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Discourses on Study Abroad: The Experience of Erasmus Students from a University in Catalonia

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This work is dedicated to my parents, Montse and Jaume

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Abstract

Despite the currently difficult economic situation in Europe and the cuts that are constantly applied to various educational programmes, every year the number of higher education students who decide to participate in academic mobility programmes is increasing – Erasmus being "one of the most visible and popular initiatives of the European Union (EU)" (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2012:9). The purpose of the present qualitative multiple case-study is to investigate the aftermath of the Erasmus (SA) experience on the identity of nine Catalan undergraduate students of the University of Lleida (Catalonia), who decided to spend part of their studies in three different sociolinguistic landscapes (the UK, Denmark and Italy), moved by their expectation and motivation to learn a foreign language and to meet a culturally different Other.

The data were collected longitudinally (pre-while-post stay), mostly during the academic year 2013-14, at the participants' home and also host universities. A discourse analytic approach was adopted for the analysis of the data, considering language as integral in the process of identity construction. The ethnomethodologically-oriented method of *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012) and the notion of *Stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) were used in order to analyse the way(s) in which the students describe and position themselves towards the social reality they are living in, while placing special emphasis on their ongoing construction of their and others' identities.

The analysis of the data indicates that not all the students' accounts reinforce some of the circulating discourses that exist on study abroad, such as that of the University of Lleida, which presents mobility as an unquestioningly transformative experience from which the students will benefit academically, professionally and personally speaking. The study illuminates (a) how individual differences ultimately affect the students' attitudes and practices while abroad; and (b) the importance of taking those differences into account for the planning, implementation and evaluation of a SA programme's success.

Resumen

A pesar de la actual difícil situación económica en Europa y de los recortes aplicados a varios programas educativos, el número de estudiantes universitarios que deciden participar en programas de movilidad aumenta cada año – siendo el Erasmus "one of the most visible and popular initiatives of the European Union (EU)" (*una de las iniciativas más visibles y populares de la Unión Europea*) (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2012:9). El objetivo del presente estudio de caso múltiple es el de investigar el impacto de la experiencia Erasmus en la identidad de nueve estudiantes universitarios de la Universitat de Lleida (Cataluña), los cuales decidieron cursar parte de sus estudios en tres contextos sociolingüísticos distintos (el Reino Unido, Dinamarca e Italia), movidos por su expectativa y motivación para aprender una lengua extranjera y para conocer un 'Otro' culturalmente diferente.

Los datos fueron recogidos longitudinalmente (antes, durante i después de la estancia), mayormente durante el curso académico 2013-14, en la universidad de origen y también en las de destino. El análisis del discurso ha sido el enfoque adoptado para el análisis de los datos, considerando la lengua como un aspecto fundamental en el proceso de la construcción de la identidad. El método etnometodológico de *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012) y la noción de *Stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) han sido utilizados con el fin de analizar la manera en que los estudiantes describen y se posicionan hacia la realidad que están viviendo, poniendo especial énfasis en el constante proceso de construcción de su identidad y de la de otros.

El análisis de los datos indica que no todas las narraciones de los estudiantes se alinean con algunos discursos circulantes que existen sobre una la movilidad académica, como el de la Universidad de Lleida, la cual presenta la movilidad como una incuestionable experiencia transformativa de la que los estudiantes se beneficiarán académica, profesional y personalmente. El estudio destaca (a) el modo en que las diferencias individuales afectan las actitudes y las prácticas de los estudiantes durante su estancia en el extranjero; y (b) la

importancia de tener dichas diferencias en consideración para la planificación, implementación y evaluación del éxito de un programa de movilidad.

Palabras clave: movilidad, Erasmus, aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, interculturalidad, identidad, discurso, *Membership Categorization Analysis*, *Stance*

Resum

A pesar de la actual difícil situació econòmica a Europa i de les constants retallades que s'apliquen a diversos programes d'educació, el nombre d'estudiants universitaris que decideixen participar en programes de mobilitat augmenta cada any – essent l'Erasmus "one of the most visible and popular initiatives of the European Union (EU)" (*una de les iniciatives més visibles i populars de la Unió Europea*) (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2012:9). L'objectiu del present estudi de cas múltiple és el d'investigar l'impacte que l'estada Erasmus té en la identitat de nou estudiants universitaris catalans, els quals van decidir cursar part dels seus estudis en tres contextos sociolingüístics diferents (el Regne Unit, Dinamarca i Itàlia), moguts per la seva expectativa i motivació per aprendre una llengua estrangera i per trobar-se amb un 'Altre' culturalment diferent.

Les dades van ser recollides longitudinalment (abans, durant, i després de l'estada), durant el curs acadèmic 2013-14, a la universitat d'origen i també a les de destí que van escollir els participants. L'anàlisi del discurs ha estat l'enfocament adoptat per a l'anàlisi de les dades, considerant la llengua un aspecte fonamental en el procés de construcció de la identitat. L'etnometodològic mètode de *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012) i la noció de *Stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) van ser utilitzats per tal d'analitzar la manera en què els estudiants descriuen i es posicionen envers la realitat social que estan vivint, posant especial èmfasi en la constant construcció de la seva identitat així com la dels altres.

L'anàlisi de les dades indica que no tots els estudiants semblen alinear-se amb alguns discursos circulants que existeixen sobre la mobilitat acadèmica, com per exemple el de la Universitat de Lleida, la qual presenta una estada a l'estranger com a una inqüestionable experiència transformativa de la que els participants es beneficiaran acadèmicament, professionalment i personalment. La present investigació destaca (a) com les diferències individuals afecten les actituds i pràctiques dels estudiants durant l'estada; i (b) la importància de tenir en compte aquestes diferències a l'hora de planificar, implementar i avaluar l'èxit d'un programa de mobilitat.

Paraules clau: mobilitat, Erasmus, aprenentatge de llengües estrangeres, interculturalitat, identitat, discurs, *Membership Categorization Analysis*, *Stance*

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Abbreviation	Explanation
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
MCA	Membership Categorization Analysis
NI	Narrative interview
OPI	Operational Plan for Internationalisation
SA	Study Abroad
UdL	Universitat de Lleida
WQ	Written questionnaire

Introduction

> **"**Regarding to my own learning during my experience abroad, I would like to mention what I have learned. And one of the most important things is that I have become aware of going beyond of what I am used to. (...) Once I have come back, if I had to take a picture of something that surprises me, I would take a picture of myself. I didn't expect to do such a big change. Of course, I knew that this experience would help me a lot to improve my professional skills but today I'm able to say that my character and my way of seeing things, people and in general life, has changed a lot.**"**
>
> (*Excerpt taken from the fifth experiential report, written by Mònica – DK*)

The excerpt starting this introductory chapter constitutes an instance of a student's discourse around the impact of a study abroad experience. In this case, the words belong to one of the nine individual cases of this study, for whom the Erasmus stay has brought about profound changes as regards her sense of self. Indeed, most higher education institutions are part of a global/local dynamic by which many mobile students – also considered as a "type of migrant" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 2) – regularly cross national borders (Marginson, 2006), expecting this to be a transformative experience. The decision of many students to study abroad, however, appears to be influenced by various circulating discourses that somehow praise mobility and present it as unquestioningly entailing (namely) linguistic and cultural benefits, in any of the destinations chosen. In this sense, students are somehow consumers of the *Study Abroad Marketing* (Zemach-Bersin, 2009: 303) and, thus, absorb "the [attractive] images and rhetoric of international education advertisements".

The current thesis, which benefitted from a three-year grant (FI2014_ B1 00139), is part of a larger research project entitled *Interculturality, European citizenship and English as a lingua franca: between policies and practices in university international mobility programmes* (FFI2012-35834, 2013-2015), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The project centred on the analysis of the impact of mobility as regards three main aspects: linguistic competence, intercultural competence and the construction of European

citizenship. It gathered quantitative data from 156 students of two universities (the University of Lleida and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia); and qualitative data from 26 outgoing mobility students, as well as of administrative staff and teachers of the host university.

My personal interest in researching the impact of a stay abroad focusing on Catalan undergraduate students of the University of Lleida stemmed from my personal and teaching experiences abroad and in the at home context, which indeed changed my perceptions of my (English) language learner and user identities. I lived my first experience abroad when I was 14 years old. Until then, my contact with the English language remained limited to the two compulsory hours of English per week that we had, both in primary and secondary school. English was a language which was often taught through Catalan; a language that I conceived as another school subject I had to pass and which mainly involved the mastery of grammatical rules and the memorization of long lists of vocabulary. My view of English radically changed when I stepped outside the classroom and went to Manchester (England) for an English summer course. That experience abroad was a transformative one that changed the view of myself as not only a language *learner*, but also as a foreign language *user*. I found myself *using* that apparently logic system I had been *learning* and/or *studying* for years at school to communicate with people with whom I did not share the same L1. However, despite the knowledge about the English language that I had acquired, being myself in and through that language turned out to be an arduous challenge. Furthermore, as a part-time teacher of *English Studies* at the University of Lleida, I have worked with many Catalan students who appear to be satisfied with their identities as learners of English and who, yet, display a sense of frustration when it comes to their *L2 user* identities, probably due to the scarce opportunities they have to use this language in their home country. This raised my interest in researching the extent to which a stay abroad, often assumed to contribute to the students' foreign language learning/use, has an impact on the students' beliefs and practices as L2 users – for some of them, as L2-users-for-the-first-time.

Research on SA has often examined its outcomes such as 'second language acquisition' (Collentine, 2004; Cubillos et al., 2008; Dewey, 2004; Freed et al., 2004; Llanes and Muñoz, 2009; Llanes, 2011; Llanes et al., 2012; Serrano et al., 2011) and 'intercultural (communicative) competence' (Cheng, 2016; Deardorff, 2006; Durán et al., 2016; Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Rundstrom, 2005; Williams, 2005). A significant part of this research has followed a rather quantitative approach and focused on pre-post data. On the one hand, quantitative research on language learning and study abroad reflects the effort of many researchers at empirically supporting Carroll's (1967: 133) solid claim that "time spent abroad is clearly one of the most potent variables we have found [and that] those who do not go abroad do not seem to be able to get very far in their foreign language study". In this sense, several studies aiming to gauge the impact of study abroad on language development indicate that "even in as short period of time as 3 or 4 weeks learners improved on several of the measures analyzed" (Llanes and Muñoz, 2009: 361) and often present "the overseas experience as a short cut to linguistic fluency" (Wilkinson, 1998: 23).

On the other hand, the concept of *intercultural (communicative) competence* has been defined as "the ability to relate to or to interact with people from various cultures [and] to engage with otherness" (Guo, 2010: 32) and/or the "development of 'critical cultural awareness', the ability to make judgements about values, beliefs and behaviours of others and of ourselves" (Byram, 2008: 42). Indeed, *intercultural talk* (Dervin 2010) seems to be present both within and outside academia. It is a concept that appears as "universally accepted, understood and (ab)used" (Dervin, 2010); and, yet, as one that is interchangeably used with other terms such as "cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence, cross-cultural effectiveness, international competence, global literacy, global citizenship, cultural competence, and cross-cultural adjustment" (Deardorff, 2004: 32). Despite the concept's "paradoxical meanings" (Byram and Guilherme, 2010: 5), some quantitative studies have *assessed* the students' intercultural competence and claimed that it increased after their SA experiences (Anderson et al., 2006; Clarke et al., 2009; Cots et al., 2016; Elola and Oskoz, 2008; Fantini, 2012), by often focusing on specific

indicators of what would be considered as interculturally competent behaviour, normally comprising the dimensions of *knowledge* (about a specific 'culture'), *skills* (e.g. listening, observing), and *attitudes* (respect for other 'cultures', openness, curiosity) (e.g. Cots et al., 2016; Deardorff, 2006; 2009).

The significance of this study lies in the analysis of the aftermath of the (Erasmus) SA experience. The analysis is focused on the evolution of the students' perception of their mobility experience and, ultimately, of their own identities. Most research on SA has assessed the impact of the SA experience based on quantitative and/or qualitative pre-post data (e.g. Llanes and Muñoz, 2009; Tracy-Ventura et al., 2016); on qualitative post-only retrospective data (e.g. Krzaklewska, 2013; Krzaklewska and Skórska, 2013; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2006); or only on data collected during the stay (e.g. Kalocsai, 2014; Wood, 2013). However, similar to few studies on SA (e.g. Jackson, 2008; Benson et al., 2013), this thesis aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the *process* the students undergo, by comparing their experiences in three different sociolinguistic contexts, by relating the participants discourses on mobility with that of their home university, and by collecting observational and elicited verbal data longitudinally during the three different stages of the SA experience (pre-sojourn, during, and post-sojourn). The multiple methods used for data collection permitted *triangulation* (Flick, 2004) or the "verify[ing] [of] the researcher's ('etic') interpretations of what is under investigation" (Jackson, 2008: 59).

Following the chronological order of the stay, the research questions this thesis attempts to answer are the following:

a) What are the students' expectations and motivations for going abroad (prior to departure) and how are these incorporated into their self-concept or 'imagined identities' as future Erasmus students? Do the students' discourses on mobility at this pre-stage align with that of their home university, that is the University of Lleida?

b) How do the students construct their identity as Erasmus students once abroad, taking into account their initial ideal self as such? Are their

expectations and/or goals finally met? To what extent is their discourse on mobility and, therefore, their construction of their identities changing at the while-stage?

c) What stance do the students display towards their Erasmus experiences at the post-stage? What impact has this had on their identities and what are the factors that have determined the characteristics of such impact? Do the students' discourses on mobility align with that of the UdL at this post-stage?

The study is structured into three parts, followed by a final conclusion. Part A focuses on the literature review and consists of one chapter, *Internationalisation of Higher Education and the Link to Mobility*, which presents an analysis of published research around the issue of internationalisation, with a focus on what Knight (2008a) conceives as an *internationalisation strategy*: mobility. This chapter is branched into a number of different sections and it basically acts as the basis for an understanding of the context in which this study was conducted. It presents the way(s) in which the Bologna Process (section 1.1) has led to the cooperation among the different Europen Higher Education institutions and, thus, to the creation of a *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA) based on common principles and values. This sub-section is also devoted to the creation of the Erasmus programme in 1987 – in which the participants of this study decided to participate – and which constituted an initiative that was meant to make mobility among European students easy and to foster the students' sense of their European citizenship. Section 1.2 centres on research about the outcomes of mobility regarding foreign language learning, intercultural competence and identity.

Part B of the study presents the conceptual framework and the research methodology. This part consists of two chapters, the first of which deals with the key theoretical concepts that somehow guided the collection and subsequent analysis of the data: social interaction, identity and discourse. These are presented as being grounded on the sociological perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1986) and Social Constructionism (Burr, 2015), both of which frame the

study of identity as a discursive product that is (re)constructed as we acquire new experiences and as always emerging through social interaction, either with one's *self* and/or with other individuals.

Chapter 3, *Research Methodology*, describes the qualitative approach with a special focus on case-study research (section 3.1), for which multiple methods for data collection were used in order to gain a deep understanding of the way(s) in which the Erasmus experience was changing the participants' sense of self. Section 3.2 details the multiple qualitative methods used for gathering data longitudinally, from the days before their departure to their return. These methods include (pre/post) focus-group interviews, questionnaire with open-ended questions, elicited experiential accounts, shadowing and narrative interview – the latter prompting the students to recall those key moments that were part of their textualized Erasmus experience, by "put[ting] experience into sequence" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 57) and, thus, by ultimately guaranteeing a temporal, unfolding sequence of the events narrated. Section 3.3 elaborates on the methods for the analysis of the data: the ethnomethodologically-oriented method known as *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1972; Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012b); and the conceptual tool of *Stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009). Both *MCA* and *Stance* have been proved to be useful in examining the students' longitudinal (re)construction of their identity, taking into account that this is entrenched in language and that, therefore, discourse plays a central role in the dynamic process of identity (re)construction.

The third and final part of the thesis, Part C, is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Consisting of five chapters, the first of these (Chapter 4), *Situating the Context of the Research*, analyses the institutional discourse of the students' home university (the University of Lleida) on mobility and on the Erasmus programme, in particular. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the underlying assumptions presented in this circulating discourse around the benefits of mobility, with which the students in this study came across; and to later corroborate whether the students' discourse aligns with that of their home university and whether it changes as a result of the study abroad experience.

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The following three chapters somehow reflect the different stages of the students' journey: pre-stay, while abroad and post-stay. Chapter 5, entitled *Prior to Departure: the Participants' Motivations and Expectations*, deals with the students' construction of their *imagined identities* (Barkhuizen & De Klerk, 2006; Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2001) as future Erasmus students, with a focus on their motives for going abroad.

Chapter 6, *During the Stay: the Qualities of the Study Abroad Experience*, is dedicated to the analysis of the participants' discourse in relation to what they reported as happening *while abroad* and to the way(s) in which this was affecting their sense of self. Special emphasis is placed on the elements the students reported as being part of their Erasmus experience; the accomplishment of their initial goals and motivations for going abroad; and the ways in which this was affecting their stance towards their SA experience.

Chapter 7, *After the Stay: The Students' Final Evaluation of the Impact of the Erasmus Experience on their Sense of Self*, presents the analysis of the students' discourse *upon return* with a focus on (a) their elicited evaluation of their experiences abroad, which are based on their initial expectations and motivations for leaving and also on what they reported as finally occurring once there; and on (b) the impact that the overall experience had on their identities, as discursively constructed by them. Indeed, the student's quote starting this introductory chapter ('Once I have come back, if I had to take a picture of something that surprises me, I would take a picture of myself') illustrates that the stay has clearly been a transformative experience for Mònica. Yet, many questions arise, which underlie the general objective of the present thesis: do all the participants of this study show a change in their identities as a result of the SA experience? What is the nature of the impact (if any) that the students describe? What factors do the students mention as being the driving forces of these changes? In what ways does the discourse of the University of Lleida on the benefits that mobility entails align with that of the students upon return? The analysis of the students' discourse presented in this chapter suggests that the Erasmus experience does not have the

same impact on all the students and, thus, sheds light on the individual differences and the factors that influence such impact.

The thesis concludes with chapter 8, which draws together the entire study by answering the overarching research question of how nine Catalan undergraduate students discursively construct the impact that the Erasmus stay had on their identities; and also the research sub-questions posed in the different chapters of analysis. This last chapter also shows the relevance of the current study as regards its longitudinality and its focus on the process the students go through (not only on the pre and post stages), which leads them to finally construct their identities in one way or another. Apart from addressing the study's limitations, it is also suggested that studies like this one are helpful for the design and implementation of informed internationalization policies, so that they guarantee the highest satisfaction and adjust to the needs of those who live this experience in first person: in this case, Erasmus students.

PART A: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 1. Internationalisation of Higher Education and the Link to Mobility: An Overview

This first chapter introduces the relevant literature that informs the present research study while defining, according to it, the main concepts and processes related to the internationalisation of higher education and to student mobility. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section (section 1.1) is devoted to defining the idea of 'internationalisation of higher education' and the main processes that it involves, while making reference to studies tackling such issues. Section 1.2 gives a brief overview of the Bologna Process and its implications for student mobility in Europe, as well as of the Erasmus programme and its rationale (section 1.2.1). Finally, in section 1.3 the literature related to the outcomes of student mobility is presented, and specifically the one associated with three different outcomes: language learning (section 1.3.1), intercultural competence (section 1.3.2) and identity (section 1.3.3).

1.1.   Internationalisation of Higher Education

> A new kind of capitalism, a new kind of economy, a new kind of global order, a new kind of society and a new kind of personal life are coming into being, all of which differ from earlier phases of social development.
>
> (Ulrich Beck, 2010: 218)

Since the advent of globalisation and the consequent technological innovations that increasingly compress the world we live in, national economies have become "rapidly impelled into the highly competitive environment of global markets" (Stromquist, 2007), with educational institutions being challenged to follow suit. The internationalisation of higher education (HE) is by no means a phenomenon we could categorize as 'new' and has often been confused with globalisation (Altbach, 2004) or even replaced with other terms like *international studies*, *global studies* or *transnational education* (Yee, 2014). As Peter Scott (2005: 14) notes, the terms *globalization* and *internationalisation* "overlap and are intertwined in all kinds of ways" and, in fact, many scholars have highlighted the relationship and, sometimes, the complementarity between them within higher

education (Altbach, 2007; Maringe and Foskett, 2010; Knight, 2008b; Scott, 2005; Teichler, 2004).

Over the past years, 'internationalisation' has been, and still is, a buzzword and many institutions are working as engines of highly qualified and well-trained personnel for today's knowledge-driven economy, by striving to promote 'international' activities. Yet, they do not usually devote the same effort to making explicit what they exactly mean by 'internationalisation' and what its indicators should be (e.g. the mobility of students, the use of English as the language of instruction). As a result, 'internationalisation' is often associated with a vague idea of an intermixing of nationalities which may lend universities an "interesting" connotation of melting pot of cultures, ideas, languages and, ultimately, identities.

Indeed, as suggested by Yee (2014: 258), there is "a large pool of literatures on internationalisation of higher education", ranging from the concept of internationalisation (De Wit, 2002; De Wit, 2011a; 2011b), internationalisation strategies (Ayoubi & Massoud, 2007; Teichler, 2004) and the relationship between internationalisation and the policies and practices undertaken by academic institutions which try to cope with the global academic milieu (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Research has also been conducted focusing on the impact that internationalisation policies may have on (a) minority language contexts due to the unavoidable "Englishisation" (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cots et al., 2014) and also on (b) the denationalization of national economies and the universalization of higher education due to this "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness" (Held et al., 1999: 2); examples of the latter are Kwiek (2003) and Tomusk (2000).

Teichler (2007: 10-11) suggests that the term *internationalisation* has been employed regarding four main themes, which have been the focus of public debates: (a) the mobility of not only students but also academic and administrative staff; (b) the recognition of study achievements across borders – the learning in one country being equivalent to that which is expected in another country; (c) the transfer of international knowledge through media; and (d) the growth of a global understanding in this networked world with people's attitudes being more

empathetic with other cultures and more internationally rather than nationally oriented. However, Hans De Wit (2011a) cautions us not to see internationalisation as a goal in itself but as a means toward increasing the quality of HE. In this sense, De Wit (2011a: 6) makes reference to the following nine misconceptions around "the mainstreaming of internationalization" and the negative consequences that these misconceptions might entail: (1) internationalisation is about teaching in English; (2) internationalisation is studying or staying abroad; (3) internationalisation equals an international subject; (4) internationalisation implies having many international students; (5) a few international students make internationalisation a success; (6) there is no need to test international and intercultural competencies; (7) the more partnerships the more international; (8) higher education is international by nature; (9) internationalisation is a goal in itself.

De Wit (2011) argues that promoting the use of English as the international and global language of instruction may result in a reduced willingness to learn other languages and also in an idealisation of 'native speakers' who, as Llurda (2009: 119) points out, are still considered by many the "norm providers and the natural choice in language teacher selection". In line with De Wit, Simon Sweeney (2012: 14) claims that the assumption that going through an international experience will make someone 'international' may not always be accurate, given that it is possible that students "fail to develop much intercultural interaction" and that they "isolate themselves from the host culture and language during their stay overseas".

Among the diversity of definitions and uses, Jane Knight (1994, 1997) distinguishes four approaches to the notion of internationalisation of higher education: activity, competency, organisational/ethos, and process approach. These respectively correspond to a view of internationalisation as either a set of activities that institutions implement, a means for developing skills in students and staff, a new institutional culture, or a process through which a new dimension is integrated into the institution. However, while Knight (and De Wit, 2011a, as well) prefers the 'process' approach and defines internationalisation of higher education as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2004: 11), for

the purposes of the present project, neither of the referred approaches, or others (see Knight, 2004, 2008b), will be contested. In contrast, I will consider internationalisation of HE as equally approachable by either of them, principally acknowledging that it entails the implementation of some (academic) activities, such as curriculum development, external partnerships and foreign language (medium) courses. Among all these activities I will focus mainly on one, which is student mobility.

For Teichler (2007), academic mobility is one of the common indicators of internationalisation within higher education, and Dirk Van Damme (2001: 418) characterises student mobility as "[t]he best known form of internationalisation". Indeed, many universities are participating more and more in the "global/local flows of people, research, and capital" (Ilieva et al., 2014), in our increasingly competitive, knowledge-driven society. The next section is devoted to one of the activities and, at the same time, one of the most frequently used indicators for internationalisation, student mobility, which Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 1) defines as "the short-term stay abroad, usually one academic year of nine to twelve months duration" and which, according to Deardorff (2014: 35), "is more than simply moving people around the world".

1.2.   The Bologna Process and Student Mobility

The European Union is facing many challenges not just as far as the labour market is concerned but also within the world of education. Internationalization has clearly involved a redefinition of the goals of universities which are increasingly promoting cross-border activities in "Europe's rapidly changing and increasingly market-driven and knowledge-based societies and economies" (Kwiek, 2004: 759). Student mobility is one of these cross border activities and also a central objective of the so-called *Bologna Process*, an intergovernmental and inter-institutional European reform process affecting higher education.

The Bologna process can be seen as a response to the perception that "the segmentation of the European higher education sector in Europe was outdated and harmful" (EHEA, 2014) and that, although the functioning and/or the organization of

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education systems differed within the EU, something needed to be done in order to bring them together. In 1999, ministers of 29 European states signed a joint declaration in Bologna (Italy) which aimed primarily to develop a 'European Higher Education Area' (henceforth EHEA), to "enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education" (European Commission, 2010b). Today, 46 signatory countries (see the map below) are engaged in this development process, which has required efforts to remove barriers within Europe, developing a new 'harmonized' system for both teaching and learning.

Figure 1 Bologna countries (Eurostat, 2009)
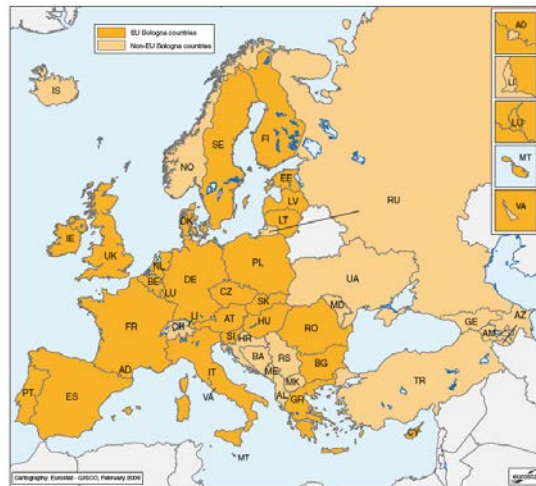
The action lines of the process have been extended and detailed in official follow-up conferences of the same ministers held every two years in different points of Europe (Prague, 2001; Berlin, 2003; Bergen, 2005; London, 2007; Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, 2009; Budapest/Vienna, 2010; and Bucharest, 2012). The action lines with which the conferences concluded were expected to contribute, in general terms, to the removal of obstacles to academic mobility and to the recognition of qualifications. Yet, other goals have been formulated over time, as summarized in the table below:

Table 1 Bologna Process Goals (adapted from Unit, U. H. E., 2005)

<u>Action line 1</u> **Adopting a system of easily readable and comparable degrees**	Flexibility and transparency within degrees across Europe, with qualifications being recognised more widely.
<u>**Action line 2**</u> **Adopting a system based on two cycles (and later on, three cycles)**	The three cycles required in the Bologna Process are: bachelor, master, doctorate.
<u>**Action line 3**</u> **Establishing a system of credits**	The introduction of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) to facilitate the recognition of exchange programmes.
<u>**Action line 4**</u> **Promoting mobility**	Promoting the "free movement" among students, academic and administrative staff as the basis for establishing the EHEA.
<u>**Action line 5**</u> **Promoting European cooperation in quality assurance**	Each higher education institution is responsible for quality assurance, which has to be compatible with other institutions across Europe.
<u>**Action line 6**</u> **Promoting European dimension in higher education**	Establishment and the recognition of 'joint degrees" to add a European dimension to higher education.
<u>**Action line 7**</u> **Lifelong learning**	Provision of various "flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques" through the cooperation of the different European institutions.
<u>**Action line 8**</u> **Higher education institutions and students**	Both the institutions and the students' active participation will ensure the Process' long-term success.
<u>**Action line 9**</u> **Promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA**	The creation of a transparent, compatible and high quality Higher Education system will make European Higher Education appear more attractive to the rest of the world.
<u>**Action line 10**</u> **Doctoral studies and the synergy between the EHEA and the ERA (European Research Area)**	The doctoral level was included as the third cycle in the Bologna Process. It was important as well to establish closer links between the EHEA and the ERA.

Through the implementation of these action lines, the Bologna Process is expected to foster the employability and the mobility of citizens as well as the development of the continent. The process has been presented as having a strong positive undercurrent that would help meet the pressures of globalisation (Van Damme, 2009) and make boundaries between the fragmented and disclosed

European HE institutions disappear, while leading to a sense of connectivity within higher education. Yet, some scholars have highlighted the difficulty of "keeping to a single pace of changes in *all* the 46 countries" (Kwiek, 2004: 760) and some have also questioned the idea that the process has truly integrated European higher education (Rivza & Teichler, 2007; Van Damme, 2009), suggesting that it is unknown the extent to which higher education policy is converging in the course of the Bologna Process.

Research has also been conducted on how society perceives the Bologna reform and there is the impression that (a) the coexistence of diverse systems has been controversial among higher education institutions, students and labour markets (Crosier et al., 2007) and that (b) not all action lines of the Bologna Process have been supported by the public, such as "the reduction of the length of the first cycle of studies to three years" in European countries where it used to last four or five years (Cardoso et al., 2008: 7).

Although this ongoing reform does not seem to develop without problems, one thing appears to be clear: by harmonizing the different European university systems thereby achieving a higher degree of comparability, coherence and transparency between them, the Process is hoped to facilitate and, ultimately, increase student mobility, with the ERASMUS student exchange programme being one of the means by which the EU supports the Bologna Process.

1.2.1. The Creation of the ERASMUS Programme and its Rationale.

> There are some people who live in a
> dream world, and there are some who
> face reality; and then there are those who
> turn one into the other.
>
> Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam

The scenery of study abroad today is very different from what it was like in the early days (the late 1980s and early 1990s) and has become a "fast-growing phenomenon, due to the ease of travel, political changes, economic need and cultural interaction" (Byram & Feng, 2006: 1). Student mobility within Europe has increased and is facilitated and promoted by exchange programmes such as ERASMUS: an independently run student exchange programme, which has been described as "the heart of the European academic mobility" (Valle and Garrido, 2014: 43; my translation).

