, Marjukka missed the landscape at home, and the ease of frequenting cafés and bars, and the freedom connected to her life in Finland. Altogether, the foreign cultural environment and her challenge of crossing into it colored her entire study

abroad experience very strongly. Marjukka's emotional responses in the face of the new cultural circumstances resemble those that often link with a culture shock: disappointment, misfit and anxiety (see section 4.1).

The second aspect that came up in Marjukka's language and cultural experiences, was **interaction**. The people whom Marjukka most connected with were the other exchange students, in addition to her few local acquaintances. About the difficulty of becoming further acquainted with the locals she said:

- (6) 'Olis kyllä varmaan halunnut, olisin mä halunnut tutustua esimerkiksi ihmisiin, jotka oli mun kanssa samoilla kursseilla. Mut se ei oo sitten niin helppoa jos on vaan niinku puoli vuotta niin sitten tutustua.'

*(I would have wanted to get to know for example people who were on same courses with me. But it isn't that easy though if you have only about a half a year to make it.)*

In Marjukka's case, the time-frame of the study abroad was a hindrance for creating better meaningful relationships with the local English-speaking students. On the one hand, Marjukka saw this as a lack regarding her aim of being thus submerged in the English-speaking society that she would gain a native model to speaking and foreign cultural experiences from the particular local cultural environment. On the other hand, her experiences within these frames included diverse opportunities learning new rules of interaction in her particular international English-speaking context. She talked about differences found in exchanging casual greetings and in conversations over dinner:

- (7) 'Mä muistan ne meidän ruokapöytäkeskustelut, kun mä saatoin istua kenen sattuukaan kanssa siellä pöydässä, niin siinä oli just se small-talk kulttuuri. Ensinnäkin ei saanut puhua jotenkin liian pitkään tai piti oppia semmoinen tietty salamakeskustelu. Ja sit myös se sellainen tietty konfliktien välttely. Et sit paljon oli ihmisiä jotka oli tavallaan hirveen ystävällisiä mut ne sitten tavallaan ennakoii jotenki.. ennakoi sillä tavalla ettei nyt vaan tuu mitään konflikteja koska (sen maalaisia) pidetään kauheen semmosina diplomaattisina. Se oli jotenkin, tuntui väsyttävältä että en mä aina jaksa puhua silleen että kaikki on mukavaa.'

*(I remember the conversations we had over dinner, when I sat with different people, that the small-talk culture was right there. First of all, you weren't supposed to talk too long or had to learn a certain lightning-bolt model. And then also to avoid conflicts. There were many people who were really friendly in a sense, but then they kind of looked beforehand... made sure that no conflicts would rise because (people of that country) are seen as very diplomatic. It felt somehow tiring; I don't have the energy to always talk so that everything is nice.)*

In another extract Marjukka told about the particular difficulties linked to establishing relationships with the locals:

- (8) 'Monesti keskusteluissa just se että kun oltiin niin kauhean diplomaattisia, niin tavallaan se oli semmoinen pinta-panssari siinä aina, että tuntuu että oli ehkä vaikeampi saada ihmisistä jotain irti, jotain omaperäistä. Mut en mä tiiä onko tää nyt ihan näin. – Just niissä luokkakeskusteluissakin oli tietty, et joku saattoi kysyä että 'Hei mistä sä oot?' ja 'Onks kivaa täällä?' ja sit sä vastaat, 'joo on tosi kivaa ja oon Suomesta' ja that's it.'

*(Many times in conversations the fact that they were so diplomatic, was kind of a tough surface always there, and so it felt more difficult to get something original out of them. But I don't know whether it really was so. – Also in those talks on classes there was that certain, that someone could ask that 'Hi, where are you from?' and 'Is it nice to be here?' and then you answered, 'yes it's really nice and I'm from Finland' – and that's it.)*

The previous two extracts tell about the cultural differences in interaction rules and socializing that Marjukka learned. These were small-talk, faster turn-taking in conversations and diplomacy or keeping a positive face. On the one hand, Marjukka appreciated the friendliness and moderateness submerged in this culture. On the other, she felt kept behind a diplomatic surface and wished the acquainting to go beyond casual greetings. In extract 7, Marjukka also mentions that maintaining a positive face and a cautious attitude towards what might get said next felt tiring to her. In comparison, Jackson (2008) mentions how cross-cultural sojourners often need to 'maintain a higher sense of awareness' of cultural differences in order to inhabit new language and cultural behaviors. This effort as well as Marjukka's unmet desire to interact on a deeper level are possible reasons why she did not view her study abroad mainly as positive (extract 3). In general, tensions between the sojourner and the host culture often build emotional stress, as one cause for a culture shock (see section 4.1).

Despite the tensions, Marjukka's experiences were told with a hint of humor. That is, sometimes similar differences did not build up to burdensome tension, but left the sojourner funnily bewildered. Marjukka told one story of how **intercultural learning** in her case came about – an experience which the other participants recognized well:

- (9) 'Kyllä mä oon varmaan oppinut, kun sit mä puhun englantia niin mulle tulee semmoisia 'how's it going'... Mut sit oli aina välillä kyllä tilanteita, että esimerkiksi kun yks proffa, opettaja... sano jotain että 'how's it going' ja sit mä en tiennyt mitä mun pitää vastata, silleen 'good how are you', ja sit se ei vastaa siihen mitään. Sit oli ihan: eh? hei? –

Kyllähän siis mä olin ennenkin kuullut et siellä se 'how are you' ei tarkoita sitä että no kuinka sinä voit. Mut sit en mä varmaan ikinä oppinut vastaamaan yhtä nopeasti, kun jos vaikka käytävällä tuli vastaan joku tyyppi ja sit se sano et 'how are you Marjukka, how's it going' ja sit siihen ois pitänyt vastata 'i'm good how are you'. Jotenkin käsittämättömän nopeasti jo piti puhua siinä kun mentiin vaan ohi.

*(Yes I must have learned because when I speak English I use the 'how's it going'... But then there were sometimes situations in which for example one professor, teacher... said something like 'how's it going' and then I didn't know how to answer, like 'good, how are you', and then he did not reply anything I felt like: eh? hei? – Though I had heard before that the 'how are you' does not mean that how are you. But I never learned to answer as fast. For example if someone passed me by and said 'how are you Marjukka how's it going and I should have answered 'I'm good how are you'. You had to speak incredibly fast when you passed people by.)*

Through daily encounters during the study abroad, Marjukka learned foreign sociocultural skills. Sometimes as here, this learning came through first being lost and then finding a way to react and act in new ways. About failing, observing and trying she said: 'se toisaalta onkin niin jännää, minkä takia varmaan tulee semmonen kuherruskuukausi joskus' (*on the other hand that is so exciting, which is why you face a honeymoon period sometimes*). Furthermore, Marjukka improved in her language skills during the journey. Looking back and up to the present, she said: 'tuntuu että englantia osasi siinä vaiheessa jo aika hyvin kun lähti, että ei nähnyt siinä mieletöntä kehitystä. Mutta kyllä mä oon ihan varma et se (kielitaito) on siellä parantunut' (*I feel I spoke English quite well before I left, so I didn't see a grand development. But I'm very sure my language skills have improved there.*)

In addition to language skills and new interaction rules, Marjukka's learning experiences touched on the values in society. She said:

(10)'Mä en tiedä et... onko se vaihdon vaikutusta vai mitä mutta... ärsyttää suvaitsemattomuus. Et jotenkin hirveän kapea, että miten pitää olla ja käyttäytyä ja miten pitää pukeutua ja mitä pitää harrastaa. Se on musta kauhean rajoittavaa. – Siellä oli enemmän ulkomaalaisia ja mä en ainakaan kohdannut, musta tuntui et siellä kampuksella oli semmoinen hirveän et, kulttuurit, piti olla kauhean, et rasistiset kommentit ei mennyt siellä läpi. En tiedä et miten muuten ( ) yhteiskunnassa, mut jotenkin siellä kampuksella se oli itsestäänselvyys, että on vaikea ymmärtää rasismia.'

*(I don't know whether it's because of the study abroad but... I'm irritated by intolerance. Somehow this narrow view of how one should behave, dress and what interests one should have. I think it's very restricting. – There were more foreigners and I did not meet, I felt that on the campus, because of the cultures, racist comments did not win any ground. I don't know how this works in the ( ) society but on the campus it was evident that racism was not understood.)*

Whether or not merely due to study abroad, the presence and diversity of cultures and races on the campus allowed Marjukka to see tolerance at work, and emphasize the significance of this value in her worldview. More specifically, even if she could not say if the diversity extended to the surrounding society, the study abroad environment was one where culturally different behaviors, outlooks, interests and ways of living were appreciated. Looking at her changing feelings as the journey proceeded – from disappointments to cross-cultural learning and later successes (see extract 11) – Marjukka managed to cross cultural barriers on a deeper level than geographically. In order for this process to unfold, it was essential that she found herself submerged in common cultural values and learned new cultural practices in the host country.