The Erasmus programme was launched on the 15th of June 1987 and it was named after the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536), who was born in the Netherlands but lived and worked in different places in Europe in order to expand his knowledge. At the same time, ERASMUS is an acronym which stands for "**EuR**opean Community **A**ction **S**cheme for the **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents". Regardless of the impact of the programme, research has been conducted regarding the increasing flows of students participating in a programme, which has grown enormously over the years (e.g. Valle and Garrido, 2014). Indeed, the expression "I am ERASMUS" has become very common among students, while expressing their ties and experiences with this programme. Despite the current difficult economic situation in Europe and the cuts that are constantly applied to various educational programmes, every year many young higher education students decide to embark on this temporary study-abroad experience making it "one of the most visible and popular initiatives of the European Union (EU)" (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013). The figures presented on the European Commission website (see figure 2) show that, since the inception of the programme, the number of

students taking part in the Erasmus has grown in a doubtlessly impressive way and is bound to grow even further.

Figure 2 Evolution of the number of Erasmus students (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-647_en.htm)
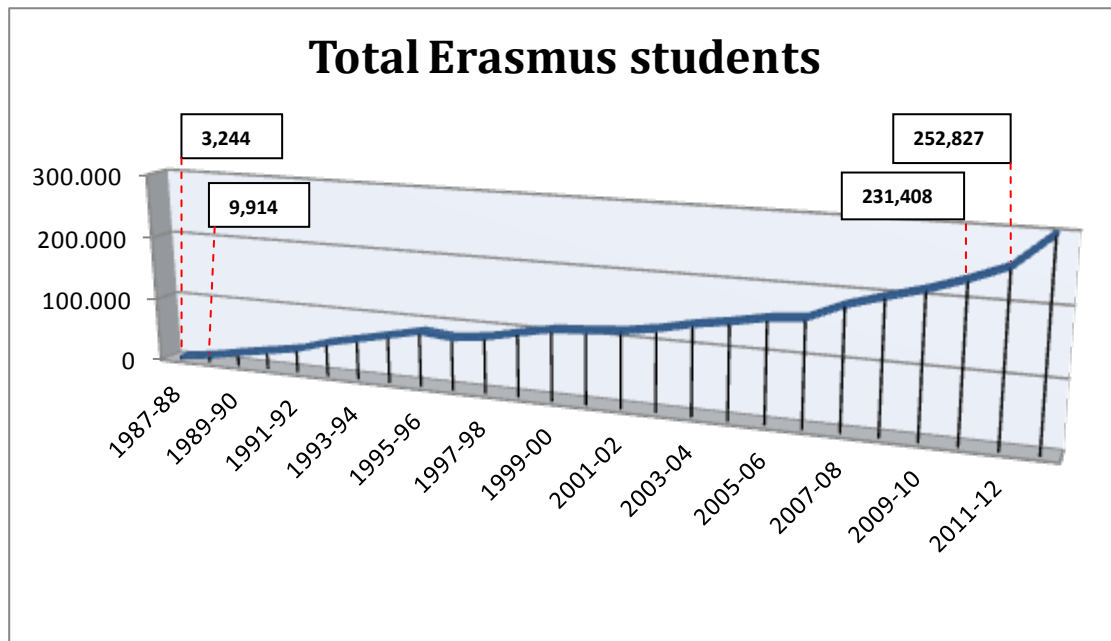
The Erasmus programme started in 1987 with only 3,244 students from 12 countries[1] and nowadays close to 300,000 students from a total of 33[2] countries participate in the programme (amounting for a total of around 3 million participants form the beginning of the programme), which makes it "the best-known EU programme and the most successful student exchange scheme in the world" (European Commission, 2012a). Even though the programme is open to all member states of the EU and its neighbours, "it is Spain, France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain who share the largest number of participants coming and going" (Cicchelli, 2013: 205).

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[1] Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, Itaya, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

[2] The 27 EU member states together with Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey.

The original five official objectives of this European ERASMUS programme, as stated in its founding document, are the following:

> (i) to achieve a significant increase in the number of students from universities as defined in Article 1 (2) spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, in order that the Community may draw upon an adequate pool of manpower with first-hand experience of economic and social aspects of other Member States...;
>
> (ii) to promote broad and intensive cooperation between universities in all Member States;
>
> (iii) to harness the full intellectual potential of the universities in the Community by means of increased mobility of teaching staff, thereby improving the quality of the education and training provided by the universities with a view to securing the competitiveness of the Community in the world market ;
>
> (iv) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe;
>
> (v) to ensure the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level.
>
> (Council of Ministers, 1987: 21-2)

As the founding document reveals, the general rationale of the programme, which allows students to spend 3 to 12 months abroad while going through "enriching learning experiences in other countries" (Feyen et al. 2013: 9), is to promote student mobility within the European Union on the assumption that those mobile students will become more pro-European. ERASMUS can thus be seen as one of the policy approaches of the EU aimed to construct the so-called "People's Europe" (Council of Ministers, 1987: 21-2), and this may explain why the programme has actually been "regarded as a kind of identity programme in recent years" (Striebek, 2013: 204). The programme does not only promote the mobility of people throughout their lifetime, but also assumes that such experience abroad and

the direct interpersonal contact between people from different European countries will foster a European identity.

The premise that cross-border people mobility, and student mobility specially, can help "consolidat[e] the concept of a People's Europe" (Council of Ministers, 1987: 21-2) has been stressed by a number of authors (Adonnino, 1985; Ambrosi, 2013; Figel, 2006; Fligstein, 2008; Rubio et al., 2002; Shore, 2000). However, some scholars claim that this is just an assumption which has never been grounded empirically (Van Mol, 2012) and that the existing literature on the impact of the ERASMUS on the students' European identity does not deal with the issue satisfactorily (e.g. Sigalas, 2008, 2010; Striebeck, 2012; Wilson, 2011).

Christof Van Mol claims that "social scientists generally agree that Europeans have national identities, but no consensus exists as to whether they also have a supranational one" (Van Mol, 2012: 165). In this line of thought, Emmanuel Sigalas' study (2010), based on the results of a quantitative longitudinal survey on two samples of ERASMUS students and on a control sample of sedentary students, questions the assumption that promoting personal interaction between Europeans will in turn broaden one's horizons and foster a European identity. What is more, Sigalas also shows that during the ERASMUS, "contact with host country students remained limited" (Sigalas, 2010) and that, although the ERASMUS may lead to socializing with other Europeans, it does not strengthen the students' European identity but quite the opposite: it may even have an adverse effect on it. In the same line, Iain Wilson states that "although the programme may have other benefits, expecting it to create Europhile 'Erasmus generations' seems unrealistic" (Wilson, 2011: 1113). For this reason, this author concludes that, once the rise of a pro-European attitude has been dismissed, the programme should focus on other potential benefits that, according to the Commission, it may entail.

In this sense, the European Commission's website states that such temporary experience abroad "not only enriches the students' lives in the academic field but also in the acquisition of intercultural skills and self-reliance" (European Commission, 2010a: 6). The programme is thus presented as serving two main objectives. On the one hand, ERASMUS may contribute to the students' learning of

other European languages and cultures. On the other, it may also be a strategy which, according to the commissioner in charge of Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Androulla Vassiliou, helps combat youth unemployment by providing the students with skills which are highly valued within the professional world:

> (…) studying or training abroad can help young people gain new skills, wider perspectives and the ability to adapt to new circumstances and systems – vital assets for finding a job and developing a career in the changing world of work, as well as for Europe whose future will depend on the skills and inventiveness of its people.
>
> (European Commission, 2010: 5)

The Erasmus programme is thus expected to serve different aims and one of these is to "help students to become internationally competent and well-prepared for job requirements in a closely interrelated European economy" (Engel, 2010: 2). Various studies address the professional impact of the ERASMUS programme on the students, although, as Teichler & Janson (2007: 494) point out, the impact is "by no means homogeneous", given that there are many variables affecting it. On the one hand, a study by Bracht et al. (2006) suggests that the impact of the ERASMUS experience on employability may differ according to the field of study: while the impact seemed to be very strong in Business Studies and Sociology, it was reported to be lower in Chemistry. On the other hand, Teichler and Janson (2007: 494) conclude that "the impact is stronger for the career horizontally than vertically" and suggest that a distinction should be made between Central/Eastern Europe and Western Europe. According to this study, studying in another European country is still considered to be a privileged experience in Central and Eastern Europe, where ERASMUS students are more optimistic about the impact of the study-abroad experience on their professional lives and substantially report seeing it as entailing "a higher professional reward" (Teichler & Janson, 2007: 494) – which is not so commonly reported by former ERASMUS students from Western European countries.

By comparing mobile with non-mobile students, Rivza & Teichler (2007) conclude that some differences can be traced between the two groups. The study suggests that mobile students tend to be more professionally active abroad than non-mobile students, and that mobile students who are not employed abroad are the ones who take over international work assignments, such as using foreign languages, communicating with people from different parts of the world or travelling to other countries for professional reasons (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). These results are also confirmed by other studies, like Bracht et al. (2006), which claims that, according to employers, former Erasmus students take over international tasks as the one listed above twice more often than former non-mobile students.

1.3. Reasons and Outcomes of Student Mobility

As has been suggested, studying abroad is considered to be enriching not just at a personal level but also "for the purposes of academic enhancement, cultural enrichment and improvement of foreign language proficiency" (Rivza & Teichler, 2007: 464). Coleman (1998: 197) already mentioned the different overlapping objectives of an overseas experience: "linguistic ones certainly, but equally cultural, academic, personal and professional ones". According to Cicchelli (2013: 206) studying abroad is a rather emotional journey "full of promises of the flourishing of new personal capacities, of an unveiling of self and of socialisation to difference" in which there may be "a series of enchantments and disenchantments, of euphorias and disappointments". In the next three sections, the literature dealing with three potential aftermaths of study abroad will be presented: language learning, intercultural competence and identity.

1.3.1. Study Abroad and Language Learning

Much study-abroad literature has depicted the international experience as "an ideal means of learning a foreign language" (Allen, 2010a: 27) or, in Wilkinson's (1998: 23) words, as a "short cut to linguistic fluency and cross-cultural understanding". The context of learning is believed to be a very important variable that affects the acquisition of an L2 (Collentine, 2009). A study by Serrano *et al.*

(2011) claims that the SA context, in particular, is more advantageous for the development of written and oral skills in terms of fluency and lexical complexity. In the same line, Gómez and Vicente (2011: 83) claim that "a six-month stay in a foreign country (…) widely improves language skills", mainly oral interaction.

In a recent paper, Llanes (2011: 190) offers a critical review of the existing literature on the impact that a study abroad experience may have on L2 gains, and claims that most of the studies reporting on the students' gains in a study abroad experience offer an American perspective which "can often be different from the European one". James Coleman (1998) already highlighted the differences regarding 'study abroad' from an American and from a European context, focusing particularly on the United Kingdom. According to him, relevant divergences are differences of scale between Europe and America, the former having smaller and thus closer language and cultural zones than the latter; the consequent usual experience in 'cultural diversity' of Europeans; the format that such study abroad programmes have: while American programmes often consist of a "short-term relocation of cohesive groups to a new geographical base (…) where they benefit from formal (classroom) teaching but without necessarily abandoning the academic structures and support systems of the home institution", European programmes are usually longer "and for students to be alone or in small groups and dependent wholly on local social, academic and institutional support systems" (Coleman, 1998: 174).

Regardless of the perspective that these studies offer, much research has demonstrated that a study abroad experience may favour (a) the improvement of the students' oral production skills (Freed et al., 2004; Juan-Garau & Pérez-Vidal, 2007; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009); (b) the students' lexical growth (Foster, 2009; Ife, Vives & Meara, 2000; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009), and (c) the development of pragmatic and sociolinguistic skills (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2008).

Regarding students' foreign language proficiency and oral performance, in particular, Juan-Garau and Pérez-Vidal (2007) conducted a longitudinal, quantitative study in order to see the impact that a study abroad experience in an English-speaking country had on 12 Catalan/Spanish students, for whom English was their L3. The students were administered a pre-test (T1) and a post-test (T2) before and

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after formal instruction in the 'at-home' (AH) context (not abroad) and prior to their study abroad. This was followed by another post-test (T3) once the students came back from SA. The results confirmed that the SA helped the students improve their linguistic oral skills and suggested that while abroad the students "[were] focusing more on form at the same time as they focus[ed] on meaning in order to communicate" (*ibid.*, 2007:129). Llanes and Muñoz's study (2009) concluded that even a stay abroad of only 3-4 weeks can produce significant gains in listening comprehension, oral fluency and accuracy. The study looked at 24 participants who were also Spanish/Catalan learners of English as a foreign language (FL) and who participated in a SA in an English-speaking university. The students were also administered a pre-test prior to their departure and a post-test after their arrival and, according to Llanes and Muñoz (2009: 362), regardless of the short period spent abroad and even though the participants "did not seem to have taken full advantage of the wide variety of opportunities that the stay abroad context may offer", the SA context was proved beneficial for the students' language proficiency. However, Llanes and Muñoz (2009: 362) clearly state that one of the limitations of the study is the "impossibility of examining what learners did during their stay abroad and in particular their social networks", which appeared as a potentially relevant variable to be considered.

Another aspect of language proficiency that has been investigated is the students' vocabulary development. Through a quantitative study conducted over a period of two years with 36 Spanish learners from a British university, Ife et al. (2000) suggested that there is lexical progress after a study abroad experience both for more advanced learners and for the less proficient. In the same line, Foster (2009: 105), also from a quantitative approach, concludes her study by stating that "living inside the target language community, being exposed to the language on a daily basis in all manner of contexts, results in an enriched and networked lexicon".

Moreover, acknowledging that being a competent language user consists not only in knowing the system of rules (the grammar), the vocabulary and the pronunciation patterns of a language, but also in using all this knowledge appropriately in different communicative situations, or, as Kinginger & Farrell

(2004: 19) state, in having developed "the ability to understand the meaning of linguistic variation in a range of different socio-pragmatic contexts", a number of scholars have addressed the development of pragmatic awareness in a SA context, usually adopting a qualitative approach (Cook, 2006; Kinginger & Farrell, 2004; Shively, 2011; Taguchi, 2008). Kinginger & Farrell's study (2004), which includes both quantitative and qualitative data from 8 case studies, looked at the learners' awareness of the use of address forms (*tu* versus *vous* in French) during a study abroad sojourn in France in 2003. The results of the study suggest that, after the SA experience, all the participants were aware of the appropriateness of the pronoun *vous* normally involving an adult and *tu* when addressing a child.

In a more recent investigation, Shively (2011: 1818) begins her article by mentioning some of the different communicative situations study abroad students, as "newcomers to an L2 speech community", might encounter and might have to deal with: "ordering a coffee, exchanging currency, mailing postcards, and adding minutes to a cell phone are just a few of the activities that make up daily life as a study abroad student". The study was based on 113 naturalistic audio recordings that 7 American undergraduates made of themselves in different service encounters in Spain. Shively's findings showed that the study abroad experience had an impact on the way students approached service encounters. By the end of the semester abroad, most of the students performed service encounters following the Spanish norms – thus abandoning the American ones – and some of them stopped using the brief *hola-hola* routine and inserted how-are-you inquiries, even though they were not acquainted with the service providers. Yet, out of the 7 students participating in this study, one of them, Greta, stands out. Greta used how-are-you inquiries at the early weeks of her experience abroad, as shown in the following excerpt where she is buying medicine:

Excerpt 1 From Shively (2011: 1825)

1	G:	hola	1	G:	hi
2	P:	hola	2	P:	hi
3	G:	cómo estás?	3	G:	how are you?
4		(2.0)	4		(2.0)
5	G:	uh::::	5	G:	uh::::

6		(2.4)	6		(2.4)
7	G:	uh- yo necesito:: (.) medicina?	7	G:	uh- I need:: (.) medicine?

The answer to Greta's question in line 3 is absent and the same situation occurred to her in two other encounters, making her avoid how-are-you greetings, which she considered inappropriate and unfriendly "on the part of Spaniards" (ibid., 2011: 1832).

Research has also been conducted regarding the impact that the Erasmus programme in particular may have on the students' language skills, as well as on their attitudes to the language of the host country (Aydin, 2012; Camiciottoli, 2010; Jenkins, 2009; Kalocsai, 2014; Llanes et al., 2011; Serrano et al., 2011), which in most cases is English. Being it the case, the 'local' language would coincide with a *lingua franca*, or, in Kalocsai's words, "a facilitator" (Kalocsai, 2014: 214) and "a bridging language" (Kalocsai, 2014: 1) with and through which the students build their Erasmus community. According to Kalocsai, the students "do not speak a variety [of English] in any traditional sense of the notion, but rather negotiate their norms of speaking 'online' in the dynamic process of learning appropriateness and efficiency" (ibid., 2014: 52). In the end, according to Jenkins (2009: 206), after the Erasmus experience, the students claim that "effective communication in English involves deferring to ENL (English Native Language) norms as a fiction". Thus, English becomes not just a *lingua franca* (ELF) that Erasmus students often use while abroad but the "key to the students' well-being during their stay abroad" (Kalocsai, 2014: 214), making them feel free and self-confident to play and experiment with the language.

Another study by Camiciottoli (2010), brought to the forefront the problems and the consequent needs that Erasmus students as L2 learners may face in English-medium universities. Camiciottoli identified one specific problem: Italian Erasmus students not understanding content lectures. In response to this problem, a pre-departure lecture comprehension course was designed, and it was concluded to be beneficial for the students prior to their departure.

Although it has long been assumed that developing foreign language proficiency may not occur without being directly immersed in the target culture (Davidson, 2007), the growing research on this topic seems to question the assumption that "SA participation *automatically* leads to language learning" (Allen, 2010b: 452). Such literature claims that research on the outcomes of study abroad should focus on individual differences since, as Celeste Kinginger argues in a very recent paper, "if there is one consistent finding in this research, it is of inconsistency; (…) individual differences have been documented in nearly every study" (Kinginger, 2015: 7). According to Kinginger (2011: 58), it may be possible that after a period studying abroad, "certain students thrive while others founder". The significance of individual differences is also supported by other scholars, such as Julia A. Stewart (2010: 138), who claims that "there is substantial variation in individual performance"; and as Àngels Llanes *et al.* (2011), who, focusing on the case of 24 Erasmus students, conclude that although the overseas experience provides more evidence regarding its positive impact on the students' L2 gains, individual differences such as the students' "motivation, attitudes, perception of progress, L2 contact and academic factors" (ibid.,2011: 1) may affect L2 gains, apart from the SA learning context.

1.3.2. Study Abroad and Intercultural Competence

The globalization era has been described as a landscape which is culturally evolving and mainly characterised by "an intensified diversity of peoples, communities and individuals who live more and more closely" (UNESCO, 2013: 4). Navigating such complex, dynamic and constantly changing environments implies the need to develop intercultural competences which help people perform "effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2006: 12).

In order to understand whether the study abroad experience leads to the development of the students' intercultural competence, we should first explore what it is meant by 'intercultural competence' in the related literature. Drawing on Byram (2008: 69), being interculturally competent involves certain "attitudes, knowledge

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and skills that need to be learnt", which the UNESCO (2013: 16) summarizes as follows: *savoir* (knowledge of the cultures), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting/relating), *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery/interaction), *savoir etre* (attitudes of curiosity/ openness; readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness). Likewise, Deardorff (2009:480) developed a grounded theory-based model for the assessment of intercultural competence, which includes "very specific measurable outcomes and indicators":

Figure 3 Process model of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2009)
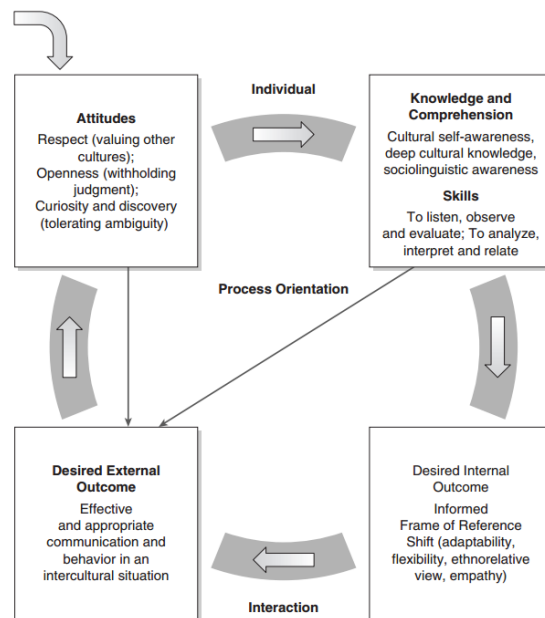
Deardorff's (2009) model, illustrated in Figue 3, shows the different elements comprised within intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal and external outcomes. This author sees intercultural competence as "an ongoing process" (Deardoff, 2009: 479) – or even a lifelong process – in which critical intercultural reflection through communicative exchange(s) between people from different cultural backgrounds is of great importance in the development of intercultural competence. According to Dervin (2016: 75) the concept of intercultural competence (IC) is, indeed, "one of the most discussed aspects of interculturality in education, especially in teacher education, language education, and study abroad". However, the scholar contends that a critical view of this "knotty

concept" (ibid, 2016: 71) should be adopted, by fighting against a solid view of culture or the "pigeonholing individuals into static identities related to national cultures" (ibid, 2016: 78), which leads us to apparently realistic – rather than idealistic – generalizations and/or stereotypes. Instead, he proposes that we follow a 'liquid' approach to IC, and to the concept of 'culture', by placing more emphasis on the similarities that we all share despite having a different nationality; and by, taking into account that this globalization era we inhabit is characterized by *diverse diversities*, even among those with the same nationality. This critical reflexivity would put an end to "ethnocentric and moralistic judgements" (ibid, 2016: 103) and allow us to cross national borders while being able to "go under the surface of discourse and appearances" (ibid, 2016: 106).

Many studies have stressed the links between study abroad and intercultural competence and/or intercultural communicative competence (Gutiérrez-Almarza et al., 2015; Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Deardorff, 2004; Dervin, 2016; Holmes et al., 2015; Hoskins and Sallah, 2011; Lee, 2011; Pozo-Vicente et al., 2012; Straffon, 2003; Wimpenny et al., 2005). Behrnd & Porzelt (2011: 213) claim that "intercultural competence does not automatically increase by simply being in a foreign culture"; and that there are many variables affecting its development, such as the students' personal factors, the length of time spent abroad, the characteristics of the study-abroad programme and the fact of "going abroad with and without preparation" (ibid., 2011: 214). Pozo-Vicente and Aguaded-Gómez (2012), who follow a mixed-methods approach, conclude that the Erasmus study-abroad experience is a complex process of acquisition and implementation of skills, which "fosters the development of the intercultural competence" (Pozo-Vicente et al., 2012: 456; my translation). These skills which, also according to Deardorff (2009), are part of intercultural competence, are *knowledge* and ability to critically reflect upon one's own culture and others' while overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, and *attitudes* such as empathy, respect and the adoption of habits of the foreign culture.

A recent quantitative study (Gutiérrez-Almarza et al., 2015) has also looked at ERASMUS students' self-perceived intercultural competence *prior* to their stay-abroad. The answers to the questionnaires administered show that both ERASMUS

students from the University of Salamanca and from Nottingham Trent University considered themselves ready and "flexible enough to adapt to new cultural milieus" (Gutiérrez-Almarza et al., 2015: 82). The Erasmus students' views on their intercultural understanding and, more specifically, on key concepts related to interculturality (e.g. essentialism, stereotyping, otherising) *prior* to going abroad is also the focus of a very recent study by Holmes et al. (2015), who conclude that it is possible – and productive in order to maximise the benefits of study abroad – that the students' intercultural learning takes place "in a pre-departure programme aimed at Erasmus students" (Holmes et al., 2015: 27). Providing students with opportunities and strategies to help them critically reflect upon cross-cultural issues while abroad is precisely the focus of Lee's study (2011). Face-to-face interviews and computer-mediated-communication were used to foster 16 students' critical reflection on their intercultural learning through blog tasks that made them explore the target culture and the host language. The findings of this study revealed that "critical reflection, however, relied on the teacher's guidance and feedback, as most of the students were cognitively challenged by not being able to clearly articulate different points of view" (ibid., 2011: 87).

1.3.3. Study Abroad and Identity

Much of the literature on the impact of study abroad has focused on language gains or on the role that identity factors, such as ethnicity or gender (Kinginger, 2008; Kinginger, 2013; Siegal, 1996), play on the students' language learning opportunities. However, as Benson *et al.* (2013: 173) claim, "a smaller number of studies have looked at the influence of study abroad on participants' identities" (e.g., Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2004; Pellegrino, 2005).

Kinginger's four-year study (2004: 219) traces the history of Alice, a working-class American student who went to France for two years with the hope of becoming "anew in a context where her social options are broadened". While abroad, Alice's views of France and of herself were constantly challenged and, in fact, Kinginger (ibid.:2004: 240) describes Alice's history as a journey that "has involved negotiation of many facets of her identity: social and linguistic, but also gender and

class identity". On her return, "Alice is no longer a drifter" (*ibid*., 2004: 240) but a cultured person who is motivated to become a language educator "to help others as they struggle with a new language" (ibid., 2004: 240). Also tackling identity issues in SA contexts, Jane Jackson (2008) presents an ethnographic study of a group of Hong Kong language learners at home and abroad (in England). The learners' accounts provide evidence of "the complex, sometimes contradictory, relationship between language, identity and culture" (*ibid*., 2008: 203) and, as the author claims, they seem to challenge the structuralist notion of identity as being fixed and stable. Instead, the learners' storied experiences rather support a more post-structuralist notion which conceives identity as fluid, dynamic and subject to change or, following Kouhpaeenejad and Gholaminejad (2014: 200), as "socially organized, reorganized, constructed, co-constructed, and continually reconstructed through language and discourse".

Indeed, Jackson (2008: 1), at the very beginning of her work, poses two core questions in relation to SA and identity: "what actually happens when students cross cultures in an unfamiliar land? What effect can a sojourn have on their sense of self (identity) and perceptions of the host language and culture?". In this respect, in a recent study, Kinginger (2013: 341) claims that the study abroad context can ultimately become a site where "exposure to unfamiliar practices can upset taken-for-granted world views". This idea is also supported by David Block (2007: 864), who provides an answer to Jackson's questions by stating that, when encountering new sociocultural milieus, students might find that "their sense of identity is destabilised and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance". According to Block (2007: 864-865), the abroad context can be an immersion setting where there's a "negotiation of difference" which finally results in *ambivalence,* and which he describes as follows:

> the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart. It is the mutually conflicting feelings of love and hate. Moreover, it is the simultaneous affirmation and negation of such feelings. (…) Ambivalence, it would seem, is the natural state of human beings who are forced by their individual life trajectories to make choices where choices are not easy to

make. However, a natural state is not necessarily a desirable state and in studies of individuals' life stories, there are attempts to resolve the conflicts that underlie ambivalence.

Part of this ambivalence is also related to the fact of dealing with the five different facets of what Benson et al. (2013: 176) call "second language identity" while abroad: (1) people's inner self of who they are, (2) the identities they project to others, (3) the identities that are recognized or ascribed to them by others, (4) imagined identities, and (5) socially-validated identity categories. Benson et al. (2013) suggest that when study abroad students have to speak a second language, they have no other way but to project their identities through this language. Related to these facets, Pellegrino-Aveni (2005), focused on facets (1) and (2) to analyse the experiences of language-in-use while abroad of seventy-six students. These were asked to describe their experiences through narrative journals, interviews and questionnaires. The special focus on facets (1) and (2) was based on the description of the "reduced form of the self" (ibid., 2005: 17-18) of these American students who went to Russia and were not able to express what they would consider as their "real selves" (ibid., 2005: 19) in the host language. Pellegrino concluded that both teachers and students believed in the powers of study abroad for language learning. Yet, as Pellegrino-Aveni (2005: 7) claims, "to learn another language is to redefine yourself publicly, socially, and personally", and this may not occur without complications.

This latter idea is in line with the post-structuralist view of identity mentioned earlier, and also with the definition of identity proposed by Block (2007: 27), which emphasizes the dynamic nature of identity: "Identities are about negotiating new subject positions at the crossroads of past, present, and future. Individuals are shaped by their sociohistories but they also shape their sociohistories as life goes on". Connecting this view of identity with study abroad, Norton and Toohey (2002: 123), claim that students should be regarded as social beings who are socially constructed and constrained, and also as "embodied, semiotic and emotional persons who identify themselves, resist identifications and

act on their social worlds". This is indeed the perpective on identity that the current study has adopted, as will be further explained in the next chapter.

Summary

The present chapter has focused on the notion of internationalisation of higher education (section 1.1), which has become both a vehicle for change for many higher education institutions, and a concept that encompasses different studies across different disciplines (e.g. marketing, education and organisation studies). In section 1.2 an overview has been given of the Bologna Process and the Erasmus student mobility programme. Section 1.3 places special emphasis on the outcomes of one of the "best known form[s] of internationalisation" (Van Damme, 2001: 418) – student mobility – while offering a review of prominent studies that examine and reveal diverse shapes the impact of a SA experience may take. As we have seen in this chapter, some studies have claimed that a stay abroad can have an impact on the students' intercultural competence; others, on their learning of a second language; and, others on the way(s) in which identity factors, such as ethnicity and gender, affect the students' language learning opportunities.

Indeed, as González et al. (2011) note in relation to Erasmus Student Mobility (ESM), one of the most common motivating factors among students to go abroad, as is the case of the participants in the present study, is "not only to complement their studies in the host university, for academic reasons, but also to improve their knowledge of foreign languages, especially the most-common languages" (González et al., 2011: 423). However, "the popular belief […] that students who study abroad are [necessarily] those who make the most progress in their language of choice and are the most likely to become fluent" (Freed, 1995: 123) has been questioned by svholars such us Barbara Freed. The same may happen in relation to intercultural competence, since, as claimed by Sweeney (2012: 14), while abroad, the students may "isolate themselves from the host culture and language during their stay overseas" and, therefore, they do not develop their intercultural competence.

Following the claim made by Benson et al. (2013) that more research is needed on the impact that a study abroad experience has on the participants' identities, this project seeks to place special emphasis on the study of the way(s) in which the Erasmus students-travellers themselves (re)define the nature of such impact, in any of its possible facets (e.g. language learning, intercultural competence, etc.). In this sense, as will be shown in chapter 6, students, while abroad, may "try out potential identities" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 233) and, therefore, discursively present themselves as individuals who, purposely or not, live different sorts of experiences, and as individuals who could be regarded as either one or multiple among diverse types of selves: 'professional self', '(inter)national self', 'multilingual self', 'language learner self', 'inter/mono-cultural self', 'social self', 'emotional self', 'ambivalent self', 'independent self', 'adaptable self', 'open-minded self', etc. To conclude, the present study aims at contributing to the body of research on the impact of SA by (1) providing a holistic sense of the self, with the individual at the centre; (2) placing special attention at the discursive mechanisms used for identity construction; (3) relying on the participants' own accounts of these multiple facets of their identity; (4) accounting for the perceived impact by the individual, rather than for external indicators; (5) presenting a longitudinal view of the evolution of the participants' sense of self.