Towards **homecoming**, the study abroad environment began to appear to Marjukka as more pleasant, and she too had crossed cultural barriers in adjusting to it. She said the following about the last phase of her journey; from a homeward perspective built in the past two years:

(11) 'Loppuvaiheessa alkoi ehkä enemmän, et sitten kun lähti niin alkoi tutustumaan joihinkin ihmisiin, ja mä kävin esimerkiksi (kaupungissa) ja sielläkin oli kylmä talvi ja sit alkoi olla kevät. Että jotenkin erilaiset tunnelmat alkoi olla siinä loppuajasta. Mutta mä tulin kyllä ihan iloisesti, tai siis oli ihan kiva tulla Suomeen takasin. – Mua joskus ärsyttääkin se kun jotkut kaverit hirveästi dissaa Suomea, ja mä oon no et hei, come on, täällä on paljon hyviä puolia. Se on itsestä kiinni... et tietyistä asioista mä nautin Suomessa hirveästi, mutta toisaalta musta on kauhean kiva myös reissata.'

*(Closer to the end, I began, managed to make acquaintances of some people and I visited (a city) and it was a cold winter there too, and then the spring started. Somehow the atmosphere began to feel different. But I was nevertheless happy to come back to Finland.- I get irritated sometimes when my friends dislike Finland, and I'm like, hey come on, there are many good things here. It's up to each person... there are things that I enjoy much in Finland, but on the other hand I also like traveling a lot.)*

Towards the end of her study abroad, the entire atmosphere on Marjukka's journey lightened. She made visits to the big multicultural cities and began to connect with some other students. In the previous text extract, Marjukka looked to the two post-journey years to interpret and make meaning of her last study abroad experiences. On the one hand, she liked being the sojourner but on the other, she was happy to return and was aware of the good sides of living in Finland. The same viewpoint, ability to

compare her experiences on study abroad to being at home, was a foundation for her current valuation of home. She talked about the good sides she had found since:

(12) 'Musta on ihanaa et mulla on täällä ystäviä, jotka mä oon tuntenut pitkän aikaa. Et mun ei tarvi jotenkin koko ajan miettiä sitä et ymmärtääkö toi ihminen ja kiinnostaako sitä mitä mä sanon... jotenkin sit alkaa itsekin muokkaamaan puhetta. Mä kyllä tykkään suomen kielestä ihan sikana, kun sillä on vapaus, niin, vapaus käyttää sitä. Musta tuntuu et Suomessa on tietty vapaus, yliopistollakin ihan saa itse valita mitä opiskelee... Mä nautin siitä et mä saan kävellä paikasta toiseen ja mennä pyörällä... ja (ulkomailla) ei vaan pääse sille tietylle asteelle niitten ihmisten kanssa samalla tavalla. Suomessa saattaa tosi nopeasti tutustua johonkin. Vaikka jos jonkun kanssa juttelee luennolla niin saattaa huomata tosi äkkiä et me ollaan tosi samanlaiset, meillä synkkaa ja ois varmaan kivaa yhdessä.'

*(I love that I have such friends here whom I've know for a long time. So I don't have to consider all the time whether a person understands me or is interested in what I say... so that I'd start to edit my speaking. I like Finnish a lot, the freedom to use it. I feel that in Finland there's that certain freedom, at the university too you can choose yourself what you study... I enjoy walking to places and riding a bike... and (abroad) you just can't get on that same level with people. In Finland you might get to know somebody fast. If you talk with someone on a lecture, you can notice very fast that we're similar, that we click and would have great time together.)*

In many ways, Marjukka gave greater value to the home environment after her study abroad experience. Mentioned in extract 12 were friendships, language, academic freedom, nature and interaction. Despite feeling herself successful in the foreign cultural environment towards the end, Marjukka gave even more value to her life and daily environment at home. In one sense, interpreting her current circumstances through her study abroad experiences helped her appreciate them more, and place the right value upon home and traveling in her life. Thus, in addition to gaining a broader worldview, Marjukka also became to appreciate her own culture even more. In the following section, I will discuss the ways in which Marjukka's journey reached beyond language and cultural experiences to her sense of self, through crossing these borders on her study abroad.

### **6.3.3 Identity**

For Marjukka, the study abroad was not as much a crossroads experience regarding identity reconstruction as it was for the other participants. However, identity negotiation is a relevant topic to connect with her experiences. All in all, Marjukka's study abroad stories include three different viewpoints to identity: 1) identity in

interaction, 2) becoming international and 3) identity negotiation and change. In addition, the negotiation of the holistic impact of her study abroad was still relevant to her two years after the experience.

The first identity linked theme which ran through Marjukka's study abroad experiences was **interaction** – the different rules of meeting, greeting and taking speech turns. Having adopted another interaction culture on study abroad, at least in part, she talked about the changes that had followed her back home:

(13) 'Mä en tiedä että onko se pelkästään vaihto vai muutkin kansainväliset kokemukset, et on oppinut ehkä enemmän... no mä en nyt siis tiedä hymyilenkö mä niin paljon, mutta musta tuntuu että mä hymyilen enemmän. Ja kun törmää tuttuihin niin tulee (sanottua) jotain yleensä. – Mä oon kyllä oppinut silleen kohtaamaan vieraita ihmisiä. Osaa ehkä (tuoda) hymyn sinne joskus tai olla jotenkin silleen, "hei", tai sanoa enemmänkin kun hei. Ne kysy et 'miten menee', ja siis se on mun mielestä selvästi siirtynyt, että itsekin saattaa.'

*(I don't know if it's just the study abroad or other international experiences too, that I've perhaps learned more... well I don't know if I smile that much, but I feel that I smile more. And when I meet people I know I usually manage to say something. – I have learned to meet unfamiliar people. I can maybe bring a smile there sometimes or be somehow, 'hi', or say more than hi. They asked that 'how's it going', and that has clearly transferred, I might do that too.)*

Marjukka did not draw a clear line between the impact of study abroad and her other international experiences on her identity. However, some greeting styles, gestures and the ease of meeting new people had stayed with her after leaving the foreign cultural environment behind. Moreover, these subtle changes were not only choices of interacting according to alternative models but things that Marjukka had learned or acquired, and then noticed had become part of her. In other words, they had built in her identity in interaction. In addition, her cross-cultural experiences allowed her to view herself and the two cultures with a particular insight. She said: 'Siinä on semmoinen tietty rentous mut sitten ehkä myös joku semmoinen pinnallisuus. Mä en osaa selittää sitä.' *(There's a certain relaxed feel but perhaps also some superficiality to it. I cannot explain it).* In this remark, she was both able and unable to describe the feel of the study abroad culture, rising from a very subjective experience. All in all, Marjukka seemed to receive the subtle changes with positive value.

The second identity linked theme in Marjukka's study abroad stories was **internationality**. In the following short extract, she explained how the journey related to her identity currently, and what traces it had left in her:

(14) 'Se ei oo pelkästään englannin opettaja minussa mikä on käynyt (maassa), vaan just nimenomaan semmoinen, ehkä kansainvälisempi niinkun identiteetti. Jotenkin tietää, että jos menee muihin kulttuureihin niin kyllä yleensä pärjää ja uskaltaa mennä.'

*(It's not just the English teacher in me that has been to (the country), but somehow it's that more international identity, you know that if you go to other cultures that you usually will manage and have courage to go.)*

In addition to the cross-cultural competencies she had gained, boldness and managing herself abroad, Marjukka felt that the study abroad had left something international in her sense of self. Bearing in mind that career had motivated her to take the journey in the first place (see extract 2), Marjukka now emphasized that it was not the career part but her entire self which had taken a journey, and become more international. Later on, Marjukka linked the experience of having an international identity to her increased knowledge, awareness and experiences of cultural differences (see extract 15).

The third identity linked issue rising in Marjukka's story is **identity negotiation and change**. The following quotations and analytic views – in the light of Marjukka's language and cultural experiences and her overall feeling of the journey – are key to understanding what the study abroad meant for Marjukka's identity. In extract 15 she was asked whether living in the foreign cultural environment changed her thoughts about her identity and self, and whether she felt a need for change:

(15) 'Mulla ehkä muutos tuli vasta sen (vaihdon) jälkeen, koska mulla se ei nyt mennyt silleen (positiivisesti), et se oli vähän niinkun pettymys. Et sit se oli vähän semmoinen kierre siinä, kun mä olin tavallaan pettynyt siihen mun vaihtopaikkaan... ja sit mä olin pettynyt itseeni kun mä olin niin... Et kun tiesi tavallaan, kun ihmiset sanoo että se on itsestä kiinni missä viihtyy. Sit mä syksyllä oikeasti aloin esimerkiksi etsiä uusia harrastuksia ja kaikkea, tuli semmoinen, niinkun jossittelut, että olisi pitänyt tehdä kaikkea tätä paljon aikaisemmin. Mut tavallaan se että tarttui siihen elämään Suomessa sitten sen jälkeen. Mä oon jotenkin ehkä nyt löytänyt sen (oman paikan).'