PART B: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter, I present the four main theoretical concepts that support and inform the design and the data analysis of the current thesis: social interaction, identity, discourse, and narrative. I conceive these concepts as grounded on the sociological perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism and Social Constructionism, both of which provide insights into our perception of reality and of ourselves. On the one hand, following the premises that, according to Blumer (1986), define Symbolic Interactionism, I understand that participants in this study act in one way or another toward the different elements that constitute their Erasmus experience(s), according to how, after interacting with their self, they interpret them and, therefore, according to the meaning that these elements have for them. On the other hand, from a social constructionist approach, I understand that (a) the meaning that each participant attributes to his/her experience abroad becomes a discursive construction accomplished in and through interaction – not only with their self – but also with their social environment, including the researcher; and that (b) this meaning is not at all stable but constantly re(interpreted) and (re)defined as he/she encounters new situations. In this sense, Social Constructionism goes very much in line with Symbolic Interactionism, given that "both emphasize how action and meaning are constructed, allowing for an interpretive rather than a literal description (Charmaz, 2003; as cited in Santos and Buzinde, 2007: 325).

As a starting point, and with a view to defining key terms, I will begin by delving into the notion of *social interaction* (section 2.1), in and through which reality – including our sense of self – is negotiated and constantly (re)defined. Section 2.2 will deal with the development of and the various approaches to the construct of *identity* and, particularly, the one adopted in this study, while trying to answer the following questions: Is identity stable, fixed or is it in constant flux during different episodes of the life course? Is it something solipsistic, private or individual, rather than social and negotiated with others? Is it a combination of both: the individual and the social? In section 2.3, I will define the term *discourse*

and its different types, while reflecting upon the way(s) in which individuals draw on and use them to bring to life and make of their social worlds a discursive construction based on their interpretations of reality. In the final section of this chapter (section 2.3.1), I will move on to clarify the relationship between identity and narrative, a specific type of discourse that constitutes the core of the data analysed in the current study.

Figure 4 below illustrates the different interrelated theoretical concepts which will guide the current thesis.

Figure 4 Theoretical concepts
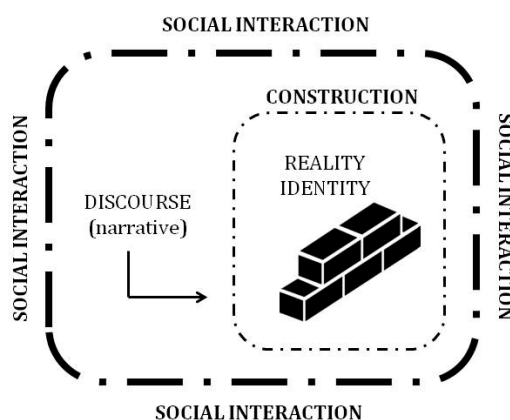
As visually illustrated in figure 4, in this chapter it will be argued that reality, and identity in particular, are "product[s] of interaction" (Santos and Buzinde, 2007: 323) or constructions that participants, as social agents, make through the use of 'small-d discourses'[3] (Gee, 1996), and specifically through narrative.

2.1. Social Interaction

The word interaction comes from the Latin *inter* –which means 'between'; and from *ago* – which means 'to act' and, therefore, suggests that it is a reciprocal action which, in general terms, could be defined as involving "at least two agents

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[3] Gee (1990) makes a distinction between analysing 'Discourse' (with capital 'D') and 'discourse' (with small 'd'), the analysis of the latter being focused on people's "micro-interactive meaning making" (Iedema, 2011: 1173) or language in use, which is in turn informed by Discourses or "socially and historically significant identities" (Gee, 1990: 218).

acting upon one another" (McCall, 2003: 327) or, in Charon's (2004: 140) words, a "give-and-take process [in which] actors take one another into account, communicate, and interpret one another as they go along". In this respect, what we do in an interaction is guided by (a) not only what the other has previously done, but also by (b) our *interpretation* of the meaning that we think has guided the line of action of the other. Charon (2004:141) supplies an example of the reciprocity that, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, characterizes interaction by comparing it to the joint act of playing a game with someone else:

> Games are interaction in slow motion. When I move a chess piece, I may have a plan. However, after I act, you make a decision and you act (on the basis of your definition of my act). Now that you have moved, I must move again – this time on the basis of my original plan and of my interpretation of your move. So it is in real life: what we each do depends in part on what others in the situation do.

This is connected to one of the premises on which, according to Herbert Blumer – the American sociologist who coined the term Symbolic Interactionism - this theoretical approach is based: humans "act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969:2). These 'things' may be, as suggested by Blumer, (a) physical objects (e.g. a tree, a table or the blinds); (b) other people (e.g. a teacher, a plumber or a monk); (c) categorizations of other human beings (e.g. Catholic or atheistic); (d) activities that others may engage in (e.g. praying, requesting something, apologising); (e) institutions (e.g. a university or a hospital); (f) what Blumer (1969:2) calls "guiding ideals, such as individual independence or honesty"; (g) emotions and (h) the different situations that humans may encounter in their daily life. These 'things', though, may not have the same meaning for another person who would, therefore, probably act differently, and this is what Blumer (1969: 69) claims with the following words:

> A tree is not the same object to a lumberman, a botanist, or a poet; a star is a different object to a modern astronomer than it was to a sheepherder of antiquity; communism is a different object to a Soviet patriot than it is to a Wall Street

broker.

Besides existing (or not) physically in our world, what is considered to be of great importance from a symbolic interactionist perspective is that these 'things' become *social objects*, given that it is in *and* through social interaction that "they are pointed out, isolated, catalogued, interpreted, and given meaning" (Charon, 2004: 45). In fact, Symbolic Interactionism, which was founded upon pragmatism, supports the idea that reality is never stable or "ready-made and waiting to be discovered" (Pascale, 2011: 78); instead, truth is thought to be always in the making, negotiated and accomplished in and through social interaction. In this line of thought, Dewey claims that,

> [we live in] a universe which is not all closed and settled, which is still in some respects indeterminate and in the making... an open universe in which uncertainty, choice, hypotheses, novelties, and possibilities are naturalized... Man finds himself living in an aleatory world; his existence involves, to put it bluntly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risk: it is uncertain, unstable, uncannily unstable... (Dewey, as cited in Plummer, 2000: 193)

From this standpoint, the human being is not conceived as a passive organism who responds to environmental stimuli, but as an "active perceiver of the situations it confronts" (Kendall, 2011: 114) and, therefore, whose behaviour "must be seen as a constant adaptation to the environment" (Denzin, 1992: 5). Human beings and their environments both influence each other and, for this reason, we should study human society conceiving it as people who are "engaged in living [... in] a process of ongoing activity in which participants are developing lines of action in the multitudinous situations they encounter" (Blumer, 1986: 20).

In this line of thought, George Herbert Mead's development of the philosophical underpinnings of '*social* behaviourism' – as contrasted with psychological behaviourism -, considers, on the one hand, that the self arises in and through communication with others or, following Watson's (2010: 304) words, "individual experience and behaviour [arise] from participation in the social group

[seen as] a communicative nexus", in which human beings (re)construct their experiences and ultimately, as pointed out in a later section, their identities. On the other hand, social behaviourism considers that the self "could be studied objectively rather than through introspection" (Kendall, 2011: 114), without relying on what Dewey called 'spectator knowledge', or the observation and representation of existing realities.

As human beings grow and encounter and interact with new social situations and environments – whether they are material or not - they change as the meaning that they assemble to the objects encountered changes. In fact, one of the aspects that distinguishes human beings from other animals and that may shape the meaning that we assign to objects is the capacity not only to sense our environment, but to continuously self-reflect upon it, to interpret and (re)define it, not only to others, but also to our 'self'– a basic concept in Symbolic Interactionism, deriving from Mead (1934) and which, according to Blumer, all human beings possess. The 'self', Blumer says, is,

> […] nothing esoteric […] it means merely that a human being can be an object of his own action. Thus, he can recognize himself, for instance, as being a man, young in age, a student, in debt, trying to become a doctor, coming from an undistinguished family and so forth. In all such instances he is an object to himself; and he acts towards himself and guides himself in his actions toward others on the basis of the kind of object he is to himself. (Blumer, 1986: 12)

Mead presents the self as a reflexive phenomenon, which enables the human being to "take the attitude of the other toward himself" (Mead, 1934: 134) or to "see himself from the outside" (Blumer, 1969: 13), in order to reflect upon and evaluate him- or herself, and to finally (re)define who he or she is or to form a self-concept (Blumer, 1969) in any given situation. Mead's understanding of the 'self' and of the importance of the other in its formation is influenced by the concept of the "looking-glass self", proposed by Charles Horton Cooley (1902). According to Cooley – and this is also related to the reciprocity that characterizes interaction - how one views and defines oneself is not an individual phenomenon, but is rather affected by our imagination of how we appear to others and of how

we perceive others evaluate us. In this sense, the people in our environment serve as a mirror that reflects images of ourselves; it reflects "our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and we are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be" (Cooley, 1902: 126). It is by taking into account our perceptions of how others judge us, or of how we think others see us that we form our identity.

Thus, the 'self', which arises in our interaction with others, is, thus, not stable but vulnerable to change as long as we interact with others; it is not an immutable entity but "a kaleidoscope of roles and identities" or "a process, continuously created and recreated in every social situation one enters" (Berger, 1963: 106). In this line, the situation in which we find ourselves will affect the role that we are taking in that particular moment (I may take the role of a teacher, a student, or an athlete, depending on the situation) - this implies a "conflation of roles [...] and identity" (Pascale, 2011: 79) or a "discontinuity of the self" (Berger, 1963: 106). Mead makes this point clearly in the following words:

> We carry on a whole series of different relationships to different people. We are one thing to one man and another thing to another. There are parts of the self which exist only for the self in relationship to itself. We divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances. We discuss politics with one and religion with another. There are all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions. It is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this type of experience. (Mead, 1934: 142)

Another important aspect that arises from the fact that the human being has a self is that "this enables him to interact with himself" (Blumer, 1969: 13). Interaction with ourselves is clearly recognizable if we think about the many instances in which we claim to be 'angry with ourselves' or, as Blumer himself suggests, in which the human being "reminds himself to do this or that, or that he is talking to himself in working out some plan of action" (Blumer, 1969: 13). These instances remind us, once more, of the "series of [...] indications that the person is making to himself" (Blumer, 1969: 13) and of the active role of human beings, who

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"interpretatively re-create" (Pascale, 2011: 77) the worlds of experience in which they live, while (re)assembling the meaning that the objects they encounter have for them, which ultimately guides their lines of action in their lives.

Apart from the role of interaction in the construction of reality and the self, Symbolic Interactionism brings forth the idea that human interaction – including interaction with oneself – has a unique and peculiar character, given that it is "*mediated* [emphasis added] by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions" (Blumer, 1969: 79). According to Mead (1934), there are two different levels or forms of social interaction: "the conversation of gestures" and "the use of significant symbols", a dichotomy to which Blumer (1969) will later refer as "non-symbolic interaction" and "symbolic interaction" respectively. The former – that is, non-symbolic interaction – does not require any mental process, such as thinking or interpretation. It takes place when one responds directly to what the other has previously done without interpreting that previous action, as is normally the case in the animal world, where:

> [...] each animal responds with its own impulse to the initial part of the act of another animal. Defending its territory, one dog plants its feet and bares its teeth in preparation for attack. Responding to this emergent behaviour, a second dog assumes a similar stance and begins its own preparation" (Hewitt, 2003: 308).

There *is* communication between the two dogs; yet, what Mead claims is that "human beings are capable of a more powerful form of communication" (Hewitt, 2003:308) through the use *and* interpretation of 'symbols', hence the term 'symbolic interaction'. Therefore, while animals react to "natural signs" (as would be smoke indicating the existence of a fire), humans also have the capacity to produce and interpret what is known as "conventional signs" or "symbols". Hewitt (2003) asserts that there are three main aspects that characterize "conventional signs", as opposed to "natural signs". The first one makes reference to the fact that the meaning of symbols responds to social conventions. A good example that illustrates this is by considering how different linguistic communities have agreed upon different words (or symbols) to designate the same entity – e.g. 'dog' (in

English), 'perro' (in Spanish) and 'gos' (in Catalan). Second, while "natural signs occur at the whim of the environment" (Hewitt, 2003: 312), symbols can be produced at will without the need for the thing signified be present in that situation – for instance, I could talk about my grandmother, even though she is not physically there at that moment. Third, symbols can be combined to form complex systems of links and replacements and, for instance, in the case of language, we may designate the same entity (e.g. 'fire') by means of different symbols: the actual word 'fire' or a combination of different words (e.g. 'a state of light and flame caused by burning'), as we would find in a dictionary's entry. Charon observes that anything produced intentionally to communicate with others is a symbol and, based on this premise, he suggests that, apart from words, our acts and many objects "can [also] take on a symbolic quality" (Charon, 2004: 51). For instance, a student may intentionally yawn in class, as symbolic of 'I'm bored'; yet, even though the student yawns *unintentionally* and even though the yawn is not a symbol for the student, the teacher might interpret it as such. With reference to objects, we can, for instance, agree that a four-leaf clover may mean good luck or that a pink ribbon may symbolize one's support to breast cancer research.

Having dealt with the symbolic dimension of human interaction, the next section is devoted to one of the central constructs of the research questions in the current study: identity, and, as will be discussed in a later section, its relationship with discourse.

2.2. Identity

<div align="right">"Self-consciousness [...] exists only in being
acknowledged." (Hegel, 1977: 111)</div>

In this section I focus on identity, one of the key constructs that appear in the research questions of the current study, and also "one of the most widely used terms in the social sciences and humanities appearing in the titles of many thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of books and articles" (Wetherell, 2010:3). As I will explain, I will not look at this concept from an essentialist point of view and ask what identity *is*; instead, I will examine identity from a social

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constructionist approach, as "constructed in discourse, as negotiated among speaking subjects in social contexts, and as emerging in the form of subjectivity and a sense of self" (Bamberg et al., 2011: 177).

Although it may be difficult to "resist [...] the desire to fix meaning so the world can be neatly divided once and for all" (Wetherell, 2010: 3), identity has been claimed to be a multilayered construct (Block, 2014: 32) and "an open problematic" (Wetherell, 2010: 3) that assembles different theoretical and methodological assumptions. It is a rich and complex construct to define due to the existing "variety of often contradictory directions in identity studies [which make it] a site of continuous unsettled argument" (ibid, 2010: 4). The complexity of the concept of identity is expressed by Vignoles et al. (2011) in the following words:

> [...] simultaneously a personal, relational, and collective phenomenon; it is stable in some ways and fluid in others; and identity is formed and revised throughout the lifespans of individuals and the histories of social groups and categories, through an interplay of processes of self-discovery, personal construction, and social construction, some of which are relatively deliberate and explicit, whereas others are more automatic and implicit. (Vignoles et al., 2011: 8)

The concept of identity has evolved in different ways since the 1950s, when it first entered the social sciences and humanities, with the writings of Erik Erikson, which have been considered "highly normative, and even utopian, with a clear notion of what would count as 'good identity'" (Wetherell, 2010: 6). Erikson (1968: 19) conceived identity as stable and as "a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity" and it was precisely this continuity that characterized identity which allowed to "predict, with some degree of certainty, what that person is going to decide or do in the context of any particular situation or life choice" (Schwartz, 2001: 10). Erikson's understanding of identity was very common in its first decades and reflects, to a major extent, the etymological roots and classical definitions of the term. Gleason (1983) notes that the term identity "comes from the Latin root *idem*, the same, and has been used in English since the sixteenth

century" (Gleason, 1983: 911), and he also includes the following classical definition of identity provided by the Oxford English Dictionary:

> The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.
> *Personal identity* (in Psychology), the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence continuity of the personality. (as cited in Gleason, 1983:911)

As can be seen, identity was initially conceived as genuine, persistent, immutable and stabilized through time; yet, socioeconomic changes from the 1980s brought with them new ways of thinking in the social sciences and humanities that questioned, shook up, "tested and complicated these [initial] assumptions [leading to] an intriguing set of new directions in identity research" (Wetherell, 2010: 13). These new ways of thinking appear "under the banners of poststructuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, performativity studies and queer theory, as the cultural or discursive turn" (ibid, 2010: 13). Block (2014) succinctly describes this shift towards a view of identity that is opposed to the one supported by essentialism:

> [...] there has been a movement away from a preoccupation with stability, function and structure to a priming of individual agency and a shift from fixed *essentialized* versions of demographic categories such as race, ethnicity, gender and age to a generally constructivist perspective which sees these categories as more fluid and unstable. (Block, 2014: 4)

As Block suggests, the rise of poststructuralism appeared as a response against a rather fixed worldview, typical of essentialism, which Bucholtz (2003) defines as,

> [...] the position that the attributes and behaviour of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics

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> believed to be inherent to the group. As an ideology, essentialism rests on two assumptions: (1) that groups can be clearly delimited; and (2) that group members are more or less alike. (Bucholtz, 2003: 400)

Thus, from an essentialist approach, identity is conceived as being determined by biology or by social structure. On the one hand, from a biological determinist perspective, individuals are thought to be "what their genes make them" (ibid, 2014: 14). Thus, the genes determine not only the biological sex or the colour of the skin, but also behaviour, as happens when certain behaviours are, sometimes unconsciously, attributed to people with a particular skin colour or to people of a particular sex. On the other hand, a social structuralist stance towards the world supports the principle that "the full significance of an entity or experience cannot be perceived unless and until it is integrated into the structure of which it forms a part" (Hawkes, 2003: 7) and, therefore, individuals' behaviour is determined by "their membership in social categories based on social class, religion, education, family, peer groups and so on" (Block, 2014: 14). Both biological determinism and structuralism are components of essentialism and what poststructuralism does is to move "beyond the search for such 'universal and invariant laws of humanity' to more nuanced, multileveled and ultimately, complicated framings of the world around us" (ibid, 2014: 15).

Opposing to biological determinism, Butler (1988) allies herself with poststructuralism and underscores the 'performativity' of our identities and, in particular, of gender. For Butler,

> [g]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through *stylized repetition of acts.* [...] gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which body gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, 1988: 519-520)

According to Butler, identities are not pre-given but the result of discursive practices, performances that we make or, in Butler's (1988: 526) words, a "re-

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enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established". She engages with the view that gendered selves constitute the effects of the repetition of 'acts' that are normatively defined by our society and that we need to be aware of the fact that the world we inhabit is a world in which "acts, gestures, the visual body, the clothed body, the various physical attributes usually associated with gender, express nothing" (ibid, 1988: 530); gendered selves are not determined by nature or biology, but are constructed through language and through our body; they are discursive practices through which individuals "*do* being women or men" (Block, 2014: 20); they are constructions which, through time, "may entail the introduction of new elements" and thus evolve or change.

Butler's conception of identity was very much influenced by Erving Goffman's (1959) earlier work, who was also interested in the way(s) in which individuals *do* identity work in and through interaction, which he metaphorically describes as a performance directed to and shaped by an audience. For Goffman (1959: 13), identity is "the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers". Goffman, who was clearly influenced by Mead, sees the 'self' as a "collaborative achievement" (Kendall, 2011: 114), a performance tailored to a specific audience, the presence of which conditions the way(s) in which we 'perform' or present ourselves. What Goffman notes, in *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life* (1959), is that individuals have two selves: one is the *actor* or "a harried fabricator of impressions involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance" (Goffman, 1959: 252), and the other is the *character* that the actor has performed; that is, the "dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented" (ibid, 1959: 252-253).

In this line of thought, Zygmunt Bauman, another sociologist whose poststructural view of identity has been very influential in the social sciences, opposes a fixed worldview and understanding of identity by asserting that we inhabit a *liquid* modern world which is characterized by "a succession of new beginnings" (Bauman, 2005: 9) and in which its members live "under conditions of constant uncertainty" (ibid, 2005: 9). Identity, as existing in such a liquid modern

world, can, therefore, only be defined - and at the same time complained about - as being "slippery, blurred and confusing [in its] nature" (Wetherell, 2010: 3), as "never [being] a final or settled matter" (Jenkins, 2008: 17) but always bound to change and always in the making.

As already noted, in the current study, identity is grounded in poststructuralist and social constructionist discourses, as accomplished and negotiated in interaction with others - either in face-to-face or in electronically-mediated interactions - through which individuals (a) are "both shaping and shaped by the interaction" (Miyahara, 2015: 16) and (b) through which they connect, make sense of and share past events, experiences, emotions and thoughts. Thus, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the central analysis of this thesis will not focus on what the participants' identities are after their study-abroad experiences, but on the way(s) in which participants discursively and intersubjectively (re)construct their identities always in interaction with the researcher and at different stages of their study abroad experience. From this stance, I will look at identity work as emerging:

> [...] through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end-product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one's own and others' discursive practices within those practices. (Davies and Harré, 1999: 35)

This view of identity as constituted in discourse is echoed by Chris Weedon – "a foundational theorist in poststructuralist discussions of identity" (Block, 2014: 17) – who employs the term 'subjectivities' – instead of 'identities' – in order to talk about "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon, 1997: 32). Weedon depicts "a subjectivity [as being] precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1997: 32). Yet, in order to understand what is meant by

identities which are *reconstituted in discourse*, in the next section, I introduce the theoretical concept of *discourse*, while relating it to the theory of Social Constructionism, in order to examine the ways in which participants in this study, as human interpreting beings who are not only "constructed [by discourse and, in particular, by language] but also manipulators of it" (Burr, 1995: 44), (re)construct the impact that their experience(s) abroad had on their sense of self.

2.3. Discourse

> If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say?
>
> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978)

This study adopts a discursive view of reality and, in particular, of identity, which implies the use of "two lenses: the lens of *discourse* and the lens of *construction*" (Bamberg et al., 2011: 177). In this section, I will first delve into the theory of Social Constructionism (SC), and then focus on *discourse*, as one of the means used by individuals to account for and ultimately construct their social worlds. The point that this study aims to make, as pointed out in section 1.2, is that a discursive view of reality invigorates an anti-essentialist stance, conceiving reality not as an essence or as something that simply *is*, but as something that is *done* through discursive practice. Reality is thus deemed a construction, a description or representation that individuals make, through the use of discourse – and, through the discursive tool of language in particular - in a given interactional situation. In this respect, it is language which "constitutes the 'I' of the subject and brings it into being through the process of signification" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 31); it is through the individuals' manipulation of words – in oral or written form - that they construct reality (Gee, 2011).

The cornerstone for the present study, grounded on Social Constructionism, is, therefore, that "reality is socially constructed" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 13)

and, thus, it is not made up of "fixed natural and/or metaphysical laws" (Weinberg, 2009: 283). What we take to be 'reality', and this connects with Symbolic Interactionism, is considered to be highly dependent on "how we approach it, and how we approach to it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part" (Gergen, 2009: 2). Our understanding of the world is, as Weinberg notes, "always *mediated* [emphasis added] by the socially inherited meanings actors actively confer upon it" (Weinberg, 2009: 285), and this is why Social Constructionism (SC),

> [...] looks beyond, and indeed challenges, taken-for-granted notions such as 'it is natural for every woman to have a maternal instinct'; or 'governments represent the societies that elect them'; or 'it is rude to speak with your mouth full' and says 'Who says?' SC wants to look back and above and beyond to the processes that have caused these things to become taken-for-granted 'knowledge': Who has said what, when, to whom, and how, to get us to where we are on any one topic? (Irwin, 2011: 100)

Houston (2001) defines Social Constructionism as a "genus linking a range of diverse theorists [...] gathered around a number of epistemological (relating to knowledge) and ontological (relating to existence) assumptions" (Houston, 2001: 846), who position themselves as 'anti-humanists' and 'anti-essentialists' (Burr, 1995; Sayer, 1997) in believing that "there are no 'essences' inside things or people that make them what they are" (Burr, 1995: 5); instead they are, as supported in this study, socially constructed. This is linked to one of the four assumptions in which "you would absolutely have to believe [...] in order to be a social constructionist" (Burr, 1995: 3), and which also form the backbone for this study.

The first assumption claims that we should be critical towards what we take to be 'reality'; we should challenge representationalist epistemologies and reject the view that "the human mind can reproduce reality in a way that corresponds to the real world" (Lorino et al., 2011: 771). This anti-essentialist assumption influences the current study in two ways. On the one hand, this premise informs my understanding of my role as a researcher whose "knowledge production, as in the case of all other discourses, is productive – it creates [a particular] reality at

the same time as representing it" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 175); it is a reality which does not "mirror what is out there" (Schwandt, 2003: 197), but a reality that could have been constructed differently in a different sociohistorical situation. In this line of thought, Burr (2015: 171) claims that traditionally researchers had the capacity to "claim truthfulness for their findings by recourse to the supposed objectivity of scientific method"; researchers were seen to be able to report the true, correct, objective and impersonal nature of the studied phenomena, without influencing or polluting the findings with "leakage from their own personal involvement" (ibid, 2015: 171). However, within a constructionist framework, the researcher's 'objective talk' is actually conceived as a construction of reality from a particular point of view or frame (Goodman, 1978), which can never be impartial but always "a product of someone asking a particular question [deriving from concrete] assumptions about the world" (Burr, 2015: 171). In fact, Social Constructionism regards "objectivity as an impossibility [since] no human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all" (Burr, 2015: 171).

On the other hand, from this social constructionist approach, the participants' elicited productions are conceived as representations that they make of the world, which are discursively produced from a particular stance and, at the same time, contingent (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Thus, individuals perceive and interact with the world from some perspective or other, and it is from a particular stance that the world gets constructed or, following Shotter's (2014) words, it is from a particular stance that "we ourselves bring [...] 'things' into existence" (Shotter, 2014: 305). For this reason, as I will explain in the methodology chapter, I will use the discourse-analytic notion of S*tance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009) to examine the way(s) in which the participants in this study display their own positioning from which they construct their social worlds.

The second assumption of Social Constructionism revolves around the "historical and cultural specificity" (Burr, 1995: 3) which conditions our discourses or our way(s) of being in the world. Our understandings of the world evolve and change with the passing of time, since they are dependent on the place and the

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moment in which one lives or, in Burr's (2015: 3) words, they are "historically and culturally relative". Burr (1995: 4) provides an example by making reference to the notion of childhood:

> What it has been thought 'natural' for children to do has changed, as well as what parents were expected to do for their children. [...] It is only relatively recent historical times that children have ceased to be simply small adults (in all but their legal rights).

The third premise upon which Social Constructionism is based supports the idea that "knowledge is sustained by social processes" (Burr, 1995: 3). As has already been pointed out, there does not exist a pre-given and stable reality; yet, it is through social interaction in which people are daily engaged with each other that "our versions of knowledge become fabricated" (Burr, 1995: 4).

> [...] what we regard as 'truth' (which of course varies historically and cross-culturally), i.e. our current accepted ways of understanding the world, is a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. (ibid, 1995: 4)

By focusing on the everyday interactions between people, the perspective that concerns this study is that reality – and identity- are social constructs (Heller, 2001) and, therefore, they are located "in the interaction between an individual and his or her world, and [...] with other people" (ibid, 2001: 252). This process of construction takes place through the use of *discourse* or, what Monica Heller (2001: 250) calls "interactional, discursive mechanics" which ultimately constitute the "primary acts of meaning-making" (ibid, 2001: 250), in and through which individuals construct their social worlds.

As noted by Bamberg et al. (2011: 180), the term 'discourse' is "embedded in different theories and applied to different fields of investigation", and it has been claimed not to "have an agreed-upon definition and confusingly many uses" (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000: 1127). Traditionally, discourse has been defined

from a linguistic point of view as "a complex of linguistic forms larger than the single sentence (a 'text') or as 'language-in-use', i.e. linguistic structures actually used by people – 'real language' (Blommaert, 2005: 2). However, as suggested by Blommaert (2005), among others, the definition of discourse should not only include language or focus only on "the nuts and bolts of written or spoken text" (Block, 2014: 18). Instead, Blommaert (2005) defines 'discourse' as that which "comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use" (Blommaert, 2005:3). This broader view of discourse is in line with a multimodal approach to discourse analysis, from which language is but "one among a number of semiotic resources [...] that people use to communicate, or make meaning, with each other" (Paltridge, 2012: 170). From a multimodal approach, there exist *various* resources on which people draw in order to display who they are, what they think and how they feel.

In addition to the above understandings of what is meant by 'discourse', Gee (1996) makes a distinction between existing, dominant discourses (which he calls *capital-D discourses*), within which particular instances of language-in-use (*small-d discourse*) are embedded. Discourses (spelled with a capital 'D') are:

> [...] ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. (Gee, 1996:127)

With this distinction, what Gee is implying is that at a macro societal level, there exists a "powerful ordering force" (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000: 1127) or, as pointed out by Bamberg et al. (2011), certain dominant systems for thought and ideologies (*capital-D discourses*), that shape the what and how something is said in particular micro interactional situations (*small-d discourses*). Although the current study will focus on a micro analysis of different elicited *small-d discourses* in and through which the participants constructed reality and their identities, it will be

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necessary to take into account the fact that the discursive construction of the impact of study abroad at the micro level may stem from already existing capital-D discourses.

Gee's distinction between *capital-D* and *small-d* discourses is related to one of the three themes – *agency*, *sameness versus difference* and *constancy and change* (Bamberg et al., 2011: 187-188)- which emerge when viewing identities as discursively constructed. In relation to agency, Bamberg et al. (2011) claim that individuals are confronted with an "agency dilemma" (ibid, 2011: 187), for which they have to navigate along a continuum with two opposing ends, as shown in the following figure.

Figure 5: The agency dilemma (*adapted from* **Bamberg et al., 2011)**
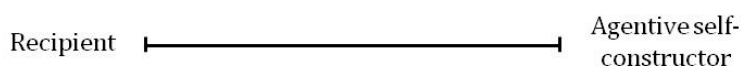
On one end, individuals' construction of their identities is based on and shaped by existing capital-D discourses and, therefore, they are seen as recipients who are "less influential, powerful, and responsible and [...] less blameworthy" (ibid, 2011: 187). On the other end of the continuum, individuals position themselves as individuals who have control over their constructions of themselves and of the world and are, therefore, seen as self-determined agents.