*(For me the change came only after that (the study abroad) because it wasn't that (positive), it was a bit like a disappointment. It took like a downspin there because I was kind of disappointed to my study abroad place... and then I was disappointed at myself because I was so... I knew that people say that it's up to each person where you feel good. Then in the autumn I really began for example to look for new hobbies and stuff,*

*and got the ifs that I should have done all this much earlier, but as a fact I took hold of life after that in Finland. I have maybe now somehow found it (my place.)*

For Marjukka, the biggest changes in her sense of self came only after her cross-cultural experience. Due to her disappointment with the environment, Marjukka found herself on a downward spiral during the journey, not wanting to fully adjust to the social and cultural community of reference around her. In a sense, the downward development made her disappointed at herself for not seizing the opportunity to submerge in the surrounding cultural context. Thus, whether consciously or not, she rejected some of the identity options available to her on study abroad, and her commitment to the surrounding community remained weaker. In addition, extract 15 reveals that Marjukka felt pressure to make more of the study abroad or relate to the environment more intensely. Thus, one can say that the outcome of her negotiation of belonging, which had continued in the home environment came about through much identity work rather than a weak engagement in the process of identity negotiation.

Lastly, as the end of extract 15 reveals, the study abroad had brought about change in Marjukka's life and sense of self mostly after the journey had ended. About being back home she said: 'Se on jotenkin ihanaa ettei tarvitse jotenkin olla koko ajan silleen... etsiä itselleen paikkaa.' (*It is somehow wonderful that you don't have to search yourself a place all the time*). Thus, through detaching herself from a familiar language and cultural setting behind, crossing barriers to another culture and then crossing the same barriers back again, Marjukka found an increasing sense of belonging at home. In addition, she found identity options that allowed her to feel rightly placed (see extract 15) instead of being on a constant search for identity and belonging.

In sum, the study abroad influenced Marjukka holistically, through identity in interaction, adding international competencies to her sense of self and making her redefine commitments and negotiate belonging. Next, I will look at how the journey influenced Marjukka's thoughts and identity regarding career.

### 6.3.4 Career identity

A few months before her planned graduation, Marjukka looked at the career issue with insight into her entire study time, including the study abroad, to her aims and competencies as well as desires for the future. She talked about her career identity with regard to 1) the English language, 2) her cross-cultural gains and 3) her future career plans. Among the three participants, Marjukka could already see herself as a professional in the field of her studies, the English language, German and pedagogy.

Firstly, Marjukka talked about the **English language** relating to career. In following extract she talked about what the study abroad had given her, and how she viewed the English language from a career perspective and as part of the career world in general:

(16) 'Tuntuu et englannin kielen taito on melkein itsestäänselvyys nykyään. Et mulla ei oo siinä mielessä mitenkään ihan älyttömän vahva olo, että nyt kun mä oon englannin opiskelija niin mä pystyn tekemään, tavallaan mitä tahansa tällä kielellä. Et näkee siinä tavallaan ihan hirveästi puutteita. Mut kyllä se mahdollistaa asioita. Ja huomaa et se ammattitaito ei tosiaankaan ole pelkästään se kielen sanasto-osaaminen. Se on kyllä totta et englannissa on aika varma eri osa-alueilla... esimerkiksi itse ymmärsi jotkut semmoiset kulttuuriset viittaukset mitä ne muut ei välttämättä sitten (ymmärtäneet).'

*(It feels that the English language skill is almost a self-evident truth today. In that sense I don't feel that strong, or that I could do anything in the language now that I'm a student of English. I see a lot of lacks in it. But it does make things possible. And I notice that professional skill is not just that you know the words of a language. That is though true that I'm quite strong on different areas of English language skills... For instance, I understood the cultural references that the others necessarily didn't.)*

On the one hand, Marjukka felt that the English language was a door-opener to career opportunities that would not exist without it. The study abroad *and* being a student of English had strengthened her language skills in pragmalinguistics and with regard to the idioms of the English-speaking culture. However, she felt that good English language skills were taken for granted in today's career world. In that sense, she did not feel that her skills were unique or that she could meet the demands of any career relating to the English language.

Secondly, when asked what kind of a professional she was at the time of the interview, Marjukka related her career identity to her **cross cultural gains**. She said:

(17) 'No, siis, kansainvälinen. Kyllä se vaihto siihen (on vaikuttanut), just tää tieto mitä on kulttuurienvälisistä eroista, ja ylipäänsä ja se kokemus siitä erilaisuudesta mitä nyt tässä ollaan keskusteltu, niin mun mielestä sekin on osa sitä, sitä englannin ammattilaisen identiteettiä. Että tavallaan siinä niinkun rajapinnassa et pystyy avaamaan näitä asioita.'

*(Well, international. The study abroad has had (influence) on that, particularly the knowledge you have about cultural differences, and generally the experience of being different that we've talked about, I think that's part of the identity of an English professional. In a way you are on the interface of being able to open these things.)*

For Marjukka, experiences of cross-cultural differences and especially her own identity-linked experience of being different were competencies she could use as a future language teacher. In fact, these were her expectations although the experiences and her particular journey through them she could not have foreseen. Thus, moreover, these became part of her personal life history and *identity* reaching to the area of career. In addition, Marjukka felt that her identity as an English professional was also in part international. This is in line with Marjukka's experiences of becoming international, in other words, that the study abroad enabled her to add an international component to her sense of self (see extract 14).

In addition to the English language and being international, Marjukka lastly talked about her **future career plans**. Bearing in mind that the knowledge and experience she had sought to gain from the study abroad were meant to equip her in particular for a language teaching career, she now said:

(18) 'Niin, siis ei mullakaan, pitää tähän mainita, et oo ollut mitenkään itsestään selvää et mä haluan opettajaksi, mut kyl mä jotenkin ehkä näen siinä työssä itseni tulevaisuudessa. – Mä olen hakemassa harjoitteluun, et mä mietin sitä et voisinko mä olla siellä pidempään kuin muutaman kuukauden... Et jollain tavalla kyllä se kansainvälisyys varmaan pysyy mukana elämässä.'

*(Well, I have to mention here that it wasn't absolutely clear that I wanted to be a teacher. But I do see myself in that career in the future. – I am about to apply for a workplace learning, and I'm thinking whether I could stay there longer than just a few months. So somehow I'm sure that internationality will remain in my life.)*

A few months before her graduation, Marjukka could see herself working as a language teacher. On the one hand, it had not always been a certainty that this was what she wanted although she could now relate to being a language teacher. On the other hand, internationality too shows in her plans for the future, perhaps as a

permanent constituent in one way or another. These possible ways include the English language in her profession, her study abroad and other cross-cultural memories, Marjukka's international acquaintances or other cross-cultural journeys yet to come.

All in all, the study abroad journey took Marjukka into a foreign cultural environment, where she faced challenges, disappointments as well as succeeded in crossing cultural barriers towards the end. Moreover, the journey made her negotiate belonging, built international aspects into her identity and worked as a crossroads experience causing her to redefine her identity commitments at home. As a result, Marjukka gained English language skills, experience and perspective useful for her future career as a teacher. In her unique life history so far, she had formed a career identity including these and other competencies and experiences, as well as international career directions for her near future.

#### **6.4 Helena's story: analysis**

Helena was a twenty-four year-old home university student completing a master's degree in English language and culture. She went on study abroad on her fourth year of studies and stayed in the country for one spring semester, a total of five months. The location of her journey was a cross-Atlantic city with old industrial legacy and a separate university campus area. During the five months, Helena took courses in English literature, creative writing, women's folklore and theatre to complement her degree. At home, her major subject was English, and she had pedagogical studies and Italian language studies as her minors. In her original plan, Helena was planning to graduate from university in the year 2011-2012.

The main contents of the analysis of Helena's study abroad journey include the following themes: first, there are her professional and personal motivations from which the journey begun. Next, there are stories about her language and cultural experiences including stories of cultural discoveries and foreignness, adaptation, finding one's place in the new environment and lastly, issues related to coming back

home. On a deeper level, Helena's cross-cultural journey took her on a journey of identity negotiation touching on worldviews and attitudes, linguistic identity and belonging. These had influence on her identity negotiation regarding career. Thus, the following sections will examine Helena's thoughts prior to her journey, her significant language and cultural experiences and the influence the study abroad had on her identity. In the last part, I will discuss the link of these to her career identity and thoughts about Helena's future career.

#### 6.4.1 Motivations and language and cultural experiences

From her motivation to go on study abroad until coming back home, Helena's journey was rich with language and cultural experiences. This section addresses 1) the motivations and expectations from which her journey started, 2) cultural differences, 3) cultural adjustment and 4) Helena's feelings and experiences on returning home.

First of all, Helena's **motivations** to go on study abroad came from at least two different sources: professional and personal. In her story, motivation and expectations were linked to language skills and her feelings about a teaching career. She said:

- (1) 'Mulla ei ollu mikään valtava odotus kielitaidon parantamisen suhteen. Mä koen et mun englannin kielen taito on silleihin ihan hyvä et en mä ajatellut et siinä mitään kauheita harppauksia tulee. Mut sit mä ajattelin enempi jotenkin just sitä sujuvuutta siihen kieleen. Just se että kun siinä vaiheessa oli kuitenkin vielä mielessä et tulee englannin opettaja, niin tuntu ihan () olla lähtemättä sitten englanninkieliseen maahan. Et jos susta tulee opettaja ja sit sä et oo koskaan ollut englanninkielisessä maassa pitempää aikaa niin mun mielestä se on vähän epäkurantti homma.'

*(I did not expect to develop my language skills a lot. I feel that my English is very good, so I did not think I would leap forward much in that. But then maybe gain more fluency. At that time I was still thinking to become an English teacher, so it felt () not to go to an English speaking country. Like, if you become a teacher and you have never stayed longer in an English speaking country; that is in my opinion a bit incompetent.)*

In connection to career, Helena expected that the study abroad would provide her with fluency in language skills and experience of the English speaking environment. Her language skills were good already before the journey. Furthermore, even though her plans and aims may have changed, Helena saw living in an English speaking country as significant for any competent future language teacher. On the personal side, Helena

was motivated to go for the following reasons. Firstly, the timing of the journey matched well her desire to bring change into her familiar circumstances (quotation x) and plunge into a completely new environment. In addition, she had a desire to see the way of life in the target culture and expected and wanted to connect with the local people. These motivations and expectations made the beginnings of her journey meaningful.

The second aspect to highlight on Helena's study abroad journey are **cultural differences**. Right in the start, she was hit by the feeling of foreignness while waiting for a delayed connection flight on a local airport. She said: 'Siinä vaiheessa tuli se ensimmäinen et nyt ollaan vieraalla maalla.' (*At that point I first realized that I'm on foreign territory*). From thereon, the cross-cultural nature of the journey and the differences in the new environment began to unveil to her. These came mainly from the character of the people she met and their interaction styles, discussed next.

Regarding people's cultural character, Helena used her airport story to exemplify what cultural differences she found in people and how they were revealed to her. Having travelled thirty-six hours, she was alone on foreign territory, her flight delayed and her phone not working. There, she began to talk to her fellow travelers who were interested in her foreign nationality, lent her a phone, and were happy to talk and help her. On discovering a different cultural character, she said: 'Et se tuli niinku se ystävällisyys ja se semmonen lämminhenkisyys; jotenkin sellainen suoruus, sosiaalisuus.' (*Their friendliness and warmth came toward me; some sort of integrity, sociability*). She guessed that in a parallel situation in Finland people would not have acted in the same way. In general, Helena valued the friendly, open, honest cultural character she found in her study abroad country, and said that it was people who made her journey special.

Most of the cultural experiences and memories that Helena spoke of centered around cultural differences in interaction. Her desire to connect with the local students was met, and otherwise too, her relations to the surrounding people were cross-cultural. In

these comments, Helena talks about the feeling of foreignness that came when she discovered cultural differences in interaction:

- (2) 'Mulle tuli käytännössä vaan siitä kulttuurista sellainen vierauden(tunne); se kulttuuri et kun on semmoinen small-talk, että sanotaan että 'joo joo mennään vaan' mut sit se oikeasti tarkoittaa että ei mennä. – Se oli tosi jännä, et jos sattui vaikka jonain päivänä et oli tosi huono päivä, niin sit kun niillä on tämä että 'how are you', mikä on yleensä vaan 'hei', niin sit jos sattukin sanomaan suoraan et no tänään nyt (masentaa) oikeasti, niin ne oli aivan silleen 'ai, jaa, niinkö?' – Semmoisia kulttuurieroja mistä tuli sit semmonen (vieraudentunne). Mut ei ne, ei ne niinku sillain ollut niin isoja asioita että tuntuisi et siitä olisi sit mikään valtava ahdistus tullut.'

*(In practice, I felt foreign in the culture; that culture of ()small-talk that you say 'yes yes let's go' but what it really means is that you won't go. – It was a bit weird, that if some day you had a really bad day, and then they have this 'how are you' what usually just means 'hi', so then if you happened to say directly that well today I'm really down, they were like 'what, oh really?' – Those were cultural differences that gave me a feeling of foreignness... but they weren't such big that I'd have felt huge anxiety because of them.)*

In these situations, Helena's communication choices were different from the interaction common for her study abroad culture. On the one hand, it was important for Helena that she could remain direct in expressing personal emotions and mood but on the other, she knew that her style caused bewilderment in her acquaintances. These differences affected her, and made her feel foreign and experience tension. However, the differences did not overwhelm her with anxiety or swell into a larger culture shock. Rather, she understood them as caused by culture and found resolves that helped her to regard them only as one cultural ingredient on her journey.

The third significant ingredient of Helena's language and cultural journey was thus **cultural adjustment** and her resolves to cultural differences. On the one hand, her good language skills in English helped her be active and create meaningful relationships in the target environment, but on the other, she took the role of a learner, for example in greeting situations. (These situations resemble the ones presented in Marjukka's story, see section 5.3.XX) Regarding resolves to cultural clashes, Helena however acted upon the social environment with her own cultural heritage, even as she was the sojourner. One strategy she used was dialoguing – exchanging thoughts and feelings, and finding common resolves to the differences. This helped her to successfully solve cultural conflicts and to avoid misunderstandings:

- (3) 'sit mä sanoin () että tiedätkö et ku tääl meillä Suomessa et kun sanotaan että tehdään niin sit tehdään ja sit se oli vaan silleen ett aa et et okei joo et heille se on niinku, et heille se on niinku enempi epäkohteliasta kieltäytyä suoraan kun se et sanotaan et joo ja sit vaan niinku liuetaan'

'sillei just et niinku keskusteltiin asiasta... sanoin siitä just silleen et että ku me on totuttu tekeen näin ni et mä tiedän että te teette näin mutta et jos voisit vähän tulla vastaan. Et sä voit kyllä mulle sanoo suoraan, et mä en pidä sitä epäkohteliaana et sano vaan. Ja sit se oli silleen et okei, no ihan hyvä et sanoit että ei hän ei niinku tullu niinku ajatelleeks.'

*(then I said () that you know, here in Finland when you say you'll do something you really will keep that. He/she was like, aha okay, from them it's more impolite to say no right up to someone than to say yes and then kind of just let it cool down.)*

*(We talked it over... I said that we are used to doing it like this, and I know that you do it like that, but that could you meet me halfway. So you can tell me no directly and I won't think it's impolite. And then he/she took it like okay, it's good you said that, I did not see it that way.)*

In Helena's case, resolves to cultural differences were found as mutual understanding grew. In these narratives, she was more proactive in confronting cultural differences than her local acquaintances, and worked actively to create mutual understanding. On the one hand, this is how she avoided culture shock, feelings of misfit and anxiety. However, in these situations she rather maintained some of her own cultural behavior than adapted. Yet again, Helena chose the role of a full learner in the face of many other cultural differences, and took on the opportunity to 'oppia kaikkea uutta ja jännittävää ja erilaista' (*learn everything new and exciting and different*). She told:

- (4) 'Suomessa kaikki asiat... on sulle tuttuja ja kaikki normit on sulle tuttuja, niin periaatteessa sä tiedät miten kaikkialla pitää tehdä. Et sit aina siellä ulkomailla on vähän silleen, et no mitenkähän nää nyt tekee, ja sit pitää aina vähän observoida sieltä sivusta et miten noi tekee että et sit menee perässä ja tekee sillein.'

*(In Finland everything is familiar; all the norms are familiar to you, so in principal you know how you must act. When you are abroad, you have to watch what people do, observe in the background and then you follow and do the same.)*

Thus, another way forward in cultural adaptation for Helena was to observe, learn and follow people as they acted in their familiar cultural environment.

Lastly, the study abroad journey revealed its cross-cultural character to Helena in her **homecoming**. All in all, her expectations of the journey were fulfilled. She said: 'Kyllä musta tuntuu että meni ihan ylikin. Et ei osannut edes odottaa kaikkea mitä siellä tapahtui.' (*Yes I think they were even exceeded. I could not have hoped for all that*

*happened there.*) However, when the major culture crossing and the successful journey was behind her, Helena was hit by the feeling of foreignness, now at home:

(5) 'Mua niinku yllätti se et sit ku tuli takas Suomeen ni se et se vierauden tunne iski Suomessa. Et Suomi on niin outo ja vieras ja nää tekee väärin.'

'Musta tuntuu et se on jotenkin se kieli ja ne ihmiset. Et pääsee olemaan siinä semmoisessa kansainvälisemmässä ympäristössä, kun sit taas täällä Suomessa... mä kaipaisin jotakuta sellaista jonka kanssa vois puhuu, niinku joku ulkomaalainen... Mut kun ei niitä oikein tahdo löytää... Se tuntuu aina silleen vähän silleen, et tuntuu jotenkin et kun tulee Suomeen niin sitä on jotenkin niin supussa täällä mut sit kun lähtee pois niin sit tuntuu et on niinkun --.'

*(When I came back to Finland, I was surprised by how I was hit by the feeling of foreignness in Finland. That Finland is so strange and they do it all wrong.)*

*(I feel that it's somehow the language and the people. You get to be in that more international environment, unlike here in Finland... I would miss someone with whom to talk, someone from abroad... But they are difficult to find... It feels always a bit, you feel that when you come back to Finland you are somehow limited, and when you go away, you are --.)*

In the first lines, Helena talks about how she felt coming back home. Some cultural activity that should have been home-like to her felt weird and wrong after the journey. In the second narrative, Helena told that she missed creating international connections and felt limited – perhaps opposite to the freedom she felt abroad. In fact, her feelings describe those of a reverse culture shock. However, Helena also called Finland her 'mother-ship'. Her homecoming included thus conflicting feelings due to language and cultural differences.

In sum, Helena's study abroad took her across language and cultural borders. In response to the differences, she both acted and adapted. In the next section, I will discuss Helena's journey in terms of identity and the impact that her study abroad language and cultural experiences had on her sense of self.