The second theme proposed by Bamberg et al. (2011), *sameness* and *difference*, revolves around the fact that speaking subjects may discursively display who they are by aligning or disaligning themselves with categorizations made by others, thus "draw[ing] up boundaries around them – and others- so that individual identities and group belongings become visible" (ibid, 2011: 188). In this sense, speakers may be engaged with "self-differentiation and self-integration" (ibid, 2011: 187) discursive practices. As will also be seen in chapters 5, 6 and 7, the analysis of the participants' *small-d discursive practices* will focus on (a) the categorizations that they make of others, and also of themselves, and (b) their positioning towards such invoked category-bound descriptions. To that end, I

will use an ethnomethodologically-oriented method, known as *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1972), and also Jaffe's (2009) notion of *Stance*.

Finally, Bamberg et al. (2011) argue that individuals have to face another dilemma: *the constancy-change dilemma*, which somehow forces them to position themselves along the following continuum.

Figure 6: The constancy-change dilemma (*adapted from* Bamberg et al., 2011)
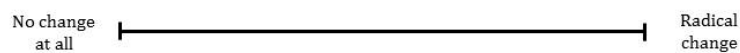
On one end, the individual might undergo no change at all, whereas, on the other end, individuals may experience "radical change from one moment to the next, resulting in potential chaos and relational unpredictability" (ibid, 2011: 188). Indeed, participants in the current study are asked to "engage in discursive practices of identity maintenance, as well as in underscoring and bringing off how they have changed" (ibid, 2011: 189), thus making change-constancy a concurrent theme in their discourses on the impact that their SA experience had on their sense of self and positioning themselves differently along this continuum.

As will be seen in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, the analysis of the current study will be mainly linguistically-driven with a focus on "*sociality* and *subjectivity* [as] rooted in language" (Carter, 2013: 583). From a social constructionist approach, language is placed at the foreground in the process of knowledge construction and in our understanding of reality – which is considered relative rather than absolute, and historically and culturally dependent rather than objective. In this sense, language is conceived as that means unique to human beings, through which the world – and also the self - gets constructed. From this stance, the participants' representations of the world do not reflect any 'real essence' of a predetermined, given reality, but multiple meanings that 'things' have for each of them, which they make available to the researcher through language (Burr, 1995) and to which they

respond. However, these meanings brought to life through language are "never fixed [but] always open to question, always contestable, always temporary" (ibid, 1995: 39) and this may explain the "numerous possible 'social constructions' of the world" (ibid, 1995: 5) made by the participants.

In sum, the point that this and the previous sections of this chapter bring forth is that, in this project, reality (including identity) is seen as an interactional and performative practice (De Fina et al., 2006) that the participants in this study were asked to engage in before, during and after their study abroad experiences. From this approach to the study of identity, I will analyse the participants' small-d discourse practices, revealing the meanings that each participant attributes to his/her stay abroad. I will examine the way(s) in which they categorize others and themselves, while revealing their attitudes or their stance towards capital-D and other discourses, and while (re)negotiating their sense of self. In addition, the participants' actions (as described by them and also as I could observe during the shadowing period) will be considered in relation to their own statements as well as to other dominant discourses. Finally, although I will try to bring to the fore the participants' own voices, I am aware, believe and thus recognize that the final outcome of this work, far from being the 'truth', will be mediated by my own beliefs and point of view.

Having defined the theoretical concepts of 'social interaction', 'identity' and 'discourse' as will be understood in this study, in the next section I will discuss a specific discourse genre that constitutes a particular means of "'doing' things through talk that simultaneously provide means of 'being'" (De Fina et al., 2006: 22): narrative.

2.3.1. A Narrative –Oriented Approach

> SÒNIA: Joan_ (...) tell me your Erasmus story (...) from the beginning until the end\ (...) tell me how it all started_ how Joan's Erasmus started_ and how this Erasmus ended\
>
> SÒNIA: *Joan_ el que vull ara_ és que m'expliquis la teva història Erasmus (...) des del principi al final\ (...) m'expliques com va començar tot_ com va començar l'Erasmus del Joan_i com va acabar aquest Erasmus*

I begin this section with conversational data that comes from the narrative interview that I held with Joan, one of the participants of this study, one year after his Erasmus experience came to an end. The short excerpt above illustrates some of the issues that will be examined in this section: (a) what is actually meant by 'narrative'; and (b) the relationship between narrative and the social construction of identity.

In asking participants to tell their "Erasmus story" (line 6) they were expected to construct a picture of their Erasmus experiences, and the situated nature of this conversational storytelling required the participants to occupy:

> more, and extended, turns at talk, while the other speaker(s) [that is, me, as researcher] hold off taking a turn until the story is over, but signal their involvement in the storytelling through displays of recipiency, usually in the form of minimal responses (Thornborrow, 2012: 54).

Another important point regarding the elicitation of the students' storied experiences is that they were also required to follow some rules – "from the beginning until the end" (line 7) – which mainly have to do with imposing structure and order on their recounting of their experiences abroad or, as De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 17) suggest, "on the heterogeneity of experience".

In the current project, I embrace the assumption that "experience itself becomes intelligible to humans only when they narrate it" (De Fina, 2003: 17), and that narrative is the "means of organizing pieces of information that would otherwise lack coherence into meaningful sequences of events" (Benson et al.,

2013:24). The story that Joan, and the other participants in this study, produce is conceived as an intersubjective, "interactional achievement" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 86), in which my role as a researcher affected the turn-by-turn unfolding of the telling of the story. For this reason, the approach taken in this project conceives the stories, not as products, but as intersubjective, interactional processes in which both the researcher and the participants become co-constructors, co-tellers or co-narrators (Norrick, 2000).

In order to learn about the impact of the Erasmus experience on the students' identity, as discursively constructed by them, I needed to employ an approach that would allow me to study the experiences of the participants holistically, while "listen[ing] to *their* 'voices' in order to understand the complexities involved in forging their identities" (Miyahara, 2015: 37, emphasis added) and focusing on the meaning that *they* discursively attribute to their storied Erasmus experiences. In this respect, although I also spent with them an average of three or four days observing and, on some occasions, also engaging with the activities in which they participated in their host countries, narrative as a method for collecting data is deemed "especially valuable when we want to capture the nature and meaning of experiences that are difficult to observe directly and are best understood from the perspectives of those who experience them" (Benson et al., 2013: 8).

Indeed, the telling of stories - understood as a form of narrative with "a sequential and temporal ordering, but also as texts that include some kind of rupture or disturbance in the normal course of events, some kind of unexpected action that provokes a reaction and/or adjustment" (Riessman, 2008: 6)"- is a mundane activity we, humans, engage in on a daily basis. In this line of thought, Hardy contends that "we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (Hardy, 1968: 5). This universality of narrative is also underscored by Barthes and Duisit (1975: 237) who notes that,

> [narrative] is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, *drame* (suspense drama), comedy, pantomime, paintings [...], stained-glass windows,

movies, local news, conversation. Moreover, in this infinite variety of forms, it is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; […] all classes, all human groups, have their stories, […]. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural.

This view of storytelling as being ubiquitous is actually echoed by McAdams and McLean, among others, who talk about human beings as "natural storytellers" (McAdams and McLean, 2013: 233) or by Atkinson (2007) who claims that "we are storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story" (Atkinson, 2007: 224).

However, although narrative is a very popular term with a "broad swath of uses and meanings" (Schiffrin et al., 2010) on which many studies have focused (Bamberg, 2007, 2010; Barkhuizen, 2011; Benson et al., 2013; Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 2001; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin and Connelly, 2004; De Fina, 2003; De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 2008; Sabaté, 2015), a clear-cut definition of narrative is nigh-on impossible to find. Riessman (2008: 3) contends that it is a term that "carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with 'story'". Taylor (2003: 195) notes that "narrative studies is a broad field encompassing a range of theoretical assumptions and analytical approaches". De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 1) argue that "*narrative* resists straightforward and agreed-upon definitions and conceptualizations", and Stanley and Temple (2008: 276) state that the field of narrative studies is notoriously "accompanied by little shared sense of core concerns, of approach, and even of what 'narrative' is seen as". Toolan (2001) does offer a broad definition of 'narrative' which somehow captures its basic aspects. A narrative, Toolan contends, "typically is a recounting of things spatiotemporally distant: here's the present teller, seemingly close to the addressee (reader or listener), and there at a distance is the tale and its topic" (Toolan, 2001: 1). According to Toolan, a narrative consists of three basic components (a tale, a teller and an addressee) and these are "'placed' […] at different degrees of mutual proximity or distance" (Toolan, 2001), as presented in figure 7 below:

Figure 7 Narrative basic components (*adapted from* Toolan, 2001)
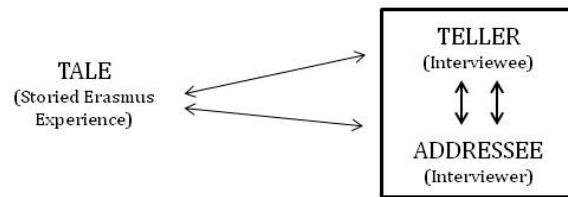
Drawing on Toolan's definition of narrative and relating it to the current study, the participants of this study, whom I could call "the tellers", were asked to reflect upon their past Erasmus experience and the meaning that some of the episodes lived had for them. Thus, they somehow made this already past and distant 'adventure' present in the context of the interaction with me (the addressee), through their narrative recounting of it (the tale). Hawthorn (1985) also touches upon the fact that, through narrative, we transport a past episode to the present and he makes reference to a painting by John Everett Millais, *The Boyhood of Raleigh*, in order to describe this relationship between teller-tale-addressee:

> Narrative focuses our attention on to a story, a sequence of events, through the direct mediation of a 'telling' which we both stare at and through, which is at once central and peripheral to the experience of the story, both absent and present in the consciousness of those being told the story. Like the two young boys we stare at the 'telling' while our minds are fixed upon what that telling points towards. We look at the pointing arm but our minds are fixed upon what is pointed at. (Hawthorn, 1985: vii)

Aristotle can be considered the antecessor of what is known as *narratology*: "the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artifacts that 'tell a story' (Bal, 2009: 3). Aristotle focused on the Greek tragedy, which he defined as "an imitation of an action that is complete, and whole […] which has a beginning, middle and an end" (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 31). From an Aristotelian point of view, 'narrative' always follows some principles, such as the structure (beginning-middle-end), which is *never* haphazard. This classical

conception of narrative "shifted with French structuralism, Russian formalism, poststructuralism, cultural analysis, and postmodernism" (Riessman, 2008: 4), and, as Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001: 4) suggest, "today's narrative theory [...] has distanced itself from the 'grand narratives of structuralism' and its focal concerns upon invariant rules, deep structures, sentences and dualism". In this sense, some scholars have moved from examining "prototypical narrative data" (Georgakopoulou, 2007: 146) to analyzing nonfictional, naturally occurring narrative data or what Georgakopoulou calls *small stories*: "snippets of talk that flouted expectations of the canon" (ibid, 2007: 146).

In the social sciences research, the term 'narrative' can make reference to three different kinds of 'text': "stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives" (Riessman, 2008: 6). As will be pointed out in a later chapter, this study will focus on the first type of narrative text proposed by Riessman - the students' elicited stories (in which I was always a co-narrator) through which they engaged with what Barkhuizen (2013) calls "narrative knowledging":

> The meaning making, learning, or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of (co)constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/watching/listening to research reports. (as cited in Barkhuizen, 2013: 4).

Although Barkhuizen's quotation above underscores the role of the researcher in interpreting, analyzing and transmitting knowledge in the narrative form, the approach taken in this study reinforces the idea of *narrative knowledging* from the participants' point of view. *Narrative knowledging* is both (a) a cognitive activity which allowed *participants* – apart from researchers- to make sense of their experiences in the process of constructing them, and (b) a social activity, since the knowledge that they generate is "discursively constructed with others in

particular spatiotemporal contexts" (Barkhuizen, 2013: 4). Indeed, contexts are a very important aspect to take into account when analyzing narratives, since, as Riessman (2008: 105) points out, "stories don't fall from the sky (or emerge from the innermost 'self'); they are composed and received in contexts – interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive". Similarly, by adopting a conversational analytic approach to the analysis of interview narrative data, Barkhuizen claims that context can be "interpreted on a number of different levels" (Barkhuizen, 2013: 6), within which narrative practice is embedded: the macro context, the telling and the talk. At the level of talk, the focus of research is on the turn-by-turn unfolding of the interaction and on the role(s) speakers have in the construction of the narrative, seen as a "collaborative and negotiated performance" (ibid, 2013: 7). The telling makes reference to the dynamics and conditions under which the narrative is constructed, such as the physical environment, the people participating in it, turn-taking rules and the language chosen. The third level of context is the macro-context which Barkhuizen describes as the "sociocultural and sociohistorical contexts" (ibid, 2013: 7), which somehow has to do with the "language ideologies and discourses that have currency in narrators' communities" (Pavlenko's, 2007: 176) and that are reflected in and that have a strong impact on the way(s) in which their narratives are produced.

In addition to the above working definitions of narrative, Thornborrow and Coates (2005) mention that narrative is a social practice speakers use "across a range of social contexts and settings to accomplish many different social actions" (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005: 7). Apart from entertaining, explaining and advising, among others, narrative – and, stories in particular – serve to "tell us who we are: they are central to our social and cultural identity" (ibid, 2005: 7). This view of narrative as playing a very important role in the way(s) in which we discursively construct who we are (or who we are not) is echoed by De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 160) who contend that "the study of narrative [serves] as a point of entry into the teller's personal, social and cultural identities" and by Sabaté (2015), who defines narratives as "rich historicized discursive actions that uniquely put into the fore the ways in which we negotiate who, where, and with whom we are or we are not, and why, in a given time and space" (Sabaté, 2015:

92). In a similar vein, Miyahara (2015) conceives narrative, not only as a tool through which participants describe and make sense of past experiences, but as a vehicle through which they construct their identities.

The approach taken in this study underscores this understanding of narrative as a practice that "involves the 'doing' of identity" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006) - no longer understood as being "independent of the process of constructing it" (Bruner, 2001: 26-27) and, therefore, as pre-existing, innate and/or natural. Instead, identity is conceived as "something that emerges out of what is said and done as connections are made to explain, negotiate and make meaning of events and experiences" (Miyahara, 2015: 42); "as continuously remade, and as contradictory and situational" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 138); and as something that "takes off [...] from the continuity/change dilemma" (Bamberg, 2010: 4). Through their narrative accounts of their experiences abroad, most of the participants in the current study, who had to adapt and (re)adapt to different physical and social environments, describe a 'change' in their sense of self. As will be seen in a later chapter, this change is related to their foreign language proficiency, intercultural relations, their fear of travelling abroad and/or to being an independent adult. The following excerpt comes from near the end of a narrative interview – this time, with Marina, - one of the participants who had gone to Wales. In this stretch of talk she suggests that, after her stay abroad, she is not the same person and, therefore, she makes of her story "one of transformation and change" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 138):

Excerpt 2 Discourse of transformation
(Excerpt taken from the NI with Marina - UK)

1	Marina:	I would recommend it to	ho recomanaria a tothom\
2		everybody\ because it is not only_	perquè ja no és només_el marxar
3		the fact of going to another	a un altre país\és_ * t'es&
4		country\ it's_ * you mature a lot_	t'espaviles un munt_ t'indepen&
5		you become indepen& * I mean_	* o sigui_tu mateix creixes com a
6		you grow as a person_ it changes	persona_ et canvia moltíssim_ la
7		you a lot_ your mentality_ because	mentalitat_ perquè fas amics de
8		you make friends from	tot arreu_i tothom sabem que
9		everywhere_ and we all know that	aquí a espanya sincerament la
10		here in Spain the mentality is	mentalitat és_molt tancada\ i·· i
11		sincerely_ very close\ a··nd and I_	jo_ me n'alegro moltíssim_
12		am very pleased_ because I saw *	perquè_ vaig veure * bueno_ en

66

13		well_ as a person_ I have seen a	*mi_ he vist un canvi molt gran\ i*
14		very big change\ and I'm actually	*a més que estic molt contenta*
15		very happy\ I would do it again\	*que ho tornaria a fer*

This narrative is a "personalized or evaluated text" (Toolan, 2001: 3), whereby Marina describes the meaning that her experience abroad had from *her* personal stance: it is, after all, an experience she would recommend to everybody.

Another feature of narrative identity that emerged in the analysis of the participants' stories is the notion of "categorization", which Barkhuizen (2013) claims to be one of the interrelated dimensions of narrative analysis, on which different scholars have focused their work (De Fina, 2000; Flannery, 2008). Through their recounting of their stories, participants "back up and negotiate positions about the social characteristics of in-group and out-group members" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 173); that is to say, they show their alignment or disalignment towards what is considered to be 'common knowledge', or towards the attributes and activities that are normally associated with the category 'Erasmus student', by making reference to the other students that they met while abroad, who were also part of this Erasmus community of practice (Kalocsai, 2014).

Summary

To sum up, what this chapter has aimed to highlight is the capacity – unique to humans – of interpreting and assembling meaning to 'things' through the use of symbols; and, in particular, through the use of language. This is the focus of chapters 5, 6 i 7, which present the analysis of the participants' discursive constructions of their Erasmus experiences and, ultimately, of their identities. As shown in these chapters, it is in and through social interactions with other people – and, in particular, by means of narrative as a discursive resource - that participants in this study do not only make sense of and construct the world they live in, but ultimately reveal who they are or who they are not. Indeed, each of the students' narrative accounts of their lives abroad provide us with unique and different

pictures of the worlds they experienced; pictures which, in spite of being constructed by students living side by side, symbolically depict different worlds.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Chapter 3 is divided into three sections. Section 3.1 is devoted to the qualitative approach undertaken in the current study, specifically to multiple case-study research, with which an in-depth understanding of the nine cases selected for this project was meant to be gained, and for which multiple methods for data collection were used. Section 3.2 presents the different methods used for gathering the qualitative data: focus group interviews, questionnaire with open-ended questions, elicited experiential accounts, shadowing and narrative interview. The last section (3.3) describes the analytical framework, which is divided into two sections. Section 3.3.1 explains the ethnomethodologically-oriented method of *Membership Categorization Analysis* (Sacks, 1972; Silverman, 1998; Stokoe, 2012b) with a focus on the resources participants use to make sense of and, ultimately, to account for their social worlds; and section 3.3.2 explains the notion of *Stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009), with a focus on the way(s) in which participants linguistically evaluate this world. The analytical framework of the current study is commensurate with the theoretical underpinnings presented in chapter 2, according to which the nine cases are held to be actively engaged in attributing meaning to their storied experiences abroad, while reflecting upon and accounting for the impact that their stays abroad have had on their sense of self.

3.1. Undertaking a Qualitative Research Approach

With the objective of explaining the research design of the current project, it is important to consider some assumptions which guided the research process and that ultimately situate this study within a qualitative approach. In order to address the research questions mentioned in the introduction, I decided to undertake a qualitative approach which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2011),

> involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artifacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and

problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3)

As Croker (2009: 5) suggests, the researcher's worldview is what guides him/her, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways". Thus, although both qualitative and quantitative researchers "think they know something about society worth telling to others" (Becker, 1986: 122), they differ in their answers to two fundamental questions: 'what is reality?' or 'how things really are?' (ontology) and 'what is knowledge?' or 'how do we know?' (epistemology). The researcher's worldview is what Croker (2009) refers to as *paradigm,* which affects, among other things, the strategies of inquiry that are used to know *and* to communicate that reality. For instance, positivism, which tends to be a more quantitative-oriented understanding of the world, contends that (i) there exists a fixed, objective and stable reality out there which can be measurable and (ii) "research should strive to find a singular, universal 'truth'" (ibid., 2009: 6). Instead, qualitative research tends to be based on a constructivist ontology which rejects positivists' criteria, while claiming that they reproduce "only a certain kind of science, a science that silences too many voices" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 9) and that a single, objective reality does not exist. Rather, constructivism posits that "since each of us experiences from our own point of view, each of us experiences a different reality" (Krauss, 2005: 760) and, therefore, diverse and multiple 'truths' exist which are socially constructed by individuals' interpretations of it through their interaction with the world. The phenomenon of 'multiple realities' is also emphasized by Croker, who states that qualitative researchers operate under ontological assumptions according to which reality is considered as follows:

> Each individual created his or her own unique understandings of the world, so there are multiple constructions and multiple interpretations of reality. And these constructions and interpretations change depending on time and circumstances, so reality is not universal but person-, context-, and time-bound. (Croker, 2009: 6)

The nature of qualitative research often implies a longitudinal approach since its job is not to measure change – this is the role of different tools mostly used in quantitative research – but "to describe the different types of changes that take place or the different outcomes that result, to account for them by showing how they arise, and to explain how and why there are differences between sample members" (Lewis, 2003: 54). In order to be able to provide a richly descriptive picture of the participants' worlds, in a qualitative study, researchers normally use multiple methods for data collection, as is the case of the current study, such us open-response questionnaires, interviews, diaries and also observations. Regardless of the research approach normally used in qualitative research – e.g. narrative inquiry, ethnography, case study, mixed methods, action research – the aim is to "give readers a sense of entering the participants' worlds and sharing the experience of being there with them" (Croker, 2009: 9), by providing richly detailed and descriptive data.

3.1.1. Case-Study Research

The qualitative research approach adopted in the present study is one of the "principal means by which inquiry is conducted in the social sciences" (Thomas, 2011: 511) and, more specifically, a commonly used approach in applied linguistics (Croker, 2009): case study. As Flyvbjerg (2011: 301) noted, "definitions of 'case study' abound"; yet, "some are useful, others not" and, in fact, Hood (2009: 68) highlights the complexity of defining this research approach by claiming that "a simple definition of case study is elusive". Notwithstanding the different definitions that exist and the misunderstandings that, according to Flyvbjerg (2011), some of them promote, they all share strong commonalities – such as the fact that it is an intensive "empirical inquiry" (Yin, 2003: 13), an "in-depth exploration" (Simons, 2009: 21) or "a detailed investigation" (Hartley, 2004: 323) which:

> explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)
> or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through
> detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources

of information (…) and reports a case description and case themes (Creswell, 2013: 97).

As Creswell's definition indicates, there is a research focus on "an object to be studied" (Stake, 1995: 14) or 'a case', which Miles and Huberman (1994: 25) define as "a phenomenon of some sort of occurring in a bounded context". Regardless of it being an individual or an entity, the main goal of case studies, and also of this study in particular, is to study them "in depth in order to provide an understanding of individuals' experiences, issues, insights, developmental pathways, or performance within a particular linguistic, social, or educational context" (Duff, 2014: 233). Stake (1995: 1) calls his cases 'actors' and, in his book entitled *The Art of Case Study Research*, he states that a case study researcher's objective is to "enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn". In a similar vein, Hartley (2004) compares the role of the researcher to that of a detective who strives to find evidence to learn about what happened, why and in what circumstances.

Another aspect, which is highlighted in different definitions of case study research, is the "developmental factor" and its relation to the environment, since "a case typically evolves in time, often as a string of concrete and interrelated events that occur" (Flyvbjerg, 2011: 301) at a particular time and within a particular context. This explains why this qualitative research approach has often been described as 'intense', since the researcher has to carry "a rather large and diverse toolbox" (Hood, 2009: 69) in order to explore the case not "through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 544). Among the most common methods used in case study, Hartley (2004: 324) mentions "participant observation, direct observation, ethnography, interviews (semi-structured to relatively unstructured), focus groups, documentary analysis, and even questionnaires may be used, or in combination". Indeed, we can conclude that the use of a variety of sources facilitates the study of the research issues in depth and in context.

Stake (1995) considers three types of case study (*intrinsic*, *instrumental* and *collective*) and the selection of a specific type of case study is guided by the purpose of the research study which, according to (Thomas, 2011: 516), is, in turn, "intimately connected with the object of the study". *Intrinsic case study* refers to the exploration of one particular case without aiming to have implications on wider cases; the case itself is of interest and the aim is precisely to understand the peculiarities of such individual case. The difference between an *intrinsic* and an *instrumental case study* has to do with the purpose of the study. The latter's aim is to provide insight into an issue, and the case, which is of secondary interest, helps advance understanding of such particular issue and to extend theory. The third type of case study design, which is the one chosen in the current project, is what Stake calls "a collective case study" (Stake, 1995), although it is also known by other names such as *multicase study*, *multiple case study* or *comparative case study*. Stake (2006) defines a multiple case study as follows:

> The multicase study is a special effort to examine something having lots of cases, parts, or members. We study those parts, perhaps its students, its committees, its projects, or manifestations in diverse settings. [...] One small collection of people, activities, policies, strengths, problems, or relationships is studied in detail. Each case to be studied has its own problems and relationships. The cases have their stories to tell [...] but the official interest is in the collection of these cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases. The unique life of the case is interesting for what it can reveal about the quintain [...] something that we want to understand more thoroughly, and we choose to study it through its cases, by means of a multicase study. (Stake, 2006: vi)

In this study, I work with a collection of nine cases, corresponding to nine undergraduate students of the University of Lleida who participated in the Erasmus exchange programme in the academic year 2013-14. The first reason for adopting a multiple case study design is that its "detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998: 61) allowed, on the one hand, to capture the complexity of the participants' diverse experiences and, on the other hand, to seek out and present the multiple, and even

contradictory, perspectives on the way(s) in which participants discursively constructed their identities while reflecting upon the impact that the Erasmus experience had on them. Besides, case study design, by taking into account case-specific understandings of what the Erasmus experience had meant for the participants, might be useful for helping student exchange programmes, such as Erasmus, be more insightful when designing and planning the desired personal and professional outcomes.

As has already been pointed out in chapter 2, the collective case study that constitutes the current project falls within the social constructionist paradigm, which supports the ontological belief that, although "case study [...] derives much of its rationale and methods from ethnography and its constituent theoretical discourses – symbolic interactionism [...] and ethnomethodology" (Chadderton and Torrance, 2011: 53), things may not be as they seem. Instead, it conceives "social reality [as] created through social interaction" (ibid, 2011: 53) with the sociocultural milieu in which people live. In this sense, and as we shall observe in chapters 5, 6 and 7, each of the participants in this study had their unique story to tell. However, each of their elicited stories, regardless of how different they were – both in terms of form and content- illuminated different aspects of their Erasmus experiences and of the nature of the impact that it had had on their identities.

From this point of view, as has already been suggested, I consider that (a) reality and meaning are "coconstructed through the dynamic processes of interacting with others and with the wider social, material, and symbolic world" (Duff, 2014: 236) and that (b) it is of great importance, and also particular to constructionism, that the researcher's interpretation of the data "is itself a construction" (Charmaz, 2006: 187). This is also supported by Hetherington (2013: 81) who notes that, from a social-constructivist approach, the fact of "presenting a phenomenon independently of one's own construction or interpretation of it" is impossible, and that the researcher's epistemological and theoretical positioning will inevitably affect the choices for conducting the research and its outcomes.

3.1.1.1. Case Recruitment and Data Generation

As has already been pointed out in the previous section, case studies may focus holistically on just one case or on a multiplicity of cases. In the current thesis, the latter was considered more appropriate, since it allows the researcher to present, not one but multiple ways of reporting the findings such as "in pairs, as individual cases, or according to themes that cut across the cases" (Duff, 2014: 237). Thus, a multiple case study, which examines how the programme or phenomenon is experienced in different environments and by multiple cases (Stake 2006), is considered to be more "robust and reliable" (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 550), although it can also be "extremely time consuming and expensive to conduct" (ibid., 2008: 550).

The first and one of the most challenging steps in undertaking this multiple case study was not only to recruit participants, but also to generate their interest in the study in order to be able to retain them over an extended period. Specifically three steps were followed in order to recruit participants. The first step, prior to recruitment, was to contact the International Relations Office of the university in order to find out the students who would participate in the Erasmus programme in the academic year 2013-14. The International Relations Office provided me with a list of those students together with some personal and academic information, such as their phone number, email, university degree, country of destination and length of stay. This list allowed me to move onto the second step in recruiting participants, which was that of establishing direct contact with them by phone. I finally contacted the 32 students who were going to three countries in particular (the United Kingdom, Denmark and Italy) in which the English language played a different role regarding its presence. The reason why these three countries were chosen is because this study was carried out in the framework of a larger research project which, as has been mentioned in the introduction, had the aim of exploring the impact of the SA experience on the students in relation to three main themes: linguistic competence, intercultural competence, and the construction of European citizenship.

A total of 30 students responded in the affirmative when asked to participate in this study, whereupon an in-person presentation of this research project to those potential participants was made, letting them know about what they would be asked to do before, during and after their stay abroad. In order to convince the potential participants to participate in the project, I expressed my interest in learning about the uniqueness of each of their experiences and let them know that those who fully engaged in the project would be rewarded. Apart from that, I also tried to make them aware of the possible practical implications that my research study might entail, such as the improvement of the planning and development of future Erasmus experiences of other students of the University of Lleida. Although I managed to gather data from 28 Erasmus students, I finally decided to focus on 9 cases (6 female students and 3 male students) according to the three following criteria:

a. Nine appeared to be a convenient number of cases for a multiple case study, since, according to Stake (2006: 22), its benefits "will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10". On the one hand, two or three cases would not allow the researcher to capture the interrelationship between the cases' practices and their contexts. In this sense, it would not be possible to gain a full understanding of the phenomena under study. On the other hand, Stake notes that more than 10 cases would entail more information or "uniqueness of interactivity than the research team and readers can come to understand" (ibid, 2006: 22).

b. The selected students had to have participated in the whole data collection process, while offering multiple perspectives on the studied phenomenon (e.g. language learning), as will be discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

c. I sought a balanced number of students according to the country of destination: three in each of them.

d. Although I did not eventually manage to have a balanced sample in terms of gender, I was mindful to include both female and male students' views on the research issues.

As will be described in section 3.2, different evidence from each of the cases was gathered through the collection of different types of data. The main part of the data collection took place from May 2013 until July 2014. However, in March/April 2015 I conducted individual narrative interviews with the participants. According to Loeber and Farrington (1994: 892), retaining participants over a period of time is not an easy task at all, since "the longer the duration of a longitudinal study, the more likely selective attrition (the loss of subjects for a variety of reasons)". Indeed, collecting data from the different cases at the same time, mostly by online means, was very challenging, and I had to use different strategies in order to engage them to constantly be active during the data collection process and try to avoid the loss of participants – for instance, I offered them my help to correct some essays that they had to write in English for the university, if they needed me to do so.

For ethical reasons, all participants signed consent forms in which they were assured of confidentiality and told clearly for whom the research was being carried out and what the objectives of the project were. To that end, the names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms in this study.

3.1.1.2. The Cases' Profiles

Table 2 shows some information about the nine cases selected for the current study, ranging in age from 22 to 26. In general terms, it can be observed that (a) all of them are born in Catalonia; (b) seven were living with their parents when they embarked on the Erasmus experience and this has emerged as a significant aspect in some of the participants' discourses, as will be discussed in the analysis chapters; (c) seven of them had already had some kind of experience abroad – mostly as students of English; and (d) the majority spent one semester abroad, with the exception of two participants: Verònica, who went to Italy, and Marina, who went to the United Kingdom, both for one year.