#### **6.4.2 Identity**

The journey of identity in Helena's case addresses four different themes. These are 1) identity negotiation in language and cultural differences, 2) worldviews and attitudes, 3) linguistic identity and belonging and 4) identity reconstruction. Like in the previous part, most of the following stories include examples from interaction situations, people and the English language.

Firstly, Helena became aware of **identity negotiation** during her journey partly through language and cultural conflicts. Her resolves in order to avoid anxiety and misfit were those of dialoguing, keeping her identity intact and expressing herself in her foreign cultural relationships. Referring to the two interaction situation quoted in section 5.4.1, she told what happened with her identity in the process of overcoming cultural differences or conflict situations:

- (6) 'Ne oppi tuntemaan mut aika raatorehellisenä. Mä luulen et mä muutin ehkä itseäni tuommoisen kautta jopa vielä suuremmaksi. Eli musta tuntui että osa niistä ihmisistä, jotka ei tunteneet mua kauhean hyvin saattoi ehkä ajatella et mä olin jopa epäkohtelias... se tuntu aina välillä olevan vähän yllättävä asia ihmisille et puhuttiin niin suoraan.'

*(They learned to know me as strict honest. I think I may have changed myself even more straightforward through those situations. I felt that part of the people who didn't know me that well may have even thought that I was impolite... it seemed to be surprising to people every now and then that I acted so straightforward.)*

In this narrative, Helena expressed her heightened state of awareness towards the foreign cultural interaction norms. In addition, she recognized some of the cultural values behind them, such as politeness and personal privacy conveyed through indirect communication. However, her valuation of honesty and openness expressed through direct communication in her home community made her reject the new cultural ways of negotiating wants and desires. Moreover, rather than internalizing new norms and interaction models, she was willing to stand the pressure of being misinterpreted by some members of the surrounding culture less intimate to her. In the end, this narrative reveals well how the issue of identity negotiation was present on Helena's study abroad journey and took place in the area of interaction.

Secondly, Helena's experiences in the new cultural environment were apt to influence her identity in the area of **attitudes and worldviews**. Her identity negotiation in this area of commitments took place in social interaction like in the first example, and the changes surfaced when she had returned home, and ruminated what was different. She said:

- (7) 'Musta tuntuu et mä suhtaudun paljon avoimemmin ihmisiin ylipäättään. Et kaikki erilaisuus ei oo mulle enää niin erilaista, tai et mä jotenkin ehkä havainnoitsen sen et joku ihminen on ehkä erilainen, mut sit mä kuitenkin suhtaudun siihen sillä lailla et hei,

kaikki me ollaan erilaisia. – Niin sillain musta tuntuu et musta on tullut paljon avarakatseisempi ihmisten suhteen.’

*(I feel that I relate much more openly to people in general. All the differences are not that different to me anymore, or I somehow perhaps notice that a person might be different but then I still relate to him/her thinking that hey, we’re all different. – So in that way I feel that I have become much more broad-minded with people.)*

In this narrative, the study abroad stood for Helena as an opportunity to view life and people through wider lenses. As she became familiar with life that looked different – people’s outlooks, behavior, styles in interaction – she seized the opportunity to embrace them as possible new identity options. In other words, these options were generally and culturally available as well as acceptable identities in her new environment, some of which she would adopt. Furthermore, these were identity options added to her worldview – not exchanged for the old ones. As a result, she internalized the value of openness and broad-mindedness towards people – perhaps embedded in the culture she inhabited or perhaps a result of her own cross-cultural journeying.

Thirdly, Helena’s study abroad was influential to her identity regarding her **linguistic identity and belonging**. The two went hand in hand on Helena’s journey: her English language skills and love for English connected her with the English speaking environment. In the following narrative, she commented on whether her study abroad experiences had had influence on her sense of belonging:

- (8) ‘Mulla varmaan kielellisesti tulee se, et koska mä rakastan englannin kieltä niin paljon, musta on niin ihana puhua sitä, niin sit ainakin kielellisesti se sisäinen koti on siellä ulkomailla, just joku englannin kielinen maa... Mut sit se sielunminä, kun kaikki juuret on Suomessa niin se on sit Suomi.’

*(Linguistically, since I love the English language so much, I love speaking it, so at least language-wise my inner home is abroad, in some English speaking country... But then my soul identity, because all my roots are in Finland, is Finland.)*

Helena expressed a sense of belonging to two different cultural environments. The feeling came from the two languages she loved. On the one hand, Helena felt that the English language had built deep into her identity, and through the language she had a home in the English speaking world. Furthermore, Helena’s sense of belonging to the English speaking world was enforced as the host culture received her as one of them –

because she could speak the English language. On this she said: 'Et ei tullut niinku sitä semmosta että sä oot erilainen.' (*I didn't hear that message that I was different.*) On the other hand, Helena's deepest sense of belonging, her soul identity, remained in her Finnish cultural environment because of her Finnish roots.

Fourthly, Helena spoke of deep personal **identity reconstruction** that she experienced during her study abroad. In the following narrative, she tells of her identity negotiation process motivated by personal desire to abandon certain identity commitments, explore new identity options and make new identity commitments surface. She said:

- (9) 'Mulla oli sellainen valtava tarve et pitää saada jotain uutta ja erilaista... mä koin et mä vähän siellä niin kuin piece by piece hajotin itseni ensin ihan täysin ja sit rupesin vähän kokoileen sillä tavalla et joo, tää on mun juttu, tätä mä teen ja että tota mä tein aina, mut se ei tunnu omalta niin mä jätän sen pois, nyt mä teen tätä näin... niinku alkoi nähdä itsensä ihan erilaisena ihmisenä. – Ja kyl mä koin että, ja mun ystävätkin on sanonut sitä, et se Helena joka lähti sinne ei oo se joka tuli takaisin. Et mä koen ainakin itse et mä tulin paljon vahvempana takaisin sieltä.'

*(I had a huge need to get something new and different... I felt that I somehow first scattered myself in there piece by piece, and then started gathering a little like, yes, this is my thing, this is what I do and that is what I've always done but it doesn't feel like me so I'll leave it out, this is what I do now... I began to see myself as someone altogether different. – And I also feel, and my friends have said that too, that the Helena who left there is not the one who came back. So I feel at least myself that I came back from there much stronger.)*

For Helena, the study abroad journey was an opportunity for breaking old and making new identity commitments. Crossing cultural borders opened to her a new range of identity options, enabled her to redefine her life opportunities anew and construct her identity from both global and local ingredients. On a conscious level, as read in the narrative, she could redefine what she loved to do, how she interacted and with whom, and what she expected from the future. In this way, she could strengthen who she was – her identity or sense of self. Moreover, the new cultural environment gave Helena perhaps one of the best opportunities to review her identity competencies, such as linguistic skill, participate in new communities of reference choose which identity of the prevailing identity constituents she would accept as parts of her identity.

In sum, the issue of identity emerged in Helena's study abroad narratives through identity negotiation situations, with regard to attitudes and worldviews, linguistic identity and belonging, and (un)conscious identity reconstruction. When asked to summarize how the study abroad had influenced her identity, Helena said:

(10) 'En mä nää itseäni minään muuna kun sinä ihmisenä, joka kävi vaihdossa. Että siitä kuitenkin sai itselleen niin paljon ja sitä muuttui niin paljon silleen sisäisesti toisaalta, että en mä oikein edes osaa kuvitella sitä Helenaa joka ei olis muuttunut.'

*(I don't see myself as any other person than as the one who went on study abroad. I got so much from it and I changed so much internally in one sense, that I can't really even picture a Helena who wouldn't have changed.)*

Like the other participants, Helena saw the study abroad semester as a whole. Similarly, she felt that its impact on her was holistic and reached as deep as to her identity. In the following section, I will look at what kind of influence the study abroad period – Helena's language and cultural experiences and the identity reconstruction work – may have had on her career identity and thoughts of career.

#### **6.4.3 Career identity**

As was evident in Helena's expectations of the study abroad, the journey was linked with career. Although it was difficult for her to pinpoint the holistic impact of the journey on her career identity, her current thoughts about her future career can give us some clues to the issue. Significant topics in the following discussion are 1) career identity negotiation and 2) international career plans.

First of all, to put the career discussion in the right perspective, Helena gave the following answer to the questions of how the study abroad had impacted her as a future English language professional:

(11) 'Ammattilaisena? En osaa siis, mä en koe sitä (vaihtoa) semmoisena, tällä hetkellä ammatti-asiana ollenkaan. Mä koen sen enemmän semmoisena henkilökohtaisena minänä.'

*(As a professional? I can't say, I don't see it (the study abroad) as a career issue at the moment. I feel it has more to do with my personal self.)*

In short, Helena herself saw the journey more as a personal than a career linked experience at the time of the interview. On the one hand, what she tells reveals that career was not the primary focus of the journey and furthermore, that she did not see its influence in terms of career, but in terms of identity. Therefore, the following examination should be viewed in the light of the same balance.