Table 2 Participants' profiles (names are pseudonyms)

Students' names	Age	Living situation	Degree	Previous experience abroad	Length of the Erasmus	Host Country
Ariadna	26	With her parents	Social Education	**YES** London (5 months, *working as a waitress in an Italian restaurant*) Cheltenham (3 weeks *with a local family*)	5 months	Denmark
Mònica	22	With her sister	Education	**YES** Ohio (USA – 1 month as a student, alone) London (2 weeks) *as a student with a local family*	5 months	Denmark
Joan	24	With his parents	Industrial Engineering	**YES** Serbia (2 months, *alone, as a student*)	5 months	Denmark
Patrícia	23	With her parents	Law	**NO**	5 months	Italy
Verònica	22	She's been living alone for two years	Business Administration	**YES** Canada (1month) Malta (1 month) London(1 month) *Always as a tourist*	10 months	Italy
Josep Miquel	23	With his parents	Law	**NO**	6 months	Italy

Students' names	Age	Living situation	Degree	Previous experience abroad	Length of the Erasmus	Host Country
Amanda	22	With her parents	Law	**YES** Berlin (15 days) (Dublin 1 week) (Paris 1 week) (Austria 1 week) (Portugal 1 week) (*As a tourist and always with Catalans*)	5 months	UK
Marina	22	With her parents	English Studies	**YES** Paris (5 days) Praga (5 days) Boston (10 days) Germany (1 week, *with the school*)	10 months	UK
Roger	22	With his parents	Law	**YES** London (2 weeks) Oxford (3 weeks) Brussels (2 weeks)	5 months	UK

3.2. Methods for Data Collection

In order to provide an answer to the main research question of this study as explained in the introduction, the present section will provide the detail regarding the design and implementation of the different methods used for data collection, while demonstrating the adequacy of such approaches for the analysis of the issues examined. The figure below summarizes schematically the different elements of the fieldwork that make the current study a qualitative one together with their chronological implementation.

Figure 8 The process of data collection
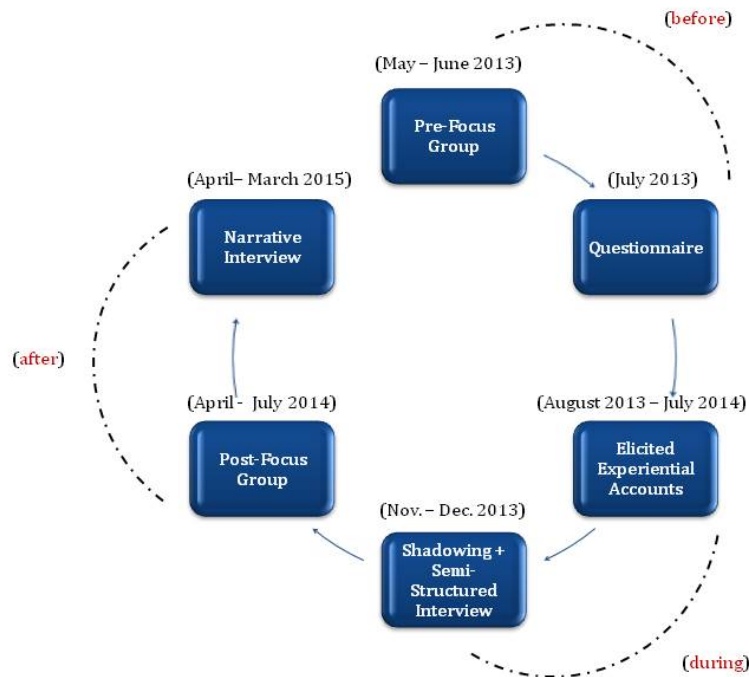
As a longitudinal study, this stuy is not based on "one-shot data collection exercises" (Benson, 2014: 159) but on multiple and complementary kinds of data collected over a period of two years. The aim in collecting all these data was to help illuminate the development (if any) of the focal students' identity over time mostly by obtaining first-hand accounts of their experiences through interviews and elicited written and oral reflections, which were also complemented with the method known as *shadowing*. This method has been described as being "related to,

but also distinctive from, both participant and non-participant observation" (Gilliat-Ray, 2011: 471) and, according to McDonald (2005: 457), it allows the researcher not to rely only "on an individual's account of their role in an organization, but [to view] it directly".

The value of doing longitudinal research has been highlighted by Bagnoli and Clark (2010: 106), who claim that "following up people over time might be interesting for appreciating change" and, from a methodological point of view, it also allowed me to evaluate and adjust my strategies for data collection during the time that the fieldwork was being carried out. The process of data collection finished with the narrative interviews that I held with the selected participants one year after they had come back, which somehow proved to be useful for (a) hearing their voices individually and not as a group; (b) for examining the participants' voices individually, after one year, while focusing on the nature of the impact that, according to them, their SA experience had on their identities; and (c) for rounding out the data previously collected while co-constructing their Erasmus storied experiences. The next sections provide the information regarding each of the methods used for the data collection.

3.2.1. Pre- and Post- Focus Group Interviews

The focus group interview was one of the multiple and complementary methods for data collection in my research study. A total of 7 focus groups were conducted comprising 23 participants: 11 of whom were female and 12 were male, aged between 21 and 26. They were organized according to the participants' country of destination (UK, Denmark or Italy) and they were carried out twice: one before the students went abroad – these are hence called pre-focus groups - and another one once they had come back (post-focus groups). The bulk of these sessions was generally conducted by at least two researchers, always including myself. As can be seen in table 3, each group, which consisted of, on average, 6 research participants, was video and audio recorded and lasted between 1 and 2 hours approximately.

Table 3 Pre- and post- focus group interviews

(Pre) Focus Group Interviews	Students going to: <u>United Kingdom</u> (22nd May 2013)	5 students + 2 researchers Length: 1h,41min.	
	Students going to: <u>Denmark</u> (30th May 2013)	13 students + 3 researchers Length: 1h,36min.	
	Students going to: <u>Italy</u> (18th June 2013)	4 students + 2 researchers Length: 1h,63min.	
(Post) Focus Group Interviews	Students going to: <u>United Kingdom</u> (28th April 2014)	2 students + 2 researchers Length: 1h,2min.	*the students had been abroad for 1 semester
	Students going to: <u>Denmark</u> (16th July 2014)	5 students + 2 researchers Length: 1h,13min.	
	Students going to: <u>Italy</u> (20th March 2014)	3 students + 2 researchers Length: 53minutes	*the students had been abroad in the first semester
	Students going to: <u>Italy</u> (17th June 2014)	3 students + 2 researchers Length: 44 minutes	*two students went to Italy in the second semester and the other one had been there for one year

In the following sections, a detailed description regarding the development and the dynamics of the focus group interviews is provided, in order to give more insight into the how these sessions were planned and moderated, and also into the way(s) in which they have contributed to the research questions that guide the current study.

3.2.1.1. The dynamics of focus group interviews

Focus groups have been defined as "group discussions organised to explore a specific set of issues such as people's views and experiences" (Kitzinger, 1995: 103). A typical function associated with focus group interviews is to "generate rich, complex, nuanced, and even contradictory accounts of how people ascribe meaning to and interpret their lived experience" (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis,

2011: 546). This definition is, at the same time, very much aligned with the so-called 'interpretive turn' and, therefore, with ontological and epistemological issues. The ideas undergirding the philosophy of this interpretive turn are very clearly stated by Yanow and Schwartz-Shea (2015: 14):

> The turning, then, is, by and large, twofold: it is a turning away from, if not against, the idea of a social scientific practice in which humans are conceptualized as objects, much as rocks or plants are in the physical and/or natural sciences, thereby erasing, too, the human traits of researchers; and it is a turning toward a rehumanized, contextualized set of practices. (...) its emphasis on their meaning-focused and person-centered concerns, as distinct from the more behavioralist connotations of 'social sciences'.

According to the 'interpretive turn', the social world is not a simple collection of external facts but a milieu of socially constructed meaning or, in other words, "a socially constructed nature of knowledge" (Moore et al., 2015: 18). Thus, I look at the data gathered from focus group sessions as produced in the very same interaction among my participants, while considering that reality is "(at least partially), socially constructed and thus changing and changeable" (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2011: 546). The emphasis is on "the role of the group dynamics in shaping the knowledge that is produced" (Moore et al., 2015: 18) and, therefore, focus group interviews are claimed to be a collectivistic research method rather than an individualistic one (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010), which allows the researcher not only to focus on what participants think or know, but also to examine "how they think and why they think that way" (Kitzinger, 1995: 299).

Focus groups are complex sites for collecting data in which "self, other and context seem to be co-emergent phenomena" (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013: 6) and this is why we followed some recommended practices that contribute to the success of focus group work, as those proposed by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013: 61):

> (...) exploiting pre-existing social networks that encourage collegiality; doing our best to create safe, comfortable, and

even festive spaces 'of' the people; using open-ended prompts for questions and then letting group participants 'take over'; keeping notes and following up on key themes and gaps; listening for breakdowns and subtexts and asking for elaboration. Finally, expect unpredictable group dynamics and even conflict and contradiction.

This was very well thought of before moderating the focus group interviews since it is of great importance to have a well-developed understanding of the 'group' and also of the place where it is going to be conducted. The sessions had to be relaxed, since "a comfortable setting, refreshments, and sitting round in a circle will help to establish the right atmosphere" (Kitzinger 1995: 301). It is the familiarity between the researcher(s) and the participants, the elicited topic under discussion, and the level of formality of the encounter that will ultimately affect what Ho (2006: 13) calls "the naturalness of focus groups".

Picture 1 Pre-Focus Group Denmark

Picture 2 Post-Focus Group

3.2.1.2.   The Groups

Beyond the age and gender differences among the participants, the groups were homogeneous in the sense that they were all about to participate in the same study abroad programme and thus shared similar excitements and worries. Yet, they were not "naturally occurring" (Kitzinger, 1995: 300) but drawn together for the purpose of the current research study.

The first step in planning these interviews was to recruit the students to come and participate in the focus group sessions. In order to do so, I enlisted the help of three students –one for each session- who had been in their host countries the previous year doing their Erasmus. The idea was that these already experienced

students gave information which they deemed relevant to the participants, who were about to go through the same experience. Thus, this first meeting allowed the participants to hear a little bit about the place they were going to and ask as many questions as they wanted, which mostly had to do with practical issues like searching for a flat, the total cost of the stay and health issues. Afterwards, as will be developed in the next section, the group interaction was based on a list of topic questions related to the three main interests of the larger research project to which this study belongs: intercultural competence, multilingualism and European citizenship. Although, on some occasions, some students seemed to take "the role of spokespeople on behalf of the rest" (Ho, 2006: 6), the participation level in the focus group interviews was generally high.

As some scholars have pointed out, the potential of focus group interviews also depends on different methodological limitations which researchers may have to deal with (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010; Ho, 2006; Moore, 2015; Morgan, 1996). In the present study, we had to deal with three main limitations which somehow affected the data gathered through this method: the group size in the case of the (pre) focus group with the students going to Denmark; the use of technical words in some of the questions that were asked to the students; and the students' lack of previous acquaintance with some of the researchers present in the sessions.

In the case of the pre-focus group with the students going to Denmark, more participants than expected finally turned up, forming a group of 13 participants, as previously shown in table 3, without taking into account the presence of the three researchers. The big size of the group caused the withdrawal from participation of some participants, unless asked about something directly. Apart from this, as shown in excerpt 3 below, another problem which we had to deal with was the use of some technical words while phrasing the questions, without immediately specifying what we meant by them and, therefore, assuming the students' understanding of such concepts:

**Excerpt 3 'Have you ever heard anyone talk about this concept of_
interculturality/'**

RESEARCHER:	have you ever heard anyone talk about this concept of_ interculturality/ o·f_ intercultural education_ intercultural communication\ this_ if you hear this word_ you more or less know what it is about\ i··f now we_we told you_ * if someone tells you that he doesn't have enough intercultural competence_ what do you understand by that/ or that he has a lot of intercultural competence\	*heu sentit a parlar mai d'aquest concepte de_ interculturalitat/ de·· educació intercultura·l_ comunicació intercultural/ això_ * si sentiu la paraula_ vosaltres més o menys sabeu de què va la cosa\ si·· ara no&nosaltres us diguéssim_ quan a algú us diu_ que no té prou competència intercultural_ què enteneu per això/ o que en té molta de competència intercultural*
PARTICIPANT:	we··ll_ interacting_ * I don't know\	*pos·· relacionar-se··_ *no sé*

Although the student in excerpt 3 tried to say something in response to the question posed, the researcher later on felt the need to explain what we understood by those terms which left the students not knowing what to say.

Finally, after having been in contact with my participants for some months by online means and also through my visits on-site, I realized that, while conducting the (post) focus groups with other researchers, the students were not as involved as they had previously been in other personal and non-personal interactions which I had conducted. Although the participation of the students in the focus group sessions was generally quite high, the presence of some researchers, with whom they were not very much acquainted, sometimes affected not only what they said (e.g. some topics that were raised by the participants in personal encounters with me were not mentioned in the focus group sessions) but also the how they said what they wanted to say (e.g. the use of more colloquial language). In fact, Ho (2006: 13) highlights the importance of familiarity between the researcher(s) and the participants stating that "the more familiar the researcher is with the participants, the more natural the interaction".

3.2.1.3. The Focus

In this study, the focus group interviews, which were held in the students' native language – Catalan-, was conceived as an appropriate research tool for data collection that would "encourage students to open up and talk freely" (Ho, 2006: 2). It is a group which is 'focused' in the sense that "it involves some kind of collective activity – such as viewing a film, examining a single health education message or simply debating a particular set of questions" (Kitzinger, 1994: 103). In the current study, the aim of the pre-focus group interview was to gather viewpoints and opinions of the different students about what they expected from the Erasmus experience and, more specifically, what their thoughts or perceptions were about the impact that their stay abroad would have on their identities. As an example, excerpt 4 shows one of the students stating that she thought she would come back being more open-minded; and, in excerpt 5, a student talked about the UK as the most convenient country that would help him improve his English, which was in fact his motivation for participating in an Erasmus.

Excerpt 4 'Maybe with a more open mind obviously\'

RESEARCHER:	do you think that the fact of staying six months in Denma··rk can change you in some aspect/	*creieu que el fet d'esta··r sis mesos a Dinamarca·· us pot canviar/ alguna· alguna cosa/*
STUDENT:	I think that it does change you * I mean_ when you come back it changes * it will be for a short time because here you get used to it again\	*jo penso que sí·· canvia * o sigui_ quan tornes aquí canvia_ serà per un període curt perquè per aquí te tornes a acostumar una altra vegada a lo que· tenies abans*
SÒNIA:	so you think you'll be the same then/ before and after coming back\	*per tant seràs la mateixa no/ abans que després de =tornar*
STUDENT:	<u>maybe with a more open mind obviously\</u>	*potser amb la ment més oberta clar*

Excerpt 5 'Mainly because of English\'

| STUDENT 1: | yes_yes_ mainly because of English\ how could I say_ * everything_ I mean_ doing an Erasmus_ in Italy_ in Germany_ Finland_ and you say_ <u>what better than going to to the UK/</u> | *sí_ sí_ en principi per l'anglès * com diria_* tot_ *vull dir_ fer Erasmus_ a Itàlia_ a Alemània_ Finlàndia_ i dius_ què millor que anar a a_ a Regne Unit/ perquè trobaràs tots los cartells en* |

	because you will find all the signs in English	anglès_
STUDENT 2:	and and the correct English\ I mean	i_ i el anglès correcte\ vull dir_
STUDENT 1:	exactly\	exacte\

On the other hand, the post-focus group allowed us to see whether those expectations were finally met or not, and also the way(s) in which the students positioned themselves towards the nature of the impact of their SA experience on their sense of self.

The focus group interviews always started with a general introduction on the aims of the larger research project to which this study belongs and also on how the sessions would be conducted. After this short introduction, the focus group interviews centred on three specific issues the larger research project was interested in: multilingualism, intercultural competence and European citizenship. The following table shows a sample of the questions that were asked to the students both in the (pre) focus groups and in the (post) focus groups, in order to see whether their thoughts, feelings or opinions regarding those issues had changed after some months abroad or not.

Table 4 Questions in the focus groups

Themes	(Pre) Focus Group	(Post) Focus Group
Multilingualism	Quantes llengües diríeu que parleu ara? (*How many languages would you say that you speak?*) El tema de les llengües com us el plantegeu amb relació a la vostra estada Erasmus? Quina situació us sembla que us trobareu? Teniu intenció d'aprofitar al màxim la possibilitat d'aprendre més llengües o millorar les que ja sabeu? (*In relation to languages, what do*	Després d'uns mesos a l'estranger, quantes llengües diríeu que parleu? (*After some months abroad, how many languages would you say you speak?*) El tema de les llengües, com us l'heu muntat en relació durant l'estada? Us heu trobat amb la situació que esperàveu trobar? Diríeu que heu aprofitat al màxim la possibilitat d'aprendre més llengües o millorar les que ja sabíeu ?

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	you think about them in relation with your Erasmus stay? What situation do you expect to find? Do you intend to take the most out of the possibility to learn more languages or improve the ones you already know?)	(*In relation to languages, what did you do while abroad? Have you found the situation that you expected to find? Would you say you have taken the most out of the possibility to learn more languages or improve the ones you already knew?*)
Intercultural competence	Hi ha gent que veuen aquest tipus d'experiència com a problemàtica i fins i tots de vegades temen patir una mena de xoc cultural. En canvi altra gent veuen l'experiència com a totalment positiva, exempta de conflicte, com un descobriment sense conseqüències negatives. Com ho veieu vosaltres? (*Some people see this experience as a problematic one and, sometimes, they are even scared of going through a kind of culture shock. Instead, other people see this experience as totally positive, without conflicts, as a discovery without negative consequences. How do you see this?*) Com preveieu que serà la vostra adaptació a un nou entorn? (*How do you expect your adaptation to a new environment to be?*)	Hi ha gent que veuen l'estada Erasmus com a problemàtica i fins i tots de vegades temen patir una mena de xoc cultural. En canvi, altra gent veuen l'experiència com a totalment positiva, exempta de conflicte, com un descobriment sense conseqüències negatives. Com la representaríeu ara vosaltres? (*Some people see this experience as a problematic one and, sometimes, they are even scared of going through a kind of culture shock. Instead, other people see this experience as totally positive, without conflicts, as a discovery without negative consequences. How do you see this now?*) Com ha estat la vostra adaptació a un nou entorn? (*How has your adaptation to a new environment been?*)
European citizenship	Creieu que la decisió vostra de fer un estada Erasmus pot tenir a veure amb la idea d'una identitat europea compartida entre els membre de la UE, que fa que us pugueu sentir més còmodes/segurs/tranquils en una universitat europea que en una universitat fora d'Europa? (*Do you think that your decision for doing an Erasmus can be related to the idea of a European identity, shared among the members of the EU that make you feel more comfortable/safe/quiet*	Creieu que la decisió vostra de fer un estada Erasmus ha afectat la vostra idea d'una identitat europea compartida entre els membres de la UE, que fa que us pugueu sentir més segurs/tranquils/còmodes en una universitat europea que en una universitat fora d'Europa? (*Do you think that your decision for doing an Erasmus has affected your idea of a European identity, shared among the members of the EU that make you feel more comfortable/safe/quiet in a*

	in a European university rather than in a university outside Europe?)	*European university rather than in a university outside Europe?*)
	Creieu que la vostra estada Erasmus pot tenir alguna mena d'impacte pel que fa als vostre sentiment de ciutadà europeu?	Creieu que la vostra estada Erasmus ha tingut alguna mena d'impacte pel que fa als vostre sentiment de ciutadà europeu?
	(*Do you think that your Erasmus stay can have any kind of impact in relation to your feeling of a European citizen?*)	(*Do you think that your Erasmus stay has had any kind of impact in relation to your feeling of a European citizen?*)

Morgan (1996: 130) defines focus groups as "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher". In this definition, Morgan talks about one essential component of focus groups: the researcher's active role in creating the discussion. The reasons why I did not use focus groups as the *sole* method for collecting data is because, on the one hand, it did not allow me to study the nature of the impact of my participants' Erasmus experience from an emic or from an insider's perspective which investigates how people perceive and categorize the world (Kottak, 2006). The discussion topics did not naturally emerge from the participants but were previously set up by the researchers, who sometimes asked questions with prior assumptions. On the other hand, since focus groups are a collectivist research method rather than individualistic one (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010), they proved to be useful in order to gain an idea of what the students thought, not individually, but as a group – although the participants did not always align with each other.

3.2.2. Questionnaire with Open-Ended Questions

Although we had listened to the students' ideas, opinions and feelings in the pre-focus group, they were also asked to answer this very short questionnaire which was sent to them via email one week before departing to their host countries, with the objective of collecting – not only collective – but also individual data. The questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions that revolved around their motivations for participating in this study abroad programme, their expectations of what they thought they would encounter in their new lives abroad

and the way(s) in which they were preparing themselves – linguistically, culturally, personally, etc. - (if they thought they had to) in order to make the most out of this experience. The questions were the following:

Table 5 Written questionnaire outline

1)	Què t'ha empès a voler fer una estada Erasmus?	*What has motivated you to do an Erasmus?*
2)	Què en saps del país on vas? Quina imatge en tens?	*What do you know about the country you are going to? What image do you have of this country?*
3)	Quines diferències esperes trobar entre la universitat i la societat lleidatana/catalana/espanyola i la universitat i la societat del país on vas?	*What diffeerences do you expect to find between the Catalan and the Danish/ English / Italian university and society?*
4)	T'has plantejat fer algunes coses concretes per treure el màxim profit de la teva estada? Si pots, indica accions concretes que et planteges dur a terme.	*Have you thought of doing any specific thing in order to take the most out of this stay abroad? If possible, state concrete actions that you plan to carry out.*
5)	T'has plantejat intentar aprendre la llengua del país on vas com a un dels objectius de la teva estada?	*Have you thought of learning the language of the host country as one of the objectives of your stay?*
6)	Amb qui creus que et comunicaràs més durant la teva estada? Ordena per ordre de més a menys (1 = amb els que més t'hi comunicaràs; 3 = amb els que menys contacte tindràs)	*With whom do you think you will communicate more during your stay? From one to three, 1= those with whom you will communicate more; 3= those with whom you will have les contact*

This short questionnaire allowed me to (a) see if the participants' motivations had to do with their predisposition to undergo some changes – whether they were related to the learning of a second language or to any other aspect – and (b) compare these early written thoughts with later accounts of their Erasmus experiences during and after the stay abroad. This time though, in contrast with the focus group methodology, this tool for data collection provided a chance for the students to express themselves individually, with no time restrictions and without the need to spontaneously interact with others.

3.2.3. Elicited Experiential Accounts

As suggested by Lincoln and Denzin (2011: 3), there exist "many methods and approaches that fall under the category of qualitative research". Although I shadowed the participants for two/three days, taking into account that experience cannot be directly observable, the participants' elicited experiential accounts described in this section were conceived as one of the multiple but complementary kinds of data which allowed me to gain a richer insight into their discursively constructed realities while being abroad.

As can be seen in figure 9, from the very first week until the end of their stay abroad, the students were asked to produce five elicited experiential accounts reflecting upon different aspects that we thought were part of their experiences abroad and send them to me by email.

Figure 9 Elicited experiential accounts
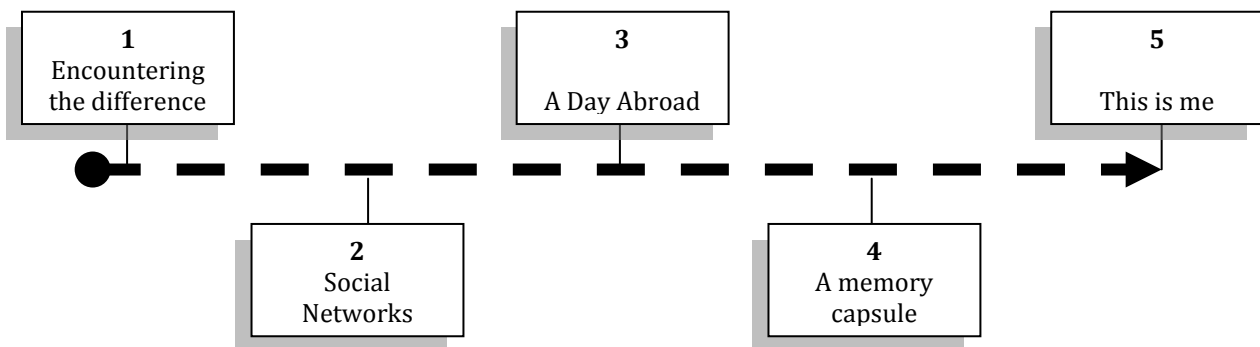
In the first 'task' that the participants were asked to do what we called "Encountering the difference", for which the students had to take a photo of a particular object, person or location that, upon their arrival, they found different from their country - something that surprised them - and write a short text describing the encountering of such difference (if encountered), together with their thoughts and feelings connected with it. The second task revolved around

their social networks, that is, the people they normally interacted with during their stay. The participants had to complete a table with information regarding their relationship with those networks, the languages they used to interact with them, the frequency of those interactions, and the means that they used (face-to-face conversations, Skype, email, whatsapp, etc.). In the middle of their stay, students had to produce a written and visual account of what a typical day abroad was like for them – this was the third task they were asked to do. For the visual task, they were asked to take pictures of all the key moments that were part of their day abroad and then write a short text describing those moments. For the fourth task, students were asked to think about a 'turning point' or something significant that occurred to them during their journey abroad that was important for them in one way or another and that they would like to remember after some years, just as it happened – this is why we called this task "a memory capsule". Finally, in the last task, which they had in the end of their stay, we made the participants reflect upon all these months that they had spent in another country and the impact – if any – that they had had on their identities. They were asked to write a text describing whether they felt they had changed after this experience or not, and what their thoughts and feelings were in relation to their by-then ending journey.

The data gathered from the participants' elicited experiential accounts consist of "first-person or self-reports of participants' own experiences" (Polkinghorne, 2005: 137), through which they were asked to (a) reflect upon different aspects of their own experience and (b) communicate what their thoughts and feelings were in relation to such aspects through the symbols of the English language. The reason why participants were asked to send me their experiential accounts in English is because we wanted to see in what ways their complex sociolinguistic repertoires, as learners of English or as *multilingual subjects*, in Kramsch's (2006) terms, allowed them to "perform different kinds of 'selves' in each language (Koven, 1998: 410). Although I gave them the option to shift from English to their native language when necessary, English did not appear to be an obstacle to discursively construct their identities for any of them but one, Verònica (IT), who refused to do it in English claiming that it was too difficult for her. Yet, regardless of the data being in English or in Catalan, it is what

Polkinghorne (2005) calls *languaged data* that allows us to study the discourses underlying the participants' symbols of language. From this perspective, the analysis will not focus on the participants' "simply single words but [their] interrelated words combined into sentences and sentences combined into discourses" (Polkinghorne, 2005: 138) through which they construct and reveal their views of who they are.

3.2.4. Shadowing

McDonald (2005: 455) defines shadowing as "a qualitative research technique that has seldom been used and rarely been discussed critically in the social science literature". This has also been supported by Quinlan (2008) who, in the same line, claims that "little is written" (Quinlan, 2008: 1480) about this data collection strategy and who, with methodological discussions about it, intends to enlighten shadowing while trying to "respond to this deficit" (ibid., 2008: 1480).

Although shadowing remains "under-described in the research methods literature" (Engstrom, 2010: 48), Gilliat-Ray (2011: 470), in a very recent study reporting on her experience of shadowing a British Muslim Hospital chaplain, states that shadowing is "generally described as a method for gathering empirical data within qualitative ethnographic fieldwork-based research" with a particular focus of attention upon "the daily practice of a single individual, living and working within a complex institutional social setting" (ibid.,2011: 470). The same is emphasized in Quinlan's following definition:

> Shadowing entails a researcher closely following a subject over a period of time to investigate what people actually do in the course of their everyday lives, not what their roles dictate of them. Behaviours, opinions, actions and explanations for those actions are reflected in the resulting thick, descriptive data. (Quinlan, 2008: 1480)

The previous definitions of shadowing express this interest in focusing on the individual, and are mainly concerned with "the direct, first-hand nature of the

experience" (McDonald, 2005: 466) of the researcher rather than focusing only on the participants' accounts of their experiences, which might be provided through interviews or self reports. This is somehow connected to what the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin said in an interview, as reported in Kelly's article entitled 'Revealing Bakhtin' (1993:61):

> In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding – in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot ever really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space, and because they are others.

In the light of Bakhtin's words, my motivations in using shadowing could be summarized as: (a) obtaining an 'other-report' about my participants' experiences and being able to discuss it with them later on, in order to co-construct the meaning that they discursively give to those experiences; and (b) being aware and steering away from the idea of representing 'reality' from an insider's perspective or, as it is called in the participant-observer literature, from "going native" (McDonald, 2005: 459). Relating to this "attitude of outsidedness" (Czarniawska, 2007: 20), Czarniawska states that "an observer can never know *better* than an actor; a stranger cannot say *more* about any culture than a native, but observers and strangers can see *different* things than actors and natives can" (ibid. 2007: 21).

Different scholars have highlighted the advantages of shadowing (Engstrom, 2010; Gilliat-Ray, 2011; McDonald, 2005; Quinlan, 2008). For instance, McDonald (2005) mentions two advantages of this method: (a) the level of analysis, which allows the researcher to look at what is going on directly and thus gain data that is "grounded in actual events rather than reconstructions of previously occurring events as in focus group and interviewing collection techniques" (Quinlan, 2008: 1482); and (b) the unit of analysis, an individual, who is examined in a holistic way while focusing on "not just their opinions or

behaviour, but both of them concurrently" (McDonald, 2005: 457), and not just in one particular setting but throughout the whole day.

My shadowing experience entailed spending a total of 25 days shadowing 13 Erasmus students from the University of Lleida: 4 in the UK, 3 in Italy and 6 in Denmark. Each individual was shadowed for between two and three days. However, there were two participants who lived and spent most of their time abroad together and, this, allowed to shadow the two of them at the same time, both in academic and non-academic contexts. Indeed, the experience of shadowing allowed me to, in the first place, have a glimpse of how they were coping with their Erasmus experience(s), while also gaining insight into the social networks with whom my participants interacted, the languages they used, the activities they normally engaged with, and their stance towards anything that was part of their daily life abroad. In the second place, I was able to use my experience as their *shadow* or the sort of *other-report* that I could get from shadowing my participants, in order not to simply rely on their recounting of events but to be able to later be better acquainted with their environment and to ultimately co-construct the meaning of their study-abroad experience(s). Here is an example of different instances taken from the last interview with the participants, in which the contribution of shadowing in my study is clearly proved to have been relevant:

Excerpt 6 'I remember that you made a comment when I shadowed you_'
(***Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Mònica, one year later***)

SÒNIA:	I remember that you made a comment_ when I shadowed you_ +mm··+ and <u>you told me tha·t</u> it is very difficult_	*me'n recordo que em vas fer un comentari_quan et vaig fer el shadowing_ +em··+ i <u>em vas dir que·</u>_és molt difícil_*
MÒNICA:	+hm+\	*+hm+*
SÒNIA:	it is very difficult to express the same in English\ right/ sometimes\	*és molt difícil expressar el mateix en anglès\ no/ a vegades*
MÒNICA:	{(ENG) yes\}	*{(ENG) yes\}*

Excerpt 7 'I saw a quite relaxed atmosphere in class'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Joan, one year later*)

SÒNIA:	<u>I saw</u> a quite relaxed atmosphere in class\ remember that I went with that teache··r and you were very relaxed_ there was a lot of dialogue\ right/ between student and teacher\	*<u>jo vaig veure</u> un ambient bastant relaxat a classe\ recordes que vaig venir amb aquell professo··r i estaveu molt relaxa·ts_ hi havia molt diàleg\ no/ entre alumne i profe*
JOAN:	yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ there was a lot of dialogue\ which doesnt't happen here\	*sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ hi havia molt diàleg\ cosa que aquí no hi ha*

Excerpt 8 'you already saw this_ that we were a lot of Spanish\'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Josep Miquel, one year later*)

JOSEP M.:	and then they have a lot of * <u>you already saw this</u> that we were a lot of Spanish\	*i llavors tenen molts * <u>ja ho vas veure tu</u> que erem molts espanyols*
SÒNIA:	yes\ and you find this positive or you say well_I should have··_	*sí\ i això ho trobes positiu o dius ostras_ haguès hagut de··_*
JOSEP M.:	well_	*bueno_*

As shown in the excerpts provided, in the last interview, I sometimes made references to what I saw and also to what they said to me during my shadowing experience. Becoming the students' shadow for two days allowed me to witness the participants in action at first hand and also to understand better what they were saying to me and to add or contrast information in order to finally co-construct their own Erasmus stories. Shadowing also brought into light the unique nature of their experiences; it made me aware of the participants' individual differences, which were somehow affecting the way(s) in which they were describing what they were going through. In addition, it was also thanks to the shadowing technique that I even ended up becoming part of their stories. In fact, on some occasions, the students themselves took for granted that "you already saw this", as shown in the last excerpt, which proved to be very useful for sharing and negotiating with them the way(s) in which we were interpreting things in order to finally co-construct their stories.

Some of the drawbacks that this "conspicuous invisibility" (Quinlan, 2008:1480) entails have also been stressed in the existing though limited literature. McDonald (2005: 458) states that "shadowing is not without its difficulties", and Czarniawska (2007: 33) has even described this method as "awkward for the shadowed person, ambiguous for the researcher, and inconvenient for many others". One of the difficulties mentioned by most of the researchers who have gone through the experience of shadowing is the "disruption of the participants' normal flow of activities" (Quinlan, 2008: 1492). In order not to alter the usual flow of my participants' routines, I made this very clear in an email that I sent them while planning my visit, in which I stated that they had to do what they normally did.

Apart from this, I had to constantly (re)negotiate access to the different events (conversations, meetings, classes) that my shadowees engaged in. In this sense, I often had to expect the unexpected since, as Quinlan (2008: 1497) puts it, "it is impossible to identify all the individuals that our shadowees will encounter over the course of a day", and this involved continuous ethical-decisions. Fortunately, I was welcomed in most situations and I was able to go with my participants to class, to group meetings with other students and to other places, such as the gym or the university canteen, where other people were present.

'Being there' with each student for two days allowed me to study the participants holistically on site and, this required constant attention and even ended up being an "exhausting and overwhelming experience" (McDonald, 2005: 458). In relation to this, Czarniawska (2007: 56) states that one of the advantages of shadowing is "its mobility". However, being constantly on the move makes the fact of taking field notes a little bit more complicated. Some of the strategies that I used to deal with this are writing quick thoughts whenever seated or even audio recording them while walking; and, at the end of the day, writing up as much as possible while trying to remember things that I had seen or heard during the previous hours.

Finally, another challenge shadowers must face is how to manage the different kinds of data (videos, photos, recorded conversations, field notes) that

end up being thick and descriptive of "behaviours, opinions, actions, and explanations for those actions" (Quinlan, 2008: 1480). In my case, as stated before, I used my experience as a shadower in order to be able not to only rely on the participants' recounting of events, but to become a co-narrator and co-construct the meaning of each of their Erasmus stories.

3.2.5. The narrative interview: a relational and discursive act

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 58) suggested that all human experience can be expressed in the form of a narrative and, in fact, "there seems to be in all forms of human life a need to tell". As Roland Barthes puts it, narrative is considered to be present "in every age, in every place, in every society; (...) it is international, trans historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (Barthes, 1977: 79). In the current study, the narrative interviews with the participants, henceforth NI, complemented the other data gathered from the other methods for data collection previously described. The narrative interview is considered as a qualitative research technique which stimulates interviewees to express their experiences "as they saw it, in their own language, using their own terms of reference, and emphasizing actions or participants which they regard as being significant" (Bates, 2004: 16). Besides, narrative becomes a resource individuals can draw on to "impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Riessman, 1993: 2).

As shown in table 6, a total of 9 narrative interviews – one with each participant – were audio-recorded one year after they had come back from their Erasmus stay. The interviews generally took place in a seminar room of the university and they ranged from 10 to 30 minutes approximately, depending on how easy the participants found it to remember and reflect upon the meaning that their experiences had had for them. Each interview was transcribed *verbatim* and also translated into English, since they were sites that proved to be useful for examining the participants' voices *individually*, and in a group.

Table 6 Narrative interviews' information

Country of destination	Participant's name	Date of the interview	Length	Place
United Kingdom	Marina	8th April 2015	28 min., 28 sec.	Seminar room
	Amanda	13th March 2015	20 min., 16 sec.	My office
	Roger	18th March 2015	25 min., 27 sec.	Seminar room
Denmark	Mònica	20th April 2015	35 min., 22 sec.	Via Skype
	Ariadna	10th March 2015	25 min., 15 sec.	Seminar room
	Joan	20th March 2015	19 min., 09 sec.	My office
Italy	Josep Miquel	10th March 2015	9 min., 14 sec.	Seminar room
	Patrícia	11th March 2015	9 min., 46 sec.	Seminar room
	Verònica	10th March 2015	21 min., 17 sec.	Seminar room

These interviews, which were conducted in a one-on-one environment, were unstructured and, therefore, I did not have a list of questions or topics to be covered. The idea was not to force or close down any topics that the participants wanted to touch upon but to allow them to activate anything they wished about their lived experiential realities and, thus, to "elicit a less imposed and therefore more 'valid' rendering of the informant's perspective" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000: 61). The plot of the participants' stories becomes a resource through which they express emotions, perceptions, evaluations and attitudes towards the episode being narrated or, following Paulson's (2011: 151) words, "stories are interpretations of experiences containing an evaluative or moral framework". Thus, the act of storying is not a simple "listing of events, but an attempt to link them both in time and meaning" (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000:59). The three phases that I followed in order to plan and conduct the interviews are the following ones proposed by Jovchelovitch and Bauer:
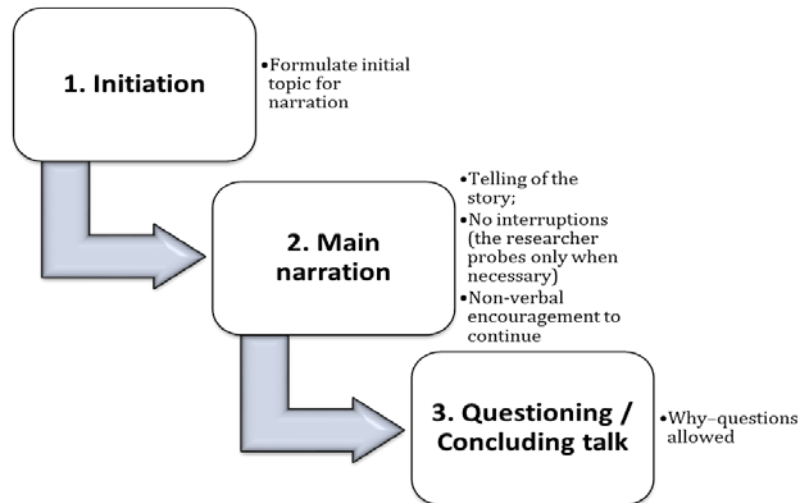
Basic phases of the narrative interview.
Adapted from Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000)

In the first phase, I asked the participants for permission to record the interview and explained the procedure of the interview that we would follow. The following excerpt shows the initiation phase of the narrative interview with Mònica, in which I asked her to tell me her Erasmus experience from the beginning until the end, in the form of a story, while "bringing in whatever [she] consider[ed] to be relevant" (Bates, 2004: 16).

Excerpt 9 Initiation phase of the narrative interview
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Mònica*)

| SÒNIA: | Mònica_ I know your Erasmus story_ I know it from the beginning until the end\ okay/ +hmm·+ and I know it but I have it as fragmented\ I have it by episodes\ right/ in the activities I could see what you were saying_ and then_ I interviewed you in the middle of your stay\ right/ +uhh·+ now I * after some months back * (...) it's already been a year since you came back\ right/ you have had time to digest this experience\ (...) now what I'm asking you is that after some time_ <u>you explain to me your Erasmus story as if it was a story</u>\ right/ I want you to tell me * and (...) I will not interrupt | *Mònica_ jo conec la història Erasmus teva_ la conec des del principi fins al final\ vale/ +em··+ i la conec però la tinc fragmentada\ la tinc amb episodis\ no/ a les activita·ts jo anava veient què m'anaves dient_i despré·s_ et vaig entrevistar també a mitja estada\ no/ +eh··+ jo ara * després d'uns mesos que has tornat * (...) ja fa un any i algo més que has tornat\ no/ has tingut temps de digerir aquesta estada\ (...) jo el que ara et demano_ és_ que després d'un temps_em em * <u>m'expliquis la teva història Erasmus com si fos un conte</u>\ vale/ vull que m'expliquis * i (...) jo no* |

	you\ okay/ I will not say anything\ +uhh·+ <u>I just want you to tell me how it all started_ how Mònica's Erasmus started_ and how it ended\</u> you will see that I will be taking notes and afterwards I may ask you something that has not been clear to me or that I need you to develop\	*t'interrompré\ vale/ jo no diré res\ +eh·+ simplement vull que m'expliquis com va començar tot_ com va començar aquest Erasmus de la Mònica_ i com va acabar\ veuràs que jo aniré prenent notes i després potser et pregunto alguna coseta que no m'hagi quedat clara o que necessiti que em desenvolupis*

After the initiation phase, the participants started constructing their Erasmus stories, which forced them to think about the point in time when they actually started the story and how to connect all the elements that, according to them were worth including in them. In this second phase, as Bates (2004: 17) suggests, it is very important that researchers listen "carefully to the interviewee's use of language so that they can pick up on the way the participant understands and expresses their views and experiences of the research topic". I paid close attention to and took notes of not only what they said but also how they said things, in order to be able to talk about it in the third phase and make sure that I was interpreting things as the participants meant. Although I did not always manage to achieve this, I tried to abstain from any comment, apart from giving signals of attentive listening like 'yes', 'okay' or 'right' – as shown in excerpt 10 below-, or when the students deliberately wanted me to be part of their narratives.

Excerpt 10 Second phase of the narrative interview
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Mònica*)

MÒNICA:	+uh···+ it was during my pràcticum in which I lived with Alexandra_ this Polish girl_	*+eh···+ va ser el meu període de pràctiques en el qual vaig estar vivint amb la Alexandra_ amb aquesta noia polonesa_*
SÒNIA:	+oh·+\	*+oh·+*
MÒNICA:	who is the person with whom I have more contact with\	*que és amb la persona amb qui mantinc més contacte*
SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*+mhm+*
MÒNICA:	we talk very often\ a··nd_ and for me it was_ the best\ I mean_ they were two weeks but for me the best two weeks o·f_	*parlem molt sovint\ i··_ i per mi va ser_ el millor\ o sigui_ van ser dos setmanes però per mi van ser les dos millors setmanes de·_*
SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*+mhm+*

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MÒNICA:	of Denmark\ right/ because we were in a place also different_ I met really nice people_ as if I was in my home\ here_ in (name of her village)_ a village of sixteen inhabitants_where everybody asks you_ everybody wants to know_ * well the same\ right/	*de Dinamarca\ no/ perquè estàvem en un lloc també diferent_vaig conèixer gent maquíssima_com si estès a casa meva/ aquí_ a (nom del seu poble)_ un poble de setze habitants_ que tothom et pregunta_ que tothom vol saber_ doncs igual\ no/*
SÒNIA:	+mm·_+	*+mm·_+*

In the third phase, my position as a researcher shifted from being a passive data collector and recorder to a co-constructor of the data, together with my participants. I used the notes that I had been taking and asked the participants more direct questions about thoughts, perceptions or emotions that they had expressed in their stories, while also relating those to what I had seen or heard as their shadower or to other data that I had previously gathered from other methods. This led the discussion in different directions although, towards the end of third phase of the interview, one of the discussion revolved around one very direct question that I asked the participants: 'quin impacte diries que ha tingut aquesta estada en tu?' (*what impact would you say this stay has had on you?)*. The reason why I included this question was because it would also allow me to see how the participants discursively constructed the impact (if any) that the Erasmus experience had had on them and, afterwards, to make this interview become a relational, cultural and discursive act of reality co-construction. Thus, I ended up playing the role, not of an excavator, but that of "a facilitator, collaborator, and travel companion in the exploration of experience" (Gemignani, 2014: 127) and, therefore, I conceive the narrative interview as an active process in which *both* the participants and me, as a researcher, finally co-constructed the data.

3.3. Methods for Data Analysis

This chapter presents the methodology adopted in this study and the feasibility and effectiveness of the methods chosen for the analysis of the different data gathered through the multiple methods described in the previous sections. The data are conceived as various activities of interactive talk (Ten Have, 1999), or as different kinds of dialogic texts (Matthiessen and Slade, 2011), always "concerned with the interpersonal" (ibid., 2011: 376) and carried out in different mediums – oral and written, and through different channels, that is, face-to-face, Skype or email. It is in these activities of interactive talk where the participants were asked to discursively make sense and ultimately account for their social world, both to themselves and to the researcher, and through different modes and languages.

In order to examine the way(s) in which participants discursively construct the impact that the Erasmus experience had on their identities, I use the ethnomethodologically-oriented method known as Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) and "a conceptual entity [...] which we can observe, investigate, research, and write about" (Englebretson, 2007: 3) and which "happens in discourse [specifically] in language in its natural habitat" (ibid, 2007:3): *Stance*. The two instruments are used inasmuch as participants, in and through the different interactions with the researcher, engaged in two different ways of constructing their identities. On the one hand, the participants engage in categorization processes by which they classify and/or label different people, as well as the values, believes and behaviours that are normally attributed to them. On the other hand, they also evaluate and linguistically display their attitudes towards such associated characteristics while "identify[ing] themselves as members of groups or distinguish[ing] themselves from members of other groups" (De Fina, 2003: 19). In this perspective, as has already been pointed out, the participants in this study engage with "self-differentiation and self-integration" (Bamberg et al, 2011: 187) discursive practices and, therefore, identity is conceived as a construction which participants make, out of their interpretation and orientation towards the sociocultural context they live in. In short, the

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objective in adopting this methodology is to "rely upon the actions of participants themselves as they interactively and sequentially make sense" (Silverman, 1998: 191), and not upon the analysts' perspectives on the participants' social reality.

Chapter 6.1 is devoted to the ethnomethodologically-oriented method of Membership Categorization Analysis used to analyse the participants categorizations of the social reality in which they live, and chapter 6.2 deals with the conceptual tool of stance adopted to examine the linguistic resources that participants use in order to display their judgements or attitudes towards such reality through the use of, what Johnstone (2009: 31) calls, "language of evaluation", the analysis of which highlights the inherent "expressive, emotive, affective or attitudinal function of language" (Kärkkäinen, 2006: 702).

3.3.1. Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA): An Ethnomethodologically-Oriented Approach

Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) is a method for the analysis of interactional data, developed by the sociologist Harvey Sacks in the 1960s and rooted in Ethnomethodology (EM), "a broader research work [...] which includes Conversation Analysis (CA), and more recently Discursive Psychology" (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015: 5). Ethnomethodology is a sociological approach founded by Harold Garfinkel, which has been defined as "working on materials to see what can be discovered in and from them" (Hester and Eglin, 1997a: 1). It conceives members of society as "practical analysts of, and inquirers into, the world" (ibid, 1997: 1) and strives to understand the methods that these members of society use to 'perform reality', since it proceeds on the basis that social reality "is not objectively determined but is constantly produced 'locally' by participants and intersubjectively ratified" (Titscher and Jenner, 2000: 106). The four principles of ethnomethodology are outlined in figure 10 below:

Figure 10 Basic ethnomethodological principles (Adapted from Titscher et al., 2000)
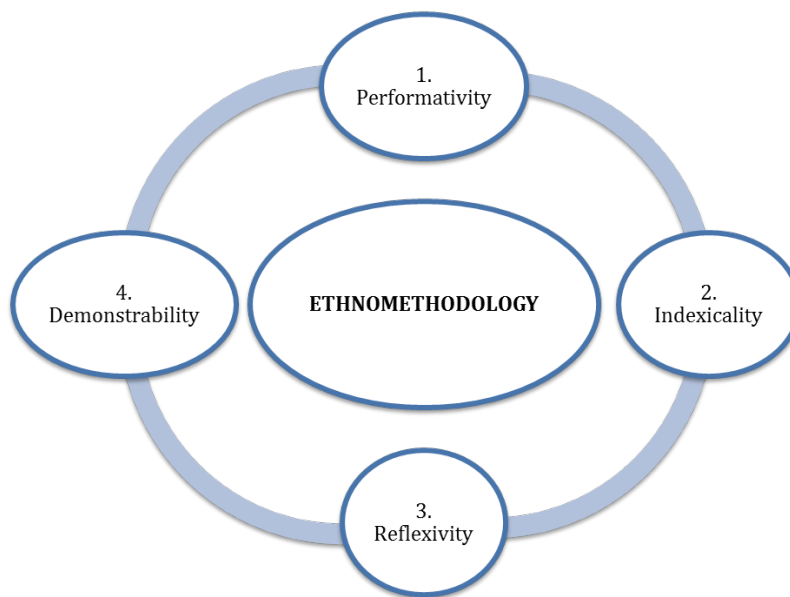
In relation to the first principle (performativity), from an ethnomethodologically-oriented perspective, meaning is performed in interactions and thus it becomes a social creation. From this perspective, social reality, far from being objectively determined, is "constantly produced locally by participants and intersubjectively ratified". Following Ochs (2012: 152), "significance is built through and experienced in temporal bursts of sense-making, often in coordination with others, often left hanging in realms of ambiguity" (Ochs, 2012: 152).

The second principle of ethnomethodology, indexicality, makes reference to what Ochs (2012: 148) calls "the indexical capacity of language", which somehow compensates the negative side of not being able to "put all ideas and sentiments into words" (ibid., 2012: 148). According to this indexical capacity of language, speakers use linguistic resources that evoke and rely upon the immediate context of utterances. From this perspective, language is approached as depending upon the context of the utterance and, therefore, "meaning is constituted by what individuals do with words in specific settings of talk" (Garot and Berard, 2011:130). Ochs (2012: 149) gives an example of a very common indexical form, the pronoun "I", while claiming that this "pronominal form (…) is relatively empty

without the context" since it makes reference to a concrete self in a concrete context. In addition, Silverstein (2003: 193) notes that the study of indexicality allows us to "relate the micro-social to the macro-social frames of analysis of any sociolinguistic phenomenon".

The third principle, reflexivity, has to do with the fact that, as Titscher et al. (2000: 106) argue, "language is context-bound in two ways, since an utterance not only occurs in the context of its production and interpretation, but simultaneously contributes to the context of the next utterance". Reflexivity is another aspect that characterizes talk-in-interaction and affects the ongoing and dialogic construction of social reality. It basically makes reference to the way(s) in which the "interlinking of utterances" (ibid, 2000: 106) is realised in and through interaction. Hester and Francis (2004) argue that interaction is characterized by a socially structured character and that "the actions of the participants are 'tied' together in intelligible and appropriate ways" (ibid., 2004: 4). This is one of the examples Hester and Francis provide in order to show the links between two utterances in a concrete interaction between two speakers:

Example of interaction between utterances (from Hester and Francis, 2004)

A:	(wringing his hand) SHIT!
B:	Are you OK?

The example above illustrates how A's utterance, in spite of not being directly addressed to B, occasions an utterance on the part of B, as a coherent response that fits in the interactive situation, after A's expletive. Thus, A's action affects the course of the interaction and "projects the kind of thing that can or should be done next" (ibid., 2004: 4).

The last principle is "demonstrability of actions" (Titscher et al., 2000: 105) or, following Hester and Francis (2004: 28), "the demonstrable relevance of sociological descriptions". Ethnomethodology rejects any taken-for-granted reality; yet, it focuses on the social reality that members themselves construct through interaction, and the methods that they use to perform this reality are

"observable and reportable" (Silverman, 1998: 74). This is also highlighted by Hester and Francis (2004: 29), who claim that it is a requirement to,

> ground sociological descriptions of social phenomena in members' orientations and understandings. In other words, ethnomethodology treats as its phenomena those phenomena to which members are oriented and which are relevant for them in the specifics of their situated talk and action. It thus rejects the widely prevalent tendency to view social activities through the lens of pre-defined sociological categories.

Following these principles, the next chapter provides an overview of the 'apparatus' used in the current project, which allows the researcher to focus on and systematize the (linguistic) resources that participants use in order to display their own understandings of the world.

3.3.1.1.   Defining the *Apparatus* of MCA

As has already been pointed out, *Membership Categorization Analysis* is a method for the analysis of interactional data, developed by the sociologist Harvey Sacks in the 1960s. In his lectures and other publications, Sacks shows his interest in understanding the ways in which members use categorization in order to make sense of everyday life and in how the conversational practice of categorization may contribute to the study of identities, which are "an important site for sociological and related inquiry; not least because they represent a field through which individual and collective life intersect" (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015: 1). Sacks' work focuses on (a) how people use social categories to describe themselves and others in the world and (b) how this categorization may affect our projected selves and what it is that we are doing within the interactional context.

In 'On the analysability of stories by children' (Sacks, 1972), Sacks analyses the first two sentences of a story produced by a child aged 2 years and 9 months, "The baby cried. The mommy picked it up", and highlights the importance of categorization in understanding these two 'simple' sentences:

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> The sentences we are considering are after all rather minor,
> and yet all of you, or many of you, hear just what I said you
> heard, and many of us are quite unacquainted with each
> other. I am then dealing with something real and something
> finely powerful. (Sacks, 1974: 218)

What Sacks is noting is that all of us, after reading these two sentences, think of the 'mommy' as the baby's mother, who is carrying out one of the mundanely recognisable activities bound to the category 'mommy', which is that of picking up her baby because he is crying. Commenting on this same example, Lepper (2000: 14) points out that a child "even as young as 2 years and 9 months has enough knowledge of 'what goes with what' to construct a meaningful – and by 'meaningful', what we mean here is 'hearable' – description". Sacks' main concern was to find out why we hear the story the same way or, in Silverman's words (1998: 83), "why might it look odd if the story read: 'The mommy cried. The baby picked it up'?". As pointed out by Housley and Fitzgerald (2015: 9), Sacks considered that this "common sense understanding of the story can be made analytically interesting" and he sought to build a methodological 'apparatus' that would precisely explain:

> how it is that any activities, which members do in such a way
> as to be recognisable as such to members, are done, and
> done recognisably. (Sacks, 1974:218)

With this objective in mind, Sacks proposes the following key concepts of membership categorization, which describe, among other aspects, "the tying of activities to categories" (Baker, 1984: 301): *membership categories*, *membership categorization device* (MCD)*, standardized relational pairs, category-bound predicates, category-bound activities,* and the *rules of economy and consistency*. Accordingly, when people 'do describing', they put people into *categories* (membership categorization), which, at the same time, belong to a collective category known as *membership categorization device* (e.g. the categories 'father' and 'son' belong to the MCD 'family'; and the categories 'butcher' and 'teacher' may be connected because they belong to the MCD 'occupation'). Besides, Sacks

suggests that categories like 'baby' and 'mommy' comprise what he calls a *standardized relational pair*, since, as Stokoe (2012b: 281) puts it, they "carry duties and moral obligations in relation to the other", as would also be the case of the categories 'teacher-student' or 'doctor-patient'. Besides, a speaker may describe or "document category membership" (Baker, 1984: 305) by also making explicit mention of the actions the category generally engages with (*category-bound activity*), such as in 'this *mother* (category) *looks after* (activity) her baby every day'; and also by mentioning the attributes linked to a particular member (e.g. Why are *teenagers* [category] *good at technology?* [predicate]).

An important aspect in the use of social categories is the two *rules of application*: the economy rule and the consistency rule. The former holds that the use of a single category can be sufficient to describe a person, without further need of detailing (e.g., 'teacher, student' need not be described beyond these categories), although more *can* be used (e.g., 'a 21-year-old Catalan student'). The 'consistency rule' states that "if a member of a given population has been categorised within a particular device then other members of that population can be categorised in terms of the same collection" (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015: 9). For instance, inasmuch as 'baby' can be heard as coming from the MCD 'family', so can 'father'. In this sense, although the category 'baby' could also belong to other MCDs (such as 'stage of life'), when hearing a second category like 'father', the hearer follows the so-called 'hearer's maxim' and consistently considers both as belonging to the same MCD 'family'.

Apart from adopting Sacks' key concepts in order to do categorial analysis, the current study will also include the dimension of sequentiality, normally associated with Conversation Analysis (CA) of any interactional activity. In fact, it has been claimed that Sacks' work developed and contributed to the sociological approach of ethnomethodology in two directions: "the sequential analysis of interaction that is commonly associated with CA (…) [and] the strand of Sacks's work that received less uptake" (Kasper, 2009: 5), which is Membership Categorization Analysis. Many scholars accent the divergence between MCA and CA (Gardner, 2012; Garot and Berard, 2011; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015; Stokoe,

2012a, 2012b; Watson, 1997), which "have developed to a large degree independently of each other, with differing attention on the part of each to the salience of the other" (Hester and Eglin, 1997a: 2). For instance, Stokoe (2012a) metaphorically describes CA as a 'juggernaut' and MCA as a 'milk float', and claims that the relationship between both approaches is 'hierarchical', considering that:

> There is no doubt that the juggernaut moves forwards with exponential influence. The milk float remains, I think, in a precarious, perhaps transitional, position. Conversation analysts have built up a large and robust set of findings, establishing via collections of instances that social interaction comprises systematic practices of turn, sequence and action. MCA, to data, has not. (Stokoe, 2012a: 352)

Watson (1997: 50) claims that even though sequential analysis set "categorization relevances at zero", we ought to see "categorisation practice as [also] a sequential object, and sequences where categorisation practice not only demonstrably makes an appearance, but also exerts an influence in shaping the discourse" (Watson, 2015: 32). In a study on the presence of racial discrimination in a series of conversations, Watson notes that this conversational practice was analysed by taking into account *both* categorial and sequential aspects, which ultimately, inform each other. In a similar vein, Gardner's analysis of a conversation about barbecues concludes that "a joining of forces between CA and MCA may enrich the project of describing and explicating the phenomenon of talk-in-interaction" (Gardner, 2012: 314), since categorization practices are after all embedded within conversational sequencing or, in Stokoe's (2012a: 353) words, "categorization practices do not just happen as, and in, one-off instances: people also do systematic, consequential things with categories and categorizations" (Stokoe, 2012a: 353).

The current study examines the ways in which students bring into play self- and other-categorizations of those involved in their narrative accounts of their Erasmus experiences abroad. The following excerpt exemplifies some categorial analysis of "members' explicit use of category references and descriptions [which] are embedded in a multi-layered sequential environment" (Housley and Fitzgerald,

2015: 12), by drawing on the narrative interview that I held with Verònica, one of the participants in this study who had been to Italy for one year. My open-ended question at line 1, 'i com va acabar tot' (*and how did it all end*) initiates a new sequence about how her experience abroad ended.