As a major conducive, her study abroad experiences encouraged Helena to re-negotiate her identity and choices regarding career. She talked about her choices concerning teacher training, desire to define her career opportunities from a wider perspective or even changing her career completely. She said:

(12) 'Mä olin vähän miettinyt et tuleeko musta nyt sit opettajaa kuitenkaan, et kun mä oon suoravalittu siihen, noihin opettajan opintoihin... Mä olin mun perusopinnot tehnyt ja sit mä lähdin vaihtoon... mä tulin pois sieltä ja mä totesin et en mä halua opettajaksi enää, et se tuntu jotenkin liian suppealta. Et tuntui et mä haluan tehdä jotain enemmän, et mä haluan lähteä jonnekin ja tehdä asioita. Sen jälkeen on tullut semmonen niinkun opiskelijan identiteetti-kriisi, et mikä se mun ammatti-minä on, mikä musta tulee. Mulle tuli ihan täysin se, että mä halusin vaihtaa alaa ihan täysin, ja sen mä oon nyt tekemässä. Et jotenkin siitä tuli sellainen rohkeus et aina kannattaa yrittää.

*(I had been thinking whether I was going to become a teacher after all, even as I have been accepted in that program... I had completed my basic studies and then I left for study abroad... I came back and said that I don't want to become a teacher anymore, that felt too narrow. I felt that I want to do something more, I want to go somewhere and do things. After that I've had a typical identity crisis of a student, that what is my professional identity, what will I become. I wanted to change the field completely, and that's what I'm doing now. I got this courage from that that it's always worth the try.)*

The courage and desire to rethink her career commitments was influenced by Helena's study abroad. After the journey, she wanted to do more, go some place further and do more versatile things in her future profession. In addition, Helena wanted stronger identification with her future profession. The study abroad had influenced her to begin a professional identity negotiation process, which she named as the typical identity crisis of a student. In other words, her study abroad experiences encouraged her to redefine her sense of commitment to her studies and who she wanted to become professionally. On Helena's journey, personal development and professional growth went hand in hand.

Secondly, the study abroad helped Helena to realize her potential and possibilities regarding **international career opportunities**. When asked whether she could imagine herself working abroad in the future, she answered with a strong yes. About the influence of study abroad and about working abroad she said:

(13) 'Jos nyt ajattelee, et se ei se englannin kieli olekaan se ammatti mihin mä haluan, niin ylipäättään mä oon saanut siitä vaihto-ajasta... just sen avoimuuden ja jonkunlaista sellaista enempi rohkeutta ja just kansainvälisyys... semmoinen mistä kuitenkin joka tapauksessa tulee ammennettua siihen omaan ammatti-elämään, vaikkei se sit englanti olisikaan. Mä koen englannin kielen ja semmoisen englanninkielisen kulttuurin mulle itselle niin läheiseksi, että en mä halua koko elämäni Suomessa olla töissä, ja viettää koko elämäni Suomessa. Et mä voisin aivan hyvin lähteä, tosi mielelläni lähtisinkin useammaksikin vuodeksi ulkomaille töihin asumaan.

*(In case the English language is not the profession I want, the study abroad overall gave me... that openness and more courage and internationality... something from which I can benefit in my future career life anyway, even if that is not English. I feel the English language and the English speaking culture so close for me that I don't want to work in Finland or spend my whole life here. So I could as well leave, I'd love to go to work and live abroad even for several years.)*

The study abroad experience gave Helena courage, openness and internationality. She was sure that these benefits would follow her to whatever her profession would be in the future. In addition, the journey had brought the English speaking culture close to her, and perhaps lowered the step for making international career moves. According to Tams and Arthur (2007: 94-5), international education is one factor enabling individual career actors to respond to global career opportunities. Although there are many factors, Helena's telling suggests that the study abroad helped her to construct a more international career identity than had she not been on the journey. At the time of the interview, she expressed that she did not want to plan her career future merely to Finland.

All in all, the study abroad semester marked a significant time in Helena's life history, told so far. The journey encouraged her to reconsider what her career identity was, and gave her openness to make possible international career moves in the future. Lastly, it provided her with perspective and experience from which she would benefit in her future working life.

## 7 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to look at the experiences of study abroad sojourners concerning language, culture and identity. Moreover, the main question asked in the beginning was this: what kind of impact does study abroad have on the sojourner's career identity. The particular crossroads topic was placed within a unique context in which English language degree students travelled to English-speaking countries for a term abroad as part of their professional training. The particular topic had been little examined in previous applied linguistic research although the study abroad industry has been grown massively for a decade. Thus the study was conducted in a timely, relevant area of studies. In addition, the present study can be considered a conversation opener in the home university setting where the experiences of study abroad sojourners and the possible impact of these journeys have been little examined.

In the empirical part of the study, I sought to approach the study question by conducting a thematic group interview. The three participants discussed their experiences under three themes: language and cultural experiences, identity related experiences and career (see appendix 2). This interview design enabled the participants to relate to each other's stories, reminisce upon their own experiences while the others talked and to share their experiences from a post-journey perspective. The data was analysed in the previous chapter using the same three themes and the qualitative narrative analysis method. The goal of the analysis, three stories written into narrative form, was to give voice to the participants' unique experiences and to gain understanding of the topic through them.

Having told Johanna's, Marjukka's and Helena's stories in chapter 6, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings in the light of previous theory. In addition, the chapter will address how the unique stories may reflect the general. The discussion follows the same three themes, language and cultural experiences, identity and career. Lastly, I will discuss the value and possible implications of this study.

## 7.1 Language and cultural experiences

In this section, I will make general observations about the participants' language and cultural experiences. These include the correlation between expectations and experiences, learning experiences regarding language and culture and general observations about these experiences and their implications.

Firstly, as was taken into account in the prescription of the three narratives, expectations and language and cultural experiences seemed to go hand in hand to some degree in the three participants' stories. All in all, expectations were fulfilled in the areas of language, culture (Johanna) and forming relationships (Johanna and Helena). Moreover, they were met relating to language, cultural and professional development (Marjukka, Helena) and unmet regarding campus living (Marjukka). In all of the participants' stories, expectations were talked of in the same areas in which positive and negative experiences occurred. This kind of a connection between expectations and experiences has been previously written about by Tarp (2006: 166, 179) who found out that expectations seemed to determine the areas in which cultural learning took place and how the students acted out their agendas for the journey. Thus, in order to encourage professional development, it would be useful to talk about expectations and ask new sojourners to set goals and think of their agendas before going on study abroad. Furthermore, the stories in this study were different from one another – in two cases the study abroad exceeded all expectations (Johanna and Helena) and in one case the journey was described in both positive and negative terms (Marjukka). This variety is helpful in viewing the journey truthfully, since many previous study abroad accounts have been falsely 'glowing', undermining the challenges that are part of the same experience (Angulo 2008: 9).

Secondly, in line with the previous studies (Dufon and Churchill 2006; Jackson 2008; Regan, Howard and Lemèe 2009), the three participants seemed to have developed in their language and cultural skills in several areas during study abroad. These included *pronunciation* (Marjukka), *fluency* (Marjukka and Helena), *sociolinguistic skills* (Johanna, Marjukka and Helena), *awareness of the other* (Johanna, Helena),

*acceptance of cultural differences* (Marjukka) *new social and communication skills* (Johanna, Marjukka and Helena), *a broader worldview* (Helena) *creating meaningful relationships* (Johanna, Helena). In sum, study abroad seemed to have influenced the participants' language and cultural development in diverse positive ways. It is also likely that only a part of all the benefits of the journeys regarding language and cultural learning are included in this study.

From another viewpoint, difficulties described by the three participants aligned similarly with previous theory (Ting-Toomey 1999; Jackson 2008; Chik and Benson 2008;). These were *emotional reactions* to the tension caused by cultural differences in interaction (Johanna, Marjukka, Helena), *feelings of misfit and anxiety* as in a culture shock (Marjukka) and *ambivalent feelings due to homecoming* (Johanna, Marjukka and Helena). These difficulties resolved in different ways and some still prevailed at the time of the interview. However, in all cases the participants showed willingness to continue dialogue with the host culture. Thus, their case stories give examples of cultural adjustment which places them in the category of short- to medium-term sojourners instead of casual travelers and tourists.

Lastly, as discussed above, the participants' stories do reflect what is general in language and cultural learning on study abroad. However, it has to be remembered that the knowledge they offer in this study is subjective, interpretive and uncovers personal meaning (Laine 2007: 26-43). Similarly, as seen in the analyses, language and cultural development served highly personal goals in the participants' lives, educational and possible career trajectories. Again, as Wenger (1999: 155) suggests, their overall meaning for and influence on the participants' lives and careers will be revealed only in the course of time.

Intertwined with the personal influence of the previous language and cultural experiences, the three case stories opened a window to identity reconstruction relating to study abroad. This theme will be discussed in the following section.

## 7.2 Identity-related experiences

Several identity-related issues that have been addressed in previous theory rose in the study abroad narratives of this study. These issues were *linguistic identity, self in interaction, belonging, becoming international, identity negotiation, worldviews and attitudes* and *identity change and reconstruction*. These will be discussed in this section under three themes: 1) language and identity, 2) belonging and 3) identity reconstruction.