Excerpt 11 Exemplifying categorial analysis
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Verònica*)

1	SÒNIA:	and how did it all end/	*i com va acabar tot/*
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	VERÒNICA:	we··ll_ * good\ I mean_ I le·ft happily\ I mean_ everybody when they leave * when he leave··s his Erasmus_ says aw·· * this_ {(SPA) that_} * I won't be able to be * go back home_ (…) they were sad\ but I·_ but I was happy\	*no··_ *bé\ vull dir_ jo m'en vaig ana··r feliçment\ vull dir_ <u>tothom</u> quan se'n va * quan marxa·· del seu Erasmus_diu ai·· és que no sé què_ no sé {(Esp) cuantos_} * no podré sense estar * tornar a casa_ (…) els hi feia pena\ pues jo·_ pues jo estava contenta*
11	SÒNIA:	to go back/	*per tornar/*
12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	VERÒNICA:	yes\ the problem with this is that I expected one thing and it has been the opposite\ just * bu··t for me_ I myself think that the people_ * I mean_ once there_ * I mean_ partying and doing nothing and living life\ which_ I find good but_ * I don't know\ +er·m+ one year like this_	*sí\ el problema d'això és que jo esperava una cosa i ha sigut el contrari\ només * però·· per mi_ jo mateixa penso que la gent_ * és que_ només arribar allà_ * pues_ sortir de festa i no fer res i viure la vida\ que_ jo ho trobo bé però_ * no sé\ +mm··+ un any així_*
23	SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*+mhm+*
24 25 26 27 28	VERÒNICA:	you may be one month_ bu·t_ * I don't know\ but_ * I mea··n_ that the people were surprised * I * about how I was\ okay/	*potser pots estar un mes_ però· * no sé\ però_ *vull di··r_ que la gent s'estranyava * jo * de com era jo\ eh/*

Verònica uses the term 'tothom' (*everybody*) in line 4, to classify what she conceives as the general behaviour of *all* Erasmus students. According to Verònica, 'sad' is a common *category-bound predicate* (Stokoe, 2012b) of Erasmus students, when having to return home, and 'sortir de festa i no fer res i viure la vida' (*partying and doing nothing and living life*) are invoked as category-bound activities Erasmus students normally engage in. Yet, as the following figure visually illustrates – and this connects with the following chapter on the notion of stance-,
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Verònica, through the sense-making practice (Watson, 2015) of membership categorizations, she is also displaying her stance towards the social reality she is discursively constructing:

Figure 11 The interplay of MCA and stance
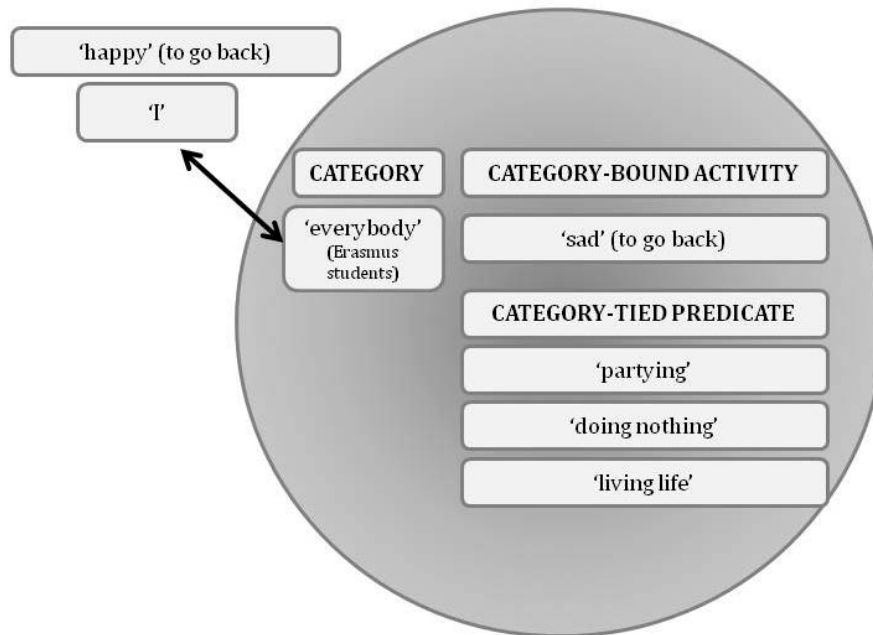
It is by focusing on the "observable and reportable" (Silverman, 1998: 74) methods that Verònica uses to construct her social reality within and through interaction, that we can see her positioning as being outside of this 'everybody', and thus suggesting that she is an atypical Erasmus student who engages with different, and even opposite, category-bound activities and who she would assign different category-bound predicates. Therefore, even though Verònica has gone to Italy as an Erasmus student, in her first turn, she explicitly makes a distinction between 'tothom' (*everybody*) and the pronominal form 'jo' (*I*) in her first turn, and makes it clear that she does not feel part of the Erasmus community by appealing to, among other resources, opposite emotions, as in 'els hi feia pena\ pues jo·_ pues jo estava contenta' (*they were sad\ but I·_ but I was happy*).

To sum, this excerpt serves to illustrate the complementarity of the two instruments used in the current study (Membership Categorization Analysis *and* Stance) when combined, which provide a richer account of two discursive practices participants engage with, in and through their discourse(s): categorization and evaluation of reality – the latter being the focus of the following section on the "conceptual entity" (Englebretson, 2007: 3) defined as *Stance*.

3.3.2. Stance

Stancetaking is, according to Jaffe (2009: 3), "one of the fundamental properties of communication" or, following Du Bois (2007: 139), "one of the most important things we do with words". Yet, although a broad array of research has been based on this conceptual tool, within a variety of different subfields within linguistics, Englebretson (2007: 1) claims that it is not a "monolithic concept" and that "definitions and conceptions of stance are as broad and varied as the individual backgrounds and interests of the researchers themselves". In addition, many studies make reference to "stance-related categories" (Du Bois, 2007: 142), such as evaluation, assessment, appraisal, point of view, and positioning.

According to Biber (2006: 99), stance is the manifestation of the "personal feelings and assessments, including attitudes that a speaker [or writer] has about certain information, how certain they are about its veracity, how they obtained access to the information, and what perspective they are taking". Conrad and Biber (2000: 56) distinguish three types of stance: *epistemic stance* (indicating "how certain the speaker or writer is" about what is said); *attitudinal stance* (indicating the speakers' feelings and judgements towards what is said) and *style stance* (indicating how something is said).

By taking a stance through the use of linguistic and non-linguistic mechanisms, speakers make themselves present in their discourse, which is what Hyland (2002: 1092) calls "self-reference". Thus, while communicating, whether in oral or written forms, speakers are not just conveying information but, at the same time, they are unveiling who they are. Hyland (ibid., 2002: 1092), who focuses on the expression of stance in academic writing, claims that, apart from conveying

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content, it "carries a representation of the writer" and, therefore, it is, "like all forms of communication, (…) an act of identity".

Englebretson (2007) states that the three key aspects that define the act of taking a stance and which, therefore, need to be taken into account are: (inter)subjectivity, evaluation and interaction. These terms appear to be strongly implicated in Du Bois' (2007: 163) following definition of stance:

> Stance is a *public act* by a social actor, *achieved dialogically* through overt communicative means, of simultaneously *evaluating objects*, positioning subjects (self and others), and *aligning with other subjects*, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field. [emphasis added]

Du Bois (2007) makes it explicit that the act of taking a stance always involves a stancetaker - a speaker producing a particular utterance - who uses "overt communicative means" (ibid, 2007: 136), which index its subjectivity. By way of illustration, Du Bois (ibid., 2007: 166) provides "a stance diagraph" that shows the different elements that are part of two stance utterances produced by two speakers (Sam and Angela) in a conversation:

Examples (*adapted from* Du Bois, 2007)

Speaker	Stance Subject	Positions/Evaluates	Stance Object	Aligns
SAM:	I	don't like	Those	
(0.2) **ANGELA:**	I	don't (like)	(those)	either

Both speakers overtly use (a) the first-person pronoun (*I*), which points directly to the stancetaker or the owner of such utterance, and (b) an affective stance predicate (*like*, *don't like*), which indexes "specific aspects of the subject's feelings, positioning the speaker subjectively along some scale of affective value" (ibid., 2007:152). It is also important to note that Sam specifies the stance object to which he is orienting (*those*), which can be "a thing, a person, a situation, an utterance, even another participant's stance" (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen,2012: 439);

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and, finally, it can be observed that Angela's use of 'either' indexes alignment with Sam's previous stance utterance.

Through these examples, Du Bois (ibid, 2007: 152) shows (a) the "co-existence of subjective (*I*) and objective (*these*) elements within a unified stance" and (b) that stances emerge within interaction, in which a speaker's stance utterance is influenced *dialogically* by a prior act of stancetaking. Du Bois represents the three key elements that are part of a stance act in the form of a triangle, as shown in figure 12 below:

Figure 12: The stance triangle (Du Bois, 2007: 163)
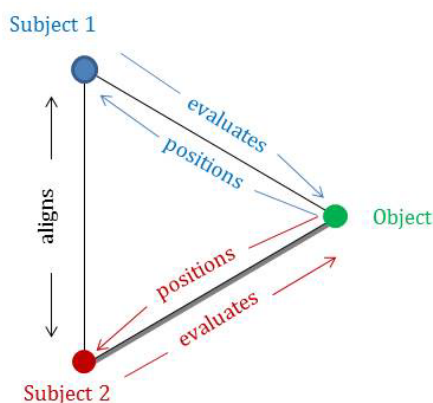
From this perspective, Du Bois (2007: 162) conceives stance as a process which consists of "three acts in one – a triune act, or tri-act" - *evaluation*, *positioning* and *alignment*-, according to which (1) "the subject evaluates an object" (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 439), (2) through such evaluation, the subject already positions himself as "the kind of person who would make that kind of evaluation about that kind of thing" (ibid., 2012: 440) and, (3) the subject's evaluation is contrasted with those of other subjects present in the interaction, who show alignment with each other, regardless of it being "convergent or divergent" (Du Bois, 2007: 164) and who "negotiate along a continuous scale the precise nature of the relation between their presently realized stance and a prior stance" (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012: 440).

According to Kärkkäinen (2006), many studies within the field of linguistics focus on the display of stance from the perspective of the individual speaker and,

thus, conceive stance as "manifesting some of the most apparently 'subjective' marking linguistic resources" (ibid., 2006: 700), and not as "a public act" (Du Bois, 2007: 163) or a *social* activity in which more than one speaker is involved. Kärkkäinen (2006: 702) does support the idea that "the speaker with her attitudes and beliefs is present in the utterances that she produces", which clearly connects with Lyons' (1994: 13) following definition of locutionary subjectivity:

> We can say that locutionary subjectivity is the locutionary agent's (the speaker's or writer's, the utterer's) expression of himself or herself in the act of utterance: locutionary subjectivity is, quite simply, self-expression in the use of language.

However, Kärkkäinen looks beyond a "speaker-based and largely individual notion of stance (and subjectivity)" and follows Du Bois (2007: 142) in conceiving it as social and dialogic in nature; as an act which "cannot be fully interpreted without reference to its larger dialogic and sequential context" or, as claimed by Jaffe (2009: 3), as an act which is "both socially situated and socially consequential". Kärkkäinen's understanding of the notion of stance is thus based on an intersubjective perspective, rather than subjective, from which she claims that:

> (...) we do not express evaluations, attitudes or affective states in a vacuum; *participants* in discourse *do not merely act, but interact.* They achieve intersubjective understandings of the ongoing conversation as they display their own understanding (their subjectivities, if you like) in their sequentially next turns, while correcting or confirming those of their coparticipants. (Kärkkäinen, 2006:704; emphasis added)

The current study focuses on the mechanisms participants use in order to discursively construct the impact that the SA experience had on their identities. Yet, as will be discussed, the students do not offer an objective description of facts, but a representation of their social reality *from a particular perspective or stance*, which they make more or less explicit by means of the linguistic resources that

they choose. Thus, it is through the analysis of the participants' "language of evaluation" (Johnstone, 2009: 31) that we can attempt to discover the feelings, attitudes or perspectives with which they construct the impact that their study-abroad experience had on their selves.

From a methodological point of view, the present study contributes to previous research based on the concept of stance in three ways. In the first place, it aims to analyse the participants' acts of stance across time by focusing on their discourse, from the beginning until the end of their stay and a year later. Secondly, it focuses on the participants' expression of stance in two different languages (Catalan and English); and third, it explores how stancetaking works in talk *and* text – conceiving both as sites for interaction between the participants and the researcher, or as different social activities that the participants were asked to engage in, which are done "with or in relation to others" (Francis and Hester, 2004: 1). In this sense, this thesis supports Lepper (2000: 77) in conceiving also written forms, such as emails, as "a kind of conversation", which is actually becoming a very common "day-to-day medium of communication of both personal and working life". Thus, in spite of talk being "spontaneous" (Van Dijk, 1997: 4), as opposed to text which is "more controlled" (ibid, 1997: 4) and which allows writers to plan and change what was written before, both of them share Bakhtin's (1981) principle known as *dialogism,* according to which the participants are not "autonomous subjects [...] who think, speak and act in and by themselves" (Dascalu, 2014: 33). Rather, they are individuals whose utterances are produced and influenced by the other with whom they are interacting. In this sense,

> all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideologies) (Holquist, 2002: 19)

In what follows, I illustrate, by way of two examples, how one of the participants in this study, Joan, takes a stance in oral and textual forms and in the two languages previously mentioned. The first example shows an excerpt from a

computer-mediated interaction – one of the elicited experiential reports which Joan wrote (in English) in response to my previous email, in which I was asking him to evaluate the reality in which he was living at that moment:

Excerpt 12 Stance example 1
(*Excerpt taken from an elicited experiential report of Joan*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	I want you to write a text in which you try to answer the questions mentioned previously. (i) Do **I** <u>have the feeling</u> that **I** am living in a <u>very different place</u>? (ii) After some months abroad, is <u>this</u> already <u>like home</u> or do **I** <u>feel</u> that **I** am very far away from Spain? (…)	6th May 2014 (Sònia)
	(6 days later)	
8 9 10 11	<u>It's true</u> that obviously <u>the culture in Denmark is different</u> to Catalonia's culture but, <u>it's easy</u> to be in quickly. **What I mean** is that nothing has surprised **me** so much to say **I'm** living in a <u>completely different world</u>.	12th May 2014 (Joan)

As can be seen in the excerpt, in lines (1-7) I am not only asking Joan to evaluate a particular stance object – the 'place' where he was living- but, at the same time, I am also (a) suggesting that he make his discourse personal, through the use of the first-person pronoun (*I*) in lines 3 and 6; and (b) proposing some linguistic devices in order to encode his stance, such as the affective stance predicates (*have the feeling* and *feel*) and attributive adjectives or phrases (*like home* and *different*), the latter being accompanied with an intensifier (*very*), inviting him to position himself "subjectively along some scale of affective value" (Du Bois, 2007: 152). In response to my email, Joan seems to accept the object I was asking him to evaluate. However, he starts by using generalizations (*it's true*, *is different* and *it's easy*) or, in Scheibman's words, "expressions that lack (…) the formal presence of a speaking subject", and also the epistemic stance adverbial (*obviously*) which shows that he is very sure about what he is saying; what Conrad and Biber (2000: 59) call "the degree of certainty (…) concerning the proposition". It is at the end of the excerpt (lines 10-11), where Joan uses the first-person

pronoun (I), indexing that it is from his *personal* perspective that he describes Denmark as *not a completely different world*.

Similarly, the following data segment (excerpt 13) illustrates the dialogic character of stancetaking, since, as will be argued here, "stances are taken in alignment with or in opposition to other possible stances and other people who hold them" (Coupland and Coupland, 2009: 228). The excerpt is taken from the narrative interview in which, one year after his Erasmus experience, I ask Joan very similar questions to the ones in excerpt 1; yet, this time in a face-to-face interaction and in Catalan.

Excerpt 13 Stance example 2
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Joan*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	**SÒNIA:**	and you told me *I had t& *I adapted pretty quickly\ right/ +hmm·+ did you really had to adapt to something/ when you say you adapt it is normally because· it is different from what you're used to\ isn't it/	*i m'has dit *em vaig que& * em vaig adaptar bastant ràpid\ no/ +em·+ realment et vas haver d'adaptar a algo/ quan dius que t'adaptes normalment és perquè· és diferent al que tu estàs acostumat\ no/*
8 9	**JOAN:**	to timetables\ yes\ more than anything else\	*a l'horari\ sí\ més que res*
10 11 12 13	**SÒNIA:**	so_ what was different/ what was the difference that you found/ timetables_ and the food a little bit\	*és a dir_ què va ser diferent/ quina diferència et vas trobar/ l'horari_ i el menjar una mica*
14 15	**JOAN:**	timetables and the food a little\ yes\	*l'horari i el menjar una mica\ sí*
16	**SÒNIA:**	but_ is this very different Joan/	*però és molt diferent això Joan/*
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25	**JOAN:**	+hm\+ in fact_ I had some_ * well_ really· not very very different\ but what is true is tha··t its * for instance_ fish is almost absent there a·nd_ +bff+ * I don't know\ not different different\ because at the end you also ha& * you could always make a Spanish omelette\ you know/	*+hm+\ de fet_ tenia alguna_ *bueno realment·· molt molt diferent no\ però sí que és veritat que·· la seva * per exemple_ el peix gairebé_ brilla per la seva absència allí i·_ +buf+ *no sé\ diferent diferent no\ perquè al final també ten& * sempre podies agafar i fer una truita de patates\ saps/*

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In this excerpt, I start voicing Joan's words (*I adapted pretty quickly*), which he had produced in a previous utterance and, in lines 4-7, I express what *my own* understanding is of 'having to adapt to another culture', while attempting to negotiate and co-construct the meaning of this process. Through the use of the alignment marker (*yes*), produced with a final falling intonation (in line 8), Joan displays his convergence with my stance (reflected in lines 4-7). He also shows alignment in lines 14-15, not only by using *yes,* but also by repeating the exact words that I had previously articulated. After this, I finally induce Joan to position himself subjectively along a scale of affective value, by introducing the intensifier (<u>*very* *different*</u>). In response to this, he negates the intensifier (*not very very different*) and, later in line 22, the attributive adjective (*not different different*) and ends up by generalizing the reason why Denmark is, after all, not *very* different, through the use of the second-person pronoun (*you*) in line 23.

Summary

Section 3.1 has introduced and discussed the qualitative research approach adopted in the present study, which is multiple case study. By adopting this in-depth approach, the thesis seeks to understand the impact that the Erasmus (SA) experience has had on the identity of nine students of the University of Lleida, with the intention not to generalize but to bring to the forefront the uniqueness and individual differences of each of the cases. As has already been pointed out in section 3.2, and as is common in case study research, this thesis used multiple sources of data (observational and verbal), which were collected longitudinally in order to capture the evolution of the students' discourse on mobility and, ultimately, of their identities.

Section 3.3 has presented the methodology for the analysis of the data and, in particular, of the participants' resources through which they construct their social words in and through interaction. As has been pointed out, MCA as an ethnomethodologically-oriented method, allows for a close analysis of the participants' categorization processes by which they make sense of and account for their own understanding and interpretations of reality. Finally, with the conceptual

tool of *Stance*, which has also been introduced in this chapter, I intend to study the linguistic forms that index the participants' evaluation and attitudes towards the different aspects of that reality that appear to be salient in their discourses.

PART C: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This part centres on the analysis and of the qualitative data, in four chapters, and the conclusions of the research study, in the final chapter. The first chapter of part C (chapter 4) is meant to provide an analysis of specific contextual aspects, which are important for the analysis of the participants' discourses on their experiences abroad. In line with Clandinin (2007: xiv), such experiences are conceived as elicited "storied, lived phenomen[a]" that can be studied empirically, and not as "*pure* experience[s] that ha[ve] not already been textualized" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005: 35).

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to the analysis of the participants' discourse before, during and after their experiences abroad, respectively. The purpose of these chapters is to (a) examine what the aftermath of the students' SA abroad experience is, from the participants' own perspective, and, at the same time, to (b) understand their elicited prospective, current and retrospective constructions of their identities. As stated in the methodology chapter, the data analysed in these sections were collected longitudinally and this has been argued to be useful in "captur[ing] through long immersion the depth and breadth of the participants' life experiences, and to capture participant change [if any] through long-term comparative observations of their perceptions and actions" (Saldaña, 2003: 16). Indeed, the longitudinal approach taken in this study has not only shed light on the heterogeneity and individualities of the participants' experiences abroad *over time*, but has also allowed me to examine, supporting a poststructuralist view of reality, the *ongoing* (re)construction of their identity as members of the category 'Erasmus student'.

Finally, chapter 8 summarizes the main conclusions reached from the analysis of the data, while answering the research questions of this study. Practical implications of the findings are also proposed in this final chapter, which are intended to contribute to the improvement of the study abroad experience. Lastly, some limitations of which this study is not devoid are listed, as well as suggestions for further research.

Chapter 4. Situating the Context of the Research

This chapter, which analyses contextual discourses related with internationalisation, mobility, the Erasmus at the University of Lleida (UdL) – the participants' 'home' university –, is organized in two main sections. On the one hand, section 4.1 examines the way(s) in which the UdL is discursively constructed in its Operational Plan for Internationalisation (*Pla Operatiu d'Internacionalització de la UdL*) (UdL, 2012) as a higher education institution that promotes mobility in order to become international. As will be discussed, this Catalan institution, in line with many other circulating discourses which praise and discursively construct mobility as unquestioningly entailing various benefits – academic, professional and personally speaking – (Fabricius *et al.*, 2016), encourages not only students but also teaching and administrative staff to participate in its mobility programmes. The purpose of this first section is to take a close look at the central tenets presented in the above mentioned institutional policy document of the UdL with regards to the *internationalisation strategy* of mobility (Knight, 2008a). This will later allow us to examine whether there is alignment between this institutional discourse on mobility and that of those participants who experienced it in first person.

On the other hand, section 4.2, delves into the notion of 'category' (Sacks, 1972; 1995) and, in particular, into the identity category of 'Erasmus student', for two main reasons: (a) it is a category that appears in various circulating discourses to refer to those students who participate in the Erasmus mobility programme; and (b) the participants, as soon as their application is accepted, seem to define and/or categorize themselves as 'Erasmus students'. It is as members of this category and, at the same time, also probably influenced by the different circulating discourses on the Erasmus programme, that they see this category as "carr[ying] a different set of category-bound activities, predicates, or rights and obligations that are *expectable* [emphasis added] for an incumbent of that category to perform or possess" (Stokoe, 2012b: 282). For instance, as will be shown in this chapter, the participants consider learning a second language and/or meeting other cultures, among others, as incumbent features on those members belonging to the category

'Erasmus student' and, thus, these two activities define not only their expectations, but also their motives for going abroad.

4.1. Internationalization at the University of Lleida

In the Operational Plan for Internationalisation of the UdL (*OPI*) (UdL, 2012-2016), the University of Lleida is constructed as a higher education (HE) institution that has an "international view" (*una visió internacional*) (UdL, 2012: 4). This institutional document presents internationalization as an "priority challenge for the UdL" (*un repte prioritari per a la UdL*) (UdL, 2012: 3) and as "a global and integral strategy, key to its present and future consolidation and projection as a higher education institution" (*una estratègia global i integral, clau per a la seva consolidació i la projecció present i futura com a institució d'educació superior*) (ibid, 2012: 3). The OPI broaches the following indicators, for which this institution is presented as "international":

Excerpt 14 Indicators of internationalisation
(*Excerpt taken from the OPI*)

> [...] signed mobility agreements (either Erasmus or the ones offered by the UdL), incoming and outgoing mobility (...), grants, regular number of foreign students (Bachelor and Master), degrees with more presence of foreign students, international research projects, international teaching and research staff (ICREA, doctoral students) [...].
> *[...] convenis de mobilitat signats (Erasmus o propis de la UdL), mobilitat entrant i sortint (...), ajuts, nombre d'estudiants estrangers regulars (grau i màster), titulacions o àrees amb més presència d'estudiants estrangers, projectes de recerca internacionals, PDI internacional (ICREA, doctorands [...].*

The indicators of internationalisation affecting all the members of the UdL (students, administration, teaching and research staff) are very much in line with the 'developments and initiatives' of current HE institutions identified by Knight (2008b), such as the development of new international networks, the growing numbers of mobility students and staff, and the impetus to recruiting foreign students, among many others, which evidence how "internationalisation has

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become a formidable force for change" (ibid, 2008b: 19) for HE institutions in the last two decades. Besides, as stated in the OPI, internationalisation involves not one but different lines of action. First, the document refers to the idea of cooperating with other foreign higher education institutions, as a fruitful strategy to develop and improve teaching and research activities. Second, mobility – a word which appears on different occasions in this institutional policy document – is presented as one of the fundamental internationalisation strategies of the UdL, not only in relation to students, but also to teaching and research staff, and to administration personnel (UdL, 2012: 9). As the following excerpt illustrates, outgoing and incoming mobility is, indeed, constructed as *a means* by which the students (a) immerse in an 'international culture' – which will "contribute to the training of professionals with an open and global vision of the world" (UdL, 2012: 3) – and (b) improve their linguistic skills in a foreign language:

Excerpt 15 Mobility as a key strategy
(***Excerpt taken from a leaflet about mobility of the UdL***)

> [This Plan] promotes specific strategies for incoming and outgoing student mobility, as an important tool to introduce the international culture, besides the attraction of regular foreign students. It is also expected that the students improve their knowledge of languages.
>
> (*[Aquest Pla]   fomenta estratègies concretes d'orígens i destins de la mobilitat dels estudiants, com una eina clara d'introducció de la cultura internacional, a més de l'atracció d'estudiants estrangers regulars. També preveu un perfeccionament dels coneixements d'idiomes entre els joves de la UdL.*)

Besides proposing cooperation with foreign HE institutions and mobility as lines of action, the OPI describes internationalisation as a key process in order to secure a better funding for the institution, mainly by attracting international students who are able to meet the full costs of the enrolment. Indeed, the university intends to "internationalise the educational offer" (*internacionalitzar l'oferta docent*) (UdL, 2012: 9), mainly by introducing English as the language of instruction. This is presented as beneficial not only for those students who come

from abroad, but also to work on what is called "internationalisation at home" (UdL, 2012: 11), which, according to Knight (2008b: 13), means:

> to give greater prominence to campus-based elements such as the intercultural and international dimension in the teaching learning process, research, extra-curricular activities, relationships with local cultural and ethnic community groups, as well as the integration of foreign students and scholars into campus life and activities.

All in all, this section has discussed how the Operational Plan of Internationalisation of the University of Lleida makes it clear that, although the internationalisation process involves many more aspects than just the mobility of its members (e.g. the increase of international research projects and/or the promotion of trilingualism with Catalan, Spanish and English), mobility appears as one of the main goals that the UdL aims to accomplish in relation to its students. The following section deals with this particular indicator of internationalisation.

4.1.1. The Promotion of Mobility and of the Erasmus Programme

Taking into account that, in order to become international, the UdL considers mobility as a key strategy, the university disseminates the different mobility programmes and agreements among its students by means of its website, a leaflet, and yearly 'informative sessions'[4] organised by the International Relations Office in each faculty. As it is stated on the website, the students of the University of Lleida have the opportunity to participate in three different academic mobility programmes: Erasmus (through signed agreements between the UdL and other European universities); the UdL's Mobility Programme (with mainly non-European universities); and the SICUE programme (with Spanish universities). The students taking part in these programmes are guaranteed full academic recognition

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[4] As the name indicates, these informative sessions are meant to guide the students of the UdL in their search for the different possibilities available for going abroad. However, I do not have empirical data so as to analyse what was actually said in those sessions which were attended by the participants of this study.

(including examinations and other forms of assessment) of those courses studied abroad, and they also receive grants to cover part of their expenses.

The *stance* that the UdL takes towards mobility in and through the three different means mentioned above is promoting the benefits that, according to the university, the three academic mobility programmes entail. As this section aims to show, the discourse of the University of Lleida is *evaluative*, since it makes subjective judgements of the world it is discursively representing and is adopting a *stance* which is "perceivable, interpretable, and available for inspection" (Englebretson, 2007: 6) through the analysis of what Hunston (2007: 35) names "evaluative language". To illustrate this, it is significant to observe the use of the attributive and *evaluative adjective* (Englebretson, 2007) 'good' used by the UdL in order to describe the benefits of SA programmes as 'some <u>good</u> reasons to take the opportunity to participate in one or different mobility programmes [...] in a foreign university' (*unes quantes bones raons per aprofitar l'oportunitat de participar en un o diversos programes de mobilitat [...] en una universitat estrangera*). The UdL clearly displays its *stance* mainly through word choice, as in the use of some evaluative main verbs and adjectives highlighted in the following passage which, in this case, briefly touches upon the three areas from which a student can benefit if he or she participates in an international mobility programme:

Excerpt 16 Benefits of studying abroad
(***Excerpt taken from a leaflet about mobility of the UdL***)

1	Academically, you will be able to <u>expand</u>	*Acadèmicament podràs ampliar l'oferta*
2	your opportunities by taking courses that	*al teu abast cursant matèries que no*
3	are not always offered at the UdL, you will	*sempre s'ofereixen a la UdL, coneixeràs*
4	<u>learn</u> about educational systems that are	*sistemes educatius diferents del nostre,*
5	<u>different</u> from ours, you will be able to do	*podràs fer practiques en empreses*
6	internships in companies from <u>other</u>	*d'altres països, millorar els teus*
7	countries, to <u>improve</u> your <u>foreign</u>	*coneixements de llengües estrangeres i*
8	language skills and to <u>learn new</u> ones.	*aprendre'n de noves.*
9	Professionally, you will <u>strengthen</u> your	*Professionalment reforçaràs aptituds*
10	aptitudes like your adaptability to <u>new</u>	*com ara l'adaptabilitat a noves*
11	environments, your fluency in <u>foreign</u>	*situacions, la fluïdesa en idiomes*
12	languages or your flexibility, which will	*estrangers o la flexibilitat, que*
13	<u>improve</u> your curriculum in a labour	*milloraran el teu currículum en un*
14	market that is becoming more global every	*mercat laboral cada dia més global.*
15	day.	*Personalment t'enriquiràs coneixent*

16	Personally, getting to <u>know</u> <u>other</u> cultures,	*altres cultures, altres maneres de fer i*
17	<u>other</u> ways of doing and of thinking will	*de pensar. Molts estudiants que han*
18	enrich you. <u>A lot of students who have</u>	*participat en algun programa de*
19	<u>participated in an international mobility</u>	*mobilitat internacional consideren que*
20	<u>programme consider that this has been one</u>	*aquesta ha estat una de les millors*
21	<u>of the best experiences in their life</u>.	*experiències de la seua vida.*

Excerpt 16 is a clear instance of the inscribed positive judgment of mobility programmes that the UdL evokes in and through its institutional discourse. In it, we can see that, through the use of the second person singular, the discourse of the university is clearly addressed to those individuals who are thinking about the possibility of participating in a mobility programme. It is a discourse which presents mobility as an experience with different stimuli, which will make the individual be an active participant of it, instead of a passive individual; someone who, in a different and new environment, will 'learn' (lines 4, 8), 'improve' (lines 7, 13), 'strengthen' (line 9) and 'know' (line 16) – see these verbs underlined in the excerpt above. And this will happen in an environment where the individual will be surrounded by difference, otherness, foreignness and novelty, as evidenced by the fact that the words 'different' (line 5), 'other' (lines 6, 16), 'foreign' (lines 7, 11) and 'new' (lines 8, 10) are repeated throughout the text (see them also underlined above). There is an evident "overemphasis on differences" (Dervin, 2016: 78) and not on the similarities that people may share in spite of coming from different places and or speaking a different language. This is what Dervin (2016: 35) names "the *differentialist bias*, or an obsession with what makes us different from others", a bias for meeting an 'exotic other' and moving away from those with whom they share the same passport, a bias which ultimately "denies interculturality beyond difference" (ibid, 2016: 35). As the excerpt above illustrates, this difference is precisely what is presented as enriching for future mobile students at academic, professional and personal levels. Apart from this, it is also interesting to point out the fact that, in lines 18-21, the university resorts to a circulating discourse of, not a few, but 'a lot of students' who, after spending some time abroad, evaluate their experiences very positively, constructing them as 'one of the best experiences in their life'.