Firstly, in all the participant's accounts, study abroad had influence on the **linguistic identities** of the sojourners. In other words, L2 learning in the target language environment compelled them to reorganize their sense of self (Norton 2000: 11). This observation is in line with the sociocultural idea that language, culture and identity are closely intertwined (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 59). Moreover, language has been regarded as the core of people's personal and group membership identities (Ting-Toomey 1999: 40-41) and a tool of access to cultural meaning-making and resources (Wenger 1999: 152-3). Against this knowledge, especially Johanna's and Helena's telling of the English language as part of their identity reveals that study abroad benefited and influenced them in several ways. Specifically, they gained access to the English language and cultural resources, received membership and took part in the local and global English-speaking communities of reference and came to reorganize their social experience through another language. In general, the impact of study abroad on the sojourners' linguistic identities (and not only on language skills) should be talked of as an opportunity related to crossing cultural barriers.

Secondly, connected to the issue of linguistic identity was **belonging**. During the study abroad, all the three participants had battled with either a divided sense of belonging (Johanna and Helena) or lack of belonging and symptoms of a culture shock (Marjukka). These narratives reveal that crossing cultures on study abroad is hard work on the sojourner's self, may guide one to reassess one's belonging and commitments – and is an emotionally demanding process both during and after the journey. Further on, it may guide a person toward quite new life options (Wenger 1999: 156, 158).

Significantly, it should be nevertheless understood that both finding a way in *and* a way out of the new communities of reference is positive personal development and may equal to personal growth (Wenger 1999: 155). Two years after study abroad, Marjukka's case is an example of how the experience of crossing cultures can be interpreted from a homeward perspective, in the light of one's desired personal (and career) directions. In general, there should be ways to ensure that study abroad sojourners will not stay unsupported in or lacking knowledge and understanding of their processes related to identity and belonging during and after crossing cultures.

Thirdly, all the three participants' of this study told of **identity reconstruction** experiences influenced by their study abroad. In addition to linguistic identity, one particular area in which change occurred and remained was interaction behavior and attitudes towards others (e.g. in relation to situational politeness, openness, outspokenness and friendliness) and in worldviews. Speaking of the latter, all the participants grew in tolerance towards cultural differences and some in specific areas: racial tolerance (Marjukka), the broadening of worldview (Helena) and appreciation of Finnish culture (Johanna, Marjukka, Helena). In previous topical research, study abroad had also brought about changes in the ways in which the sojourners thought and communicated, in values and ethics and in developing a third-space perspective to both their home and other cultures (Gill 2010: 372). At least in these ways, conditioned by personal agency and other factors, study abroad can become an identity transforming experience (Ting-Toomey 1999: 233; Alred and Byram 2006: 211; Ehrenreich 2006: 190; Tarp 2006: 166, 179 and Angulo 2008: 32). This is what the narratives of the present study reinforced. As Patron (2007: 15) argues, it is relevant to talk about identity change in connection with temporal, cultural, situational variables.

Moreover, understanding study abroad as a potentially identity-transforming experience is a fruitful foundation for studying different identity-related topics in different fields of research. In the present study, the discussion about the holistic impact of study abroad culminated in re-thinking career identity after study abroad. This is the topic of the following section.

### **7.3 Study abroad and the sojourners' career identities**

First of all, it is important to be reminded of the link between career and study abroad in the present study. The grounds and motivations for examining career identity in relation to study abroad rose from the educational context that surrounds study abroad journeys in the University of Jyväskylä, in particular when English language students travel to English-speaking countries. In addition, I had taken career-oriented cross-cultural journey as a researcher. In this study, the term career identity was defined as a person's experience of oneself as a professional actor (Eteläpelto and Vähäsantanen 2006: 26). All in all, the three narrative analyses revealed that it was meaningful to connect career identity with study abroad. The impact of the journey on each participant's career paths and career identity will be discussed separately below.

In Johanna's case, study abroad seemed to strengthen the image she had of herself as an international career actor. Firstly, she felt that her English language skills and speaker identity opened to her doors to go and work abroad and made her secure in managing various career-related circumstances in the English language. Secondly, the study abroad had provided her with opportunities to internationalise and form meaningful cross-cultural relationships. According to Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie (2009: 388), these factors increase the likelihood by which one is to add an international component to one's career. In addition, as Johanna's case reinforces, study abroad can guide individuals to construct their career identity globally even though every individual's career will follow unique future trajectories (Tams and Arthur 2007: 94-95).

In line with her agency and expectations of study abroad, Marjukka described her career identity first with a professional orientation. This had developed gradually during the course of her studies. In relation to language and cultural learning, the study abroad had equipped Marjukka with skills, worldview and tangible cultural experiences that she saw significant for a language teaching career. In their study, Festervand and Tillery (2001) have observed similarly that study abroad can provide the sojourners with academic validation and thus keys for professional growth. The

second career-linked issue in Marjukka's case was internationality. In spite of the challenges faced, Marjukka felt that her career identity had become internationally constructed. This global career identity construction showed in her plans to go on a workplace learning period abroad. Otherwise, Marjukka was not momentarily planning an international career. As one related factor, Alred and Byram (2006: 230-1) have suggested that those with positive study abroad experiences are more likely to pursue an international career than those whose experiences are negative. In the same way, this study may reinforce that sojourners who regard their study abroad as positive are more likely to add an intercultural component to their career (Alred and Byram 2006: 230-1).

In Helena's case, the study abroad journey became an important crossroads experience regarding both personal life and career. Given great positive value by herself, study abroad encouraged Helena to reassess her relationship to the career and education she had started pursuing – with the result that she was considering to change her profession at the time of the interview. More specifically, the journey encouraged her to begin a serious identity negotiation and along with that, career identity reconstruction. In addition, study abroad had given her courage and opportunities to internationalize. Thus, she could see herself very well living and working abroad in her near future. All in all, Helena saw the study abroad in personal rather than professional terms. In previous theory, it has been observed that personal and professional development often go hand in hand, one inspiring the other (Ropo and Gustafsson 2006: 73). Therefore, because of life changing experiences in the areas of personal development, study abroad has the potential to impact the sojourner's career identity in unexpected ways (Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie 2009: 385-6).

With findings such as these, the next section will discuss the value, restrictions and the implications of the present study. References to the findings discussed in sections 7.1-7.3 will be made in section 7.4. The emphasis of discussion in the section will be on observations about the sojourners' career identities.

#### **7.4 Value, implications and restrictions of the study**

As discussed in the previous sections, this study has had complementary value to earlier research and theory on the relationship of study abroad and identity reconstruction. In addition, the study has reinforced that study abroad has potential to have influence on the traveller's career identity, not least when language students travel to their target language and cultural environments. As was discussed in the previous section, study abroad can provide the travellers with validation of professional skills, opportunities to construct a global career identity and those of adding an international component to their career. Below, I will discuss the value, implications and restrictions of the study.

The present study has been valuable as a research experiment in a field where few studies had previously addressed the relationship between study abroad and career. In addition, studying the impact that study abroad may have on the sojourners' career identities has been relevant to this day. The findings on this study imply that it was meaningful to connect study abroad and career and that it would be useful to further examine the career-related opportunities of study abroad. Moreover, especially in the local university contexts, such as is the University of Jyväskylä, study abroad programmes should be tailored to best compliment the professional training and the professional needs of the students. In particular, the opportunities that study abroad can provide for future language professionals should be further studied. As stated by two of the participants (Marjukka and Helena), living in an English-speaking country is seen as a necessary by many students for becoming a competent English language professional. At present, students in the local university are left quite alone in connecting their overseas experiences to their professional development. In addition to career, students who cross cultures should also be better supported and advised concerning the nature of cross-cultural challenges, the common adjustment stages and re-entry challenges. These are all possible topic areas for further studies in the field.

In relation to its goals, this study succeeded well. Firstly, the experiences studied revealed that culture crossing is likely to shape people's identities in various ways. Secondly, the study managed to increase understanding of the potential influence of study abroad on the sojourners' career identities. In addition, the study lifted the participants' stories up as unique and valuable which was the purpose of the methodology chosen. Moreover, I believe that the theory discussed in chapters 2-4 grounded the empirical part well and gave solid frames for discussing the findings. Lastly, examining language and cultural experience, identity and career was meaningful for myself as a future English language professional. The results of this study have helped me to reflect on how crossing cultures back and forth has equipped me for my future career.

The study had also some restrictions. These were mostly connected to the data collection and the narrative analysis methods. For me, collecting data was a new experience, which showed in the group-interview situation. On the one hand, group interview proved successful because listening to others helped the participants to remember events from their study abroad. Moreover, they could compare experiences and take time before forming their answers. On the other hand, because the discussion and speech turns moved on more freely in a group, it was difficult to control the quality of the answers. For these reasons, the data of this study included much general talk about study abroad but lacked focused answers about the most important points regarding identity and career. One participant also shared less than the others. In addition, going through all the three themes in a group-interview took time, and the participants began to feel tired towards the last theme discussed, career. Moreover, individual interviews would have better supported the initial aim of collecting and telling unique case stories. As it were, the data was interesting and the stories unique, but either the data collection or the method of analysis could have been reconsidered. The data was not extended with additional interviews because the participants initially volunteered for one session.

Secondly, as mentioned in chapter 5.3.3, the transition from narrative data to research texts is not simple. Thus, my inexperience as a writer of narrative research texts may

show in the case stories. In my opinion, the major weakness in the stories is the balance between quotation and interpretation. Moreover, the quotations are longer and there are more of them than in a pure narrative analysis. In addition, they have been sometimes analysed for more than they tell black on white. One of the major reasons behind this was that the participants had agreed and commented on each others' stories. So, the main content of their lines was often said by another. Secondly, the analytic framework does not show clearly enough in the final stories. The past-future and the inward-outward dimensions have been remembered while writing the narratives but should have been made more explicit. Thirdly, the researcher's signature in the narratives is more analytic than personal, which was helpful considering the analyses but makes the stories less narrative by nature. All these are restrictions to the quality and meaningfulness of the analyses, and of the results.

Lastly, there was certain ethical pressure to producing stories of the experiences and identities of the participants. On the one hand, the purpose was to examine what meaning the participants had given to their experiences but on the other, to interpret these from the perspective of a researcher. One of my ethical concerns was not to misrepresent anything the participants had told about their experiences, least of all about their identities. Another one was not to forget that the analyses were made in a temporal context, and that there are yet no final answers to how study abroad might influence the careers of the participants. Thus, my hope as a researcher is that the stories of this study will be viewed as experiences of experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 19) that are meaningful enough for research purposes. Due to the qualitative case study character of the study, the results have little generalisability. This however does not undermine the importance of studying individuals' lives.

To sum up the section, the present study further reinforced that study abroad has the potential to impact sojourners' identities and career identities in various ways. The results mainly complemented those of earlier research but were valuable regarding the unique context and purposes of the study. The results imply that there is room for much development in the study abroad programs if the goal of the sending institutions is to support the career identity processes of the students. Furthermore, the study

succeeded in increasing understanding of this timely area of research but the methodology of the empirical part had some restrictions to it, mainly considering data collection and the writing of the narrative analyses. Moreover, there were ethical concerns to composing the narratives, which partly determine the character of the stories.

## **8 CONCLUSION**

The concluding lines will give an overview of this study. In the chapter, I will summarize the purpose and findings of the study, its challenges and strengths, make suggestions for further research and tell what the study process meant for me personally.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact that study abroad experiences may have on a person's career identity. The motivations for conducting this study rose from the lack of earlier research on study abroad and career, and from the impact that my personal culture crossing experiences had on my professional development. In practice, the study was conducted as a qualitative case study focusing on experiences. The data was collected with a thematic group interview and analyzed as three narrative analyses, and written out as three case stories. The plot of the stories carried from expectations to language and cultural experiences, to identity and to the impact of these on the participants' career identities. The findings of the study reinforced that study abroad has the potential to influence a person's career identity in various ways. Firstly, it may provide the sojourner with validation of academic skills and offer opportunities to construct a global career identity. Secondly, students who go on study abroad are more likely to add an international component to their career than those who do not. In addition, study abroad can become a crossroads experience for the sojourner and guide one's career identity reconstruction in unexpected ways.

Perhaps one of the most challenging tasks during the study process was to locate my researcher's interest in suitable theoretical frames. The concept of identity was a challenge in itself: used much in everyday life and also viewed and defined

theoretically in various ways. Thus, understanding which definitions were relevant and how the different dimensions of identity (e.g. career) should come together in this study was time-consuming. However, I believe that allowing time to develop my understanding about this specific field of studies became a strength which shows as coherence, clarity and insight into the final product.

The second largest challenge regarding the design of this study was the narrative framework chosen. All in all, I believe that collecting narratives, seeking new understanding on the themes (rather than generalizations) and stressing the uniqueness and importance of an individual's experience were all essential values regarding the questions that were asked. However, as discussed in section 7.4, there were weaknesses in how the methodology was applied in the data collection phase and challenges to how the narrative analyses were composed. Also the dimensions of the analytic framework should have been made more visible. The last challenges were ethical. Specifically, I was concerned with interpreting the participants' experiences in ways that were both true on theoretical basis and gave justice to the participants' identities and experiences.

Despite the challenges and methodological restrictions, I believe that certain balance was gained throughout the study. In the end, I believe that this study became a meaningful, explorative journey into the themes study abroad and identity, and provided unique understanding on potential impact of study abroad on the career identities of the sojourners. In addition, my hope is that the applied linguistic nature of this study is revealed for the reader – the connections between language and culture, culture crossings and identity. I believe that examining these relationships was the key to understanding how study abroad may ultimately influence one's career identity. In other words, I believe that this study succeeded regarding its purposes – to increase understanding of study abroad, identity and career and give value to the experience of an individual traveler and career actor.

In light of the results, the relationship between study abroad and career is a meaningful area also for further studies. In many ways, it would be beneficial to further examine the potential benefits of study abroad and find out how to make best of its career-related opportunities. In fact, it is currently a lack that students are not better supported in setting goals and processing their study abroad experiences to benefit their professional development. Moreover, it would be useful to study the professional development opportunities that students at present relate with study abroad in the local university context, and what role cross-cultural experiences should play in the professional training of the students. Regarding methodology, it would be generally beneficial to approach these questions with both qualitative and quantitative methods and avoid the restrictions that came along with the particular data collection and analysis methods of this study. In addition, since the crossroads topic of study abroad, identity and career is little examined, I believe there is also room to collect and study more personal stories of identity, career and culture crossing experiences.

Finally, conducting this study has been a beneficial learning process for me personally. Firstly, it has helped me to understand my own identity reconstruction after crossing cultural barriers. Moreover, processing career identity has helped me to understand how my academic education has equipped me – with skills, knowledge and tools for constructing myself a professional identity. My own cross-cultural experiences were significant as for gaining intercultural competence and adding that competence to my professional identity. Moreover, the narrative approach has taught me to view the learning of all things as a process rather than a product, and to recognize the narrative quality of life and career histories. Furthermore, I have learned academic skills such as writing and information processing as well as to navigate in the international data bases. Conducting this study has also taught me patience towards a work in progress. It is not an impossible idea that these particular themes – culture crossing, identity and career – will remain as three of my highest personal interests as I will orient myself towards career.

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## APPENDIX 1: PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM PRIOR TO INTERVIEW

### AINEISTONKERUUN ESITIELOMAKE

Jyväskylän yliopisto, Kielten laitos

Olen viidennen vuoden yliopisto-opiskelija ja teen parhaillaan pro-gradua englannin kieleen. Tarkoitukseni on tutkia kieltenopiskelijoiden ajatuksia ammatti-identiteetistä ja ammattiin suuntautumisesta kohdemaassa tapahtuneen opiskelijavaihdon jälkeen. **Kiitos osallistumisestasi!** Ryhmäkeskustelutilanteessa esiinnyt omalla nimelläsi, mutta aineisto käsitellään luottamuksellisesti ja löydökset esitetään aina nimettömänä.

#### Vastaisitko seuraaviin kysymyksiin lyhyesti ennen keskustelua:

Nimi: \_\_\_\_\_

Tutkinto ja aloitusvuosi: \_\_\_\_\_

Pääaineesi: \_\_\_\_\_

Sivuaineesi: \_\_\_\_\_

Milloin (vuosi/kesto) ja missä (maa/kaupunki/yliopisto) olit vaihdossa?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Millaisia opintoja suoritit vaihtoaikanasasi?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Kuinka pian valmistut? \_\_\_\_\_

**KIITOS!!**

**Terv,**

**Jenni Trög**

*Mikäli haluat minun postittavan sinulle linkin valmiiseen graduuni, jätä tähän sähköpostiosoitteesi:*

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS FOR THEMATIC GROUP INTERVIEW

### RYHMÄHAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET

#### TEEMAT:

1. *Tarinoita* identiteetin uudelleenrakentumisesta kieli- ja kulttuurikokemusten kautta
2. *Ajatuksia* tämänhetkisestä ammatti-identiteetistä ja tulevasta urasta.

#### AIHEALUEET:

Elämäntarinatyyppisiä odotuksia...

Kokemuksia erilaisuudesta (kielen ja ympäristön kautta)

Kulttuurishokki (ja siitä selviäminen)

Kulttuurien välinen oppiminen

**Identiteetin uudelleenrakentuminen**

**Tulkintoja vaihtokokemuksista**

Englannin kieli-kulttuuri ammatillisena työkaluna

Tulevaisuuden urasuunnitelmia

#### AVAIMIA KESKUSTELUUN:

- tuokset, maisemat, tuntemukset, ensisilmäys

(jos voit palata siihen kun astuit lentokentältä ulos ensimmäistä kertaa.. kerro tarina.. mitä tapahtui)

- silmiä avaavia hetkiä

(mitä uutta kohtasit... mikä vieraassa kulttuurissa oli erilaista kuin kotona? kerro...)

- erilaisuus: kieli ja kulttuuri

- uupumus, stressi, kaipuu kotiin

- tärkeät, ihanat asiat matkalla

- ihmiset (mitä opin toisilta ihmisiltä vaihdon aikana.. kulttuurien välisiä siltoja)

**muutoksia omassa itsessä vaihdon aikana.. oppimiskokemuksia**

**paluun jälkeisiä kokemuksia... kuinka olin muuttunut, mikä oli muuttunut...**

**nyt = minkälaisia muutoksia minussa on jäljellä?**

Mitä englannin kieli-kulttuuri merkitsee sinulle ammattina?

Millainen englannin kielen ammattilainen sinä olet/tulet olemaan?

Miten vaihto on vaikuttanut siihen kuinka koet itsesi englannin kielen ja kulttuurin ammattilaisena?

Millaisia tulevaisuuden suunnitelmia sinulla on uraan liittyen?