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On the UdL's website, the Erasmus programme, in particular, is also constructed, on the UdL's website, as a learning experience in another European country that allows students to "benefit from it educationally, linguistically and culturally" (*beneficïin educativament, lingüísticament i culturalment*)[5] and that contributes to their personal development. Those students willing to participate in this programme are required to be enrolled at the UdL, to have earned a minimum of credits, and to have "enough knowledge of the language of instruction in the host university" (*coneixements suficients de la llengua en què s'imparteixen els estudis a la universitat de destinació*). In fact, all students are required to certify an intermediate level of the language of instruction in the host university, except for those going to Italy and Portugal, who are just asked to express their commitment to enrol in a language course, if possible, before departure.

The analysis of the institutional discourse on mobility presented in this section goes very much in line with Ryuko Kubota's (2016: 349) work on what she calls "the study-abroad social imaginary" and, more specifically, on "the alleged benefits of study abroad found in common discourse". *Social imaginaries,* Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 34) maintain, are spread through "images, myths, parables, stories, legends and other narratives and most significantly, in the contemporary era, the mass media, as well as popular culture". Kubota (2016: 355) notes that, although SA is commonly presented as providing students with linguistic, cultural, personal and career benefits, "the student sojourn experience and these alleged benefits do not have a simple causal relationship" and that policymakers should be aware of this in order to "facilitate a narrowing of the gaps". One of the objectives of this first chapter of analysis is precisely that of examining the so-called "interactional stancetaking activity" (Haddington, 2007: 283) of *alignment* and see whether it exists between the institutional discourse on mobility and that of the participants of the present study. The focus will not be on the sequential and turn-organizational aspects of alignment, but on the linguistic features used by both agents (the UdL and the participants) in order to take a stance about a shared stance object, which in this case is the study-abroad experience.

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[5] http://www.udl.cat/ca/serveis/ori/estudiantat/erasmus/vols/que_es/index.html

To conclude, the UdL projects a positive *stance* towards the Erasmus and other mobility programmes, constructing them as the 'means' to achieve some beneficial goals for the students – which, at the same time, are considered beneficial for the institution itself -, and thus encouraging them to participate in such programmes. The following section deals with the already established social category 'Erasmus student', which the participants in this study, far from resisting their membership into it, accept and use in order to (re)construct their imagined, actual and past identities.

4.2. The Participants' Membership in the Category 'Erasmus student': a Longitudinal (Re)Negotiation

As has already been pointed out, the present section is meant to contextualize the analysis of students' discourse by delving into the notion of the category 'Erasmus student' given that (a) it is a form of categorization which is used in order to refer to the participants of this study – without necessarily associating any descriptions; and (b) the students seem to accept and recognize themselves as members of this category before leaving – as the excerpts in this section will illustrate.

It is important to point out that the label 'Erasmus student' appears as a socially-accepted form of categorization, with which certain characteristics, images or even stereotypes are often praxeologically associated[6]. The present study may somehow allow us to see the extent to which and/or the ways in which the discourse of the nine participants in this project aligns with the incumbent descriptions normally associated with the category 'Erasmus student'. This category is materialized, as the following figures illustrate, in a plethora of public

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[6] A Spanish book entitled *Cosas que nunca olvidarás de tu Erasmus* ('Things you will never forget about your Erasmus') (Arrazola and Piñeiro, 2015) serves as an illustration of a circulating discourse, which offers a collection of those descriptions that are commonly associated with the category 'Erasmus student' and which could, therefore, be considered as 'common knowledge' defining those members belonging to this category. The authors highlight partying at night; interacting mainly with other Spanish students (in spite of having left with the opposite intention); and growing and/or maturing as a person, among other category-bound activities of Erasmus students.

documents – such as books, newspapers (e.g. see figure 13) and films[7] –, in official documents - such as the Erasmus Student Charter (*Carta del Estudiante Erasmus,* see figure 15), in which the students' rights and responsibilities are stated, and in the International Exchange Erasmus Student Network Card (see figure 14), which some of the participants of this study had.

Figure 13 The category 'Erasmus student' in a Spanish newspaper

Figure 14 The category 'Erasmus student' in the Erasmus Student Network Card

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[7] "L'auberge espagnole" is a French film released in 2002, in which we can see that Xavier, the main protagonist, chooses Barcelona as the host destination for his Erasmus experience. In this film, we can see – as is the case of the participants in this study – that foreign language learning (in this case, Spanish) is the protagonist's main motive for going abroad. Yet, his experience abroad offers him much more than just the learning of a foreign language: he has to learn, among other things, how to manage linguistic and cultural diversity.

Figure 15 The category 'Erasmus student' in the Erasmus Student Charter

The participants in this study seemed to accept this category and, on many occasions, they explicitly presented themselves as members of this community. For purposes of illustration, I quote Amanda's following words, which are taken from the elicited experiential account, in which she was asked to talk about an important turning point during her Erasmus experience. This excerpt shows that she recalls the way she introduced herself as an Erasmus student (line 1), in a languages event addressed to high school students which was organized by the host university.

Excerpt 17 'I'm an Erasmus student in Wales
(Excerpt taken from Amanda's Activity 5)

1 Good morning everybody my name is Amanda. I'm an Erasmus student in Wales,
2 and I am fully aware of the difficulties that speaking a foreign language involves.

Similarly, Ariadna, another participant in the study who went to Denmark, recognized herself as a member of the category "Erasmus student" in the narrative interview that I held with her one year after she had returned. In the following excerpt, she expresses that the Erasmus experience was new for her because, although she had already been working abroad, she had actually never been overseas as an Erasmus student:

Excerpt 18 'You also carried the label Erasmus student'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview during the shadowing period with Ariadna - DK)*

1	SÒNIA:	obviously there you were working	*clar que allà estaves treballant i*
2		and here you were as a··_	*aquí estaves com a··_*
3	ARIADNA:	of course\ of course\	*clar\ clar*
4	SÒNIA:	* you also carried the label	*portaves també l'etiqueta*
5		Erasmus student\	*[(ENG) Erasmus student\] no/*
6		right/	
7	SÒNIA:	yes\ yes\	*sí\ sí*

Summary

In this chapter, two main types of discourses of the students' home context have been analysed. On the one hand, section 4.1 has examined the institutional discourse of the University of Lleida regarding mobility, and in particular the Erasmus programme. As has been evidenced, the UdL deems mobility as a key aspect of its internationalisation policies, and seeks to promote it through diverse discursive strategies, in documents, leaflets and its website. In fact the UdL highlights several benefits of studying abroad when directly addressing its students. On the other hand, section 4.2 has justified the identification of the participants as 'Erasmus students', which unavoidably entails the association of diverse characteristics (activities and predicates) that our participants may (re)negotiate as a result of their SA experiences.

Therefore, drawing on the discourse analytical tools of *membership categorization analysis* (Fitzgerald and Housley, 2015; Stokoe, 2012b) and *stance* (Du Bois, 2007; Jaffe, 2009), the following three chapters address the analysis of different episodes in which the participants are asked to "take the attitude of the other toward himself" (Mead, 1934: 134), in order to see how they longitudinally (re)define their own "self-characterizing descriptions" (Stokoe, 2009: 81) and in what ways they maintain their discursive constructions of themselves as members of the category 'Erasmus students' or, on the contrary, they detach themselves from it. In other words, the next chapters present the analysis of the way(s) in which the participants, through the means of language and in interaction, evaluate

and construct their sense of self, or the image that they have of who and what they are as a result of their experience as Erasmus students.

In particular, the next chapter (chapter 5) will focus on the participants' hoped for and *imagined identities* (Barkhuizen & De Klerk, 2006; Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2001) as Erasmus-students-to-be which crop up in interaction. According to Barkuizen and De Klerk (2006: 278) imagination is "an important ingredient", when examining how participants "place themselves in a country they do not yet live in, and most have never visited" or how they imagine "their personal and social identities will be positioned" (ibid, 2006: 278). The concept of *imagined identities* has at the same time been related to Norton's (1997: 410) poststructuralist understanding of identity – which has already been tackled in chapter 2 and which emphasizes its fluid and changing nature across time and space: "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future". The concept of *imagined identities* has also been defined as "expan[sions] of our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves" (Wenger, 1998: 176). In this sense, chapter 5 will particularly focus on the *category-implicative description* (Stokoe, 2009) and on the *activities* and *predicates* that the participants in this study expect to be bound to the category 'Erasmus student', some of which actually constitute their motivations for participating in the Erasmus programme. Indeed, following an emic approach to the analysis of the data, I could observe that the participants made their motivations *and* expectations relevant in their discourse before, during and after their experiences abroad, and, in fact, it is based on those that they evoke a particular *stance* towards their SA experience.

Chapter 5. Prior to Departure: The Participants' Motivations and Expectations

Te estremeces. (…)
El corazón se te acelera y pierdes la noción
de dónde estás durante un instante.
La alegría se mezcla con los nervios y tu
cabeza empieza a hacer planes a mil por hora.
Te han admitido.
Te han concedido la beca.
Te vas de Erasmus.

You shiver. (…)
Happiness is mixed with nervousness and
your mind starts making plans a mile a minute.
You have been accepted.
You have been awarded the scholarship.
You're going on Erasmus.

(Arrazola and Piñeiro, 2015: 8)

Going back to an aforementioned idea, ERASMUS is "one of the most visible and popular initiatives of the European Union (EU)" (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013) and, as Murphy-Lejeune (2002) and Krzaklewska (2008) suggest, it is important to examine what motivations and expectations prompt the students to spend part of their studies abroad through this programme. Through the analysis of the data, we can certainly observe that phrases such as 'I would like to', 'I want', 'what (has) motivated me' and 'I hope' are constantly present in the students' comments. As this chapter aims to show, the analysis of the participants' *imagined experiences* and/or *identities* will shed light on their language- and identity-related, pre-departure motivations and expectations as prospective Erasmus students, while allowing us to later "make connections between life before and after [the SA experience], and thus to focus on the 'journey'" (Barkhuizen & de Klerk, 2006: 277). In this sense, as has already been pointed out, the present study will not only focus on the outcomes of the stay, but on the students' *ongoing* construction of their identity which is, thus, seen as a process in which they take into account their initial motives for going abroad *and* the things that actually happen once there. The fact of tracking the students longitudinally will allow us to see what elements have been part of this journey abroad and how, based on those elements, the students

construct their identities as being the same before and after their SA experiences or, on the contrary, as two different selves.

Motives for going abroad can be defined as, following Krzaklewska (2008: 84), "reasons, determinants, forces, and expectations". For Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 79), motivations comprise three interconnected elements: "latent components" (which consist of mental and psychological dimensions, such as dreams, desires and predispositions to action), "active components" (such as influences, motivations, expectations, objectives and fears, which are more related to external stimuli and, specifically, to what individuals expect to find or do in a particular time and space), and "resulting components" (which have to do with future intentions and objectives based on the students' evaluation of their experiences).

Although I recognise the different nature of the diverse motivations, in the current study, it is not my purpose to make a distinction between the three components proposed by Murphy-Lejeune (2002); instead, I will distinguish between (a) those expectations which act as motivations and (b) those expectations which do not necessarily do so, but that constitute the participants' symbolic meaning of the things encountered abroad. In this sense, following Krzaklewska (2008), I will consider the former as comprising those expectations which act as reasons, determinants and forces that trigger action and/or decision. For instance, the following excerpt shows that 'encountering difference' is both an expectation *and* a motivation for Ariadna which prompted her to go to Denmark:

Excerpt 19 Yearning to encounter difference
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Ariadna - DK*)

1	ARIADNA:	many people were telling me why are	*[...] molta gent em deia on vas*
2		you going so far/ don't you see tha··t_	*tan lluny/ si··_ no veuràs el so··l_*
3		you will not see the su··n_ that there	*hi haurà neu_ no sé què_ * dic_ és*
4		will be snow_ whatever_ * I mean_	*lo que busco\ [...] a mi*
5		that's what I'm looking for\ [...] I	*m'agradaria viure l'experiència*
6		would like to live the experience o··f_	*de··_ pues d'aquest canvi climàtic*
7		*well_ of encountering this climate	*sobretot\ no/ i de·· i d'estil de*
8		change\ right/ o··f_ another lifestyle\	*vida\ perquè per anar-me'n a*
9		because_ I can go to Italy for the	*Itàlia hi puc anar els caps de*
10		weekend or·*it's very similar\	*setmana o· * és molt semblant*

Ariadna clearly expresses her intention to keep an open mind towards the things she expects to find abroad. However, as has been suggested, I understand that not all expectations necessarily function as motives that encourage students to participate in this programme. In fact, they could also function as aspects that the students dislike about the culture they are about to enter. In this sense, I will consider expectations as future ideas that they have about their host countries and about their experiences in them. As an illustration, excerpt 20 includes the expectation of one of the students who went to Wales, Amanda. In the short-written questionnaire, when asked about the differences (if any) that she expected to find between the home and host societies and universities, she says the following:

Excerpt 20 Opposing the Catalan and the English societies
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Amanda - UK*)

1 2 3 4 5	RESEARCHER:	What differences do you expect to find between the university and society in Lleida/Catalonia/Spain and that of your host country?	*Quines diferències esperes trobar entre la universitat i la societat lleidatana/catalana/espanyola i la universitat i la societat del país on vas?*
6 7 8 9 10 11	AMANDA:	The differences can be the way they work on the competences they are expected to acquire and with reference to the society I think they are not as open or as friendly as Catalans.	*Les diferències poden ser la manera com treballen les competències que s'han d'assolir i pel que fa a la societat penso que no són tan oberts o bé tan simpàtics com els catalans.*

Although Amanda expects to find differences within the host university (lines 6-8) and society (10-11), these are not aspects that motivate her to leave her home country. She is just, as suggested before, anticipating the existence of particular differences and, similarly to Ariadna, she shows an open mind about this expected diversity.

With reference to motivations, Murphy-Lejeune (2002) asserts that most research has focused on data that have been collected *after* the students' experiences abroad and that, therefore, these data may include elements of the three components mentioned earlier. By way of illustration, I quote Verònica, one

of the participants in this study, who was asked to give a title to her storied Erasmus experience in the narrative interview. Following Murphy-Lejeune, Verònica's title – 'Different from what I was looking for' (*Diferent al que buscava*) – brings to light the interconnectedness of active and resulting components, given that it reveals her evaluation of the final outcomes of her Erasmus experience, in relation to her expectations and hopes, which, at the same time, affects her "ambitions for the future" (ibid, 2002: 79): 'right now, I wouldn't go to Italy but to another place; to the other side of the world so as not to find so many Spanish people' (*ara mateix no aniria a Itàlia sinó que aniria a un altre lloc; a l'altra punta del món per no trobar-me tants espanyols*). In the current project, however, I will not only take into account the students' expectations and motives for going abroad as expressed by them *after* the SA experience but also those mentioned *before* their departure and *while* abroad. This is somehow illustrated in the following figure, in which we can see the interconnectedness between the participants' expectations/motivations and their present and past behaviour as Erasmus students. When the participants are asked about the impact that their SA experience had on their sense of self at the end of their stay, they made reference to the activities they ended up engaging in during their stay, *while* relating them to their initial motivations that had prompted them to leave. It is based on those motivations and expectations that they ultimately offered a final evaluation of the ways in which they thought they benefitted – or not – from such stay abroad.

Figure 16 The participants' motivations, expectations and behaviour: a longitudinal view
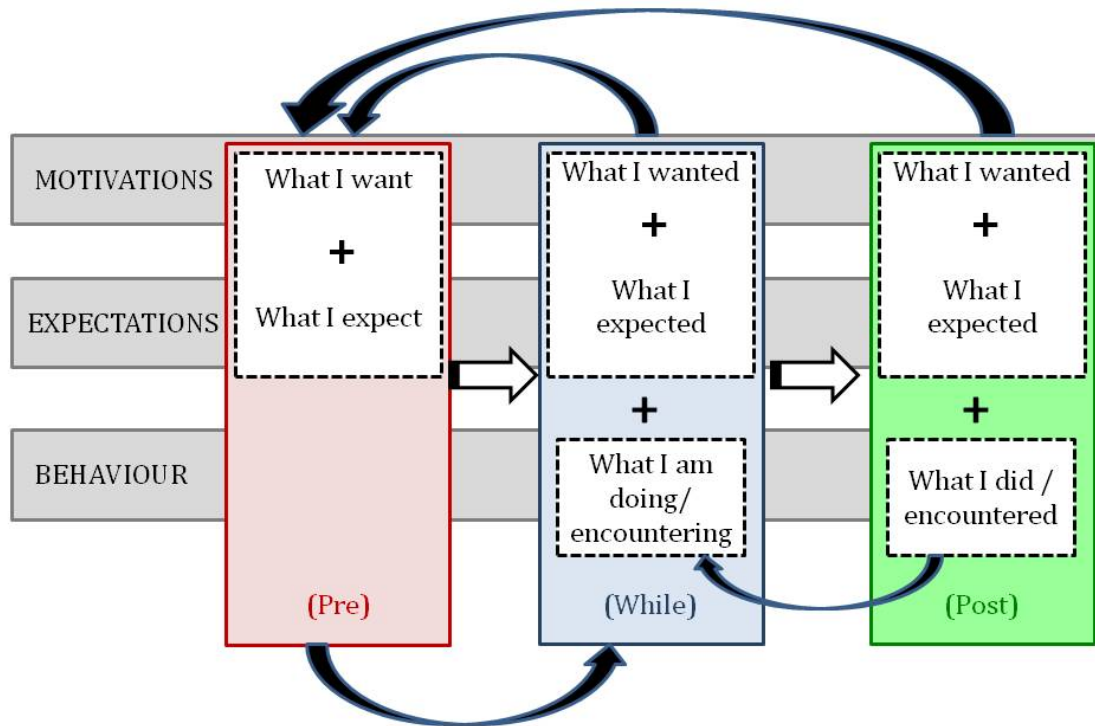
The fact of eliciting the participants' motives at three different stages (pre-while-post) has proved to be useful in different aspects. First, it has allowed me to see the ways in which, based on those motives, the participants planned or expected their behaviours to be like. In other words, it has allowed me to see, as pointed out in the previous section, how they discursively constructed their *imagined identity* (Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2001; Wenger, 1998; Xu, 2013) as members of the category 'Erasmus student', while delving into the way(s) in which each participant perceived and imagined "the relationships between one's self and other people and things in the same time and space that he or she nevertheless has virtually no direct interactions" (Xu, 2013: 80). In this sense, I intend to answer the following questions: first, what category-bound activities did the participants, as future Erasmus students, imagine themselves engaging in – or not – before leaving? For example, as excerpt 21 reveals (lines 4-10), some of the participants claimed that, in order to learn English, they were determined not to interact with

other Spanish and/or Catalan students. Secondly, it has given me insights into the ways in which they reflected upon, accounted for and evaluated their lines of action *while* abroad: Were they behaving as they thought they would? Why or why not? Were they satisfied? For instance, in the interview that I held with Joan when I visited him in Denmark, in the middle of his stay abroad, he told me the following:

Excerpt 21 Avoiding interacting with Spaniards
(*Excerpt taken from semi-structured interview during shadowing period with Joan - DK*)

1 2 3	JOAN:	when_ we make·_ we make a trip or something_ we don't go with Spaniards\	*quan_ fem·_ fem una sortida o algo_no anem amb espanyols*
4 5 6	SÒNIA:	and this * you have told me that you had this as an objective\ that you came here saying_ I_	*i això * tu m'has dit abans que ho tenies com a un objectiu\que tu vas venir aquí dient_ jo_*
8 9 10	JOAN:	the objectives_ the_the_ the * my objective was not to be with Spaniards\	*els objectius_ els_ els_ els * el meu objectiu no era estar amb espanyols*
11	SÒNIA:	exactly\	*exacte*
12 13	JOAN:	I mean_ it was something that I wanted to avoid completely\	*vull dir_ era algo que volia evitar completament*
14 15	SÒNIA: JOAN:	and are you doing it/ yes\	*i ho estàs fent/* *sí*

As can be seen in the excerpt above, Joan makes reference to an activity he is engaging in: to avoid mixing and interacting with Spaniards (line 2-3). In fact, this was something he had already planned to do *before* going abroad (lines 12-13) taking into account that one of his motives was to learn English.

Thirdly, by focusing on the data collected *after* the students' return, I could delve into the ways in which they evaluated the outcomes of the stay – the *object of stance* (Du Bois, 2007: 154) – taking into consideration their motivations, expectations *and* behaviours, in which case I focused on the following questions: Did the students take a positive or negative stance toward the impact of their experiences abroad? Were their hopes finally accomplished? The following excerpt

illustrates how Joan, even one year after his stay abroad, evokes a positive stance toward his experience in Denmark (lines 25, 28), taking into account his two main motivations for going abroad: learning English in an environment in which it is 'the only means of communication that we would have'; and working in groups of students from other countries. He concludes that he does not feel disappointed with the outcomes of the stay, because he has fought for what he wanted (lines 28-29):

Excerpt 22 Fulfilled expectations after the SA experience
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Joan - DK*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	JOAN:	when I was in my second year at university_ someone from [a University in Denmark] came to give a talk_ i··n our university and I went there_ and it caught my attention quite a bit\ look_ they do group work_ that's good * I don't know\ it can be interesting and also with people from other countries [...] I knew that I would do the final project with people from other countries_ who wouldn't probably speak English perfectly but it would be the only means of communication that we would have\	*quan feia segon de carrera van venir de [una universitat de Dinamarca] a fer una xerrada_ a·· la uni i hi vaig anar_ i em va cridar bastant l'atenció\ ai mira_ doncs fan projectes amb grup_ doncs està bé * no sé\ pot estar interessant i més amb gent d'altres països [...] sabia que faria el projecte amb gent d'altres països_ que potser no parlarien tampoc perfectament l'anglès però seria l'únic mitjà de comunicació que tindríem*
17 18 19 20 21 22 23	SÒNIA:	very good\ and then_ +uh··+ you expected * from what I see you expected a lot of things from this stay\ you expected to work in groups_ you expected to improve your English_ * have you been disappointed in any aspect/	*molt bé\ i per tant_+eh··+ tu t'esperaves * pel que veig t'esperaves moltes coses d'aquesta estada\ t'esperaves treballar en grup_ t'esperaves millorar l'anglès_ * has estat decepcionat en algun aspecte/*
25	JOAN:	+uh··+ no\ no\ because_	*+mm·+ no\ no\ perquè_*
26 27	SÒNIA:	you have found what you expected then\	*t'has trobat el que esperaves doncs*
28 29	JOAN:	yes\ because I have also looked for it\	*sí perquè també m'ho he buscat una mica*

As this excerpt illustrates, Joan uses the adjective 'good' and the phrase 'it caught my attention' (lines 5-7) to evaluate the things he expected to find and do

while abroad. Fortunately, he ended up doing and finding those things he mentioned at the beginning and this is why he evokes a positive stance toward the impact that, according to him, the Erasmus has had on his identity – this is illustrated with his response to my question in lines 22-23 on whether he has found anything that has disappointed him.

The initial stage of the analysis of the data revealed two main salient *category-bound activities* connected with the category 'Erasmus student', running through and across the participants' narrative discourse, and which constitute the students' explicit mention of their motives for studying abroad: learning a foreign language (section 5.1); and encountering linguistic and/or cultural difference (section 5.2). These hoped activities will be considered part of the *incumbency* that becomes expected, 'common knowledge' (Stokoe, 2012) that the participants of this project have about the behaviour of those members of the category 'Erasmus student'. In other words, learning a foreign language and encountering difference will be conceived as 'category-bound activit[ies]' performed "expectably and properly by persons who are the incumbents of particular categories" (Hester and Englin, 1997: 5). However, in spite of being highly interrelated, these issues will be broached in separate sections below. Section 5.1 deals with the uppermost motive mentioned by the students for going abroad: learning a foreign language. And in section 5.2 I will address the students' discursive construction of their future envisioned self as someone who will encounter ('cultural') difference and/or novelty during their stay.

5.1. Learning a Foreign Language in the UK, Denmark and Italy

As has been pointed out in section 1.3.1, studying abroad has been traditionally conceived as "a crucial step in the development of ability to use a language in a range of communicative settings" (Kinginger, 2009: 5). For instance, Engle and Engle's (2004: 234) work, among others, provides evidence of US students' improvement of foreign language knowledge as a result of a sojourn abroad:

> [...] they make extensive, rapid progress in the basic vocabulary to which they are most intensely exposed: [...] home, meals, classroom, public transportation, and various social settings. The mastery of grammar and linguistic structures previously prepared in the classroom setting would suddenly take on new immediacy and utility, especially for students required to use the language in all settings [...].

Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 100) argues that what actually distinguishes European mobile students from other migrants is "the qualitative investment in their future". The learning of a foreign language – mostly of English – or, as Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 82) puts it, "speaking foreignness" is, indeed, the uppermost expected *category-bound activity* (Stokoe, 2012b) mentioned by the participants of this study and, actually, one of their motivations for their stay abroad. The students expect their sojourn abroad to provide them with "a round-the-clock exposure to the language" (Engle and Engle, 2004: 234), which will help them benefit from the experience linguistically speaking. This is illustrated in the following figure, in which I quote the students' expression of their hope to learn a foreign language. The excerpts come from those data sources in which they make this *initial* motive explicit.

Figure 17 Learning a foreign language as an expected category-bound activity

Of course I want [to learn Welsh]! In fact, I have been looking for videos of Welsh-speaking people with English subtitles [...]. However, it is said that this language is not very used. (WQ)

What has motivated me to participate in this stay has been my wish to know the language perfectly, which since I was a kid I always wanted to study. (WQ)

[I want to] learn Italian because, since I will not be able to practice English as much as I wanted, I will learn Italian as much as I can and this will be a positive aspect personally speaking and for my CV. (WQ)

I want to practice English because I haven't been away from home more than two weeks. (WQ)

Amanda (Wales)

Marina (Wales)

Verònica (Italy)

Without a doubt I want to learn Italian because it is a very basic language which I have always liked. Also [I want to learn] all the languages that I can, apart from Italian. (WQ)

I hope and will work so that my stay in the UK helps me perfect my level of English, and of legal English in particular. (WQ)

Roger (Wales)

LANGUAGE LEARNING

Josep M. (Italy)

Patrícia (Italy)

It is a new experience to learn a new language. [...] I want to attend an intensive course in Italian, at the EOI or at the UdL, and also any course offered by the host university. (WQ)

Mònica (DK)

Ariadna (DK)

Joan (DK)

The objective for doing an Erasmus is in the first place_ for the language\ right/ because··_ * well_ my idea is·_ (...) come on * I go away_ I practice· quite a while and upon my return I will feel better [with my English]. (Pre-FG)

I would like to improve my English. (WQ)

[Learning Danish] is sincerely not my objective.. It is obvious that I would like to learn some words [...] but my priority is English. (WQ)

[I would like to] learn basic things in Danish or as much as I can. I have looked at some books of Danish for beginners. (WQ)

I finally decided to go to Denmark because I thought it was a very good opportunity to··_ *well_ to improve my English\ (Pre-FG)

As has been mentioned in the methodology chapter, the selected participants for this study chose UK, Denmark and Italy as their host destinations, in which they hoped and expected to achieve one of their main goals: learning a foreign language. The purpose of this section is to examine the way(s) in which the students' image about the sociolinguistic landscape of their host destinations influenced their motivation to learn a particular language. To that end, I will analyse the language motive appearing in the discourse of the nine participants of this study, while delving into the following questions: In what way(s) did the students make the sociolinguistic scenario of their host country relevant in their discourse *before* their SA experience? How did it affect their motivations regarding their learning of a foreign language? Did they consider it an obstacle or just the perfect site for accomplishing their goal? Did all the students see themselves learning the *local* language(s) and/ or the most spoken foreign language? In order to contextualize the analysis of the students' discourse, a descriptive account of the host universities is also provided in the present section.

The two universities in the UK where the students went to were located in Wales and, for reasons of confidentiality, they will be named University A (Amanda and Roger), and University B (Marina). According to the *Office for National Statistics* of the UK (2011 census)[8], although both Welsh and English are the official languages of Wales, the former is only spoken by a 19% of its population, whereas the latter is spoken by 99% of the residents. On the one hand, although English appears to be the default language of University A, this university is presented as a higher education institution in which the learning of Welsh is promoted through various policies. As stated on its website, the university claims to have many Welsh speaking students, but the opportunities to use the language within the institution have been traditionally scarce. This is the reason why these policies are meant to embed the Welsh language within its academic working practices. To that end, these policies give students the option to have a Welsh-speaking personal tutor or to sit their exams in Welsh. On the other hand,

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[8] QS206WA - Welsh language skills, ONS 2011 census. (accessed: 09.01.2015)

^ QS205EW - Proficiency in English, ONS 2011 census. (accessed: 09.01.2015)

University B is constructed as an institution that aims to build a bilingual community in which both Welsh and English are treated equally, so that every individual has the right and opportunity to use both languages within the university context. Despite this, the students in this study reported that English – not Welsh – was the language of instruction, as was the case of those who went to Denmark.

In Denmark, even though the official language is Danish, English is spoken by an 86% of its population as a foreign language (European Commission, 2012b). The Danish university (University C) where Mònica, Ariadna and Joan went to is defined as an internationally oriented institution with many international students coming from more than 50 countries. However, as has already been mentioned, Mònica, Ariadna and Joan reported that the *only* language of instruction in the courses they attended was English and, indeed, the learning of this language – not Danish – is an activity that appears in the students' comments at the three stages of the study (pre, while, post).

As regards the third destination, Italy, the European Commission (2012b) indicates that English is the most spoken foreign language, although by a clearly smaller percentage of the population than that for Denmark: only a 34% of the residents speak it. Nevertheless, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (2012), the degree of knowledge of other languages in Italy (English included) is quite elementary: 30.6% of people who spoke at least another language reported that they understood and used only few words and sentences; and only 15% said they knew how to understand a wide range of texts, and use the second language in a flexible manner and with full competence.

On the one hand, Verònica and Patrícia went to University D, a university which, in spite of offering a website in Italian and English, is mainly monolingual as regards its working practices. For instance, the courses offered at this institution are generally taught in Italian, although some teaching is available in English. The university encourages international students to learn the national language by offering free Italian courses for foreign students until a B1 level. On the other hand, Josep Miquel decided to go to University E, which also has Italian as the language of

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instruction in almost all its programmes. In fact, efforts to teach the Italian language and culture are crystallized in the form of courses for international students. However, unlike University D, multilingualism is already present in the trilingual version of its website – in Italian, English and Chinese – and on 3 out of the 32 programmes which are fully taught in English.

As has been pointed out, the participants' language stake, although combined with other cultural and personal issues, appears as one of their main motivations for going abroad, and this has also been reported in Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) research on the experiential narratives of fifty students, who participated in three different SA programmes. The participants of Murphy-Lejeune's study also reported language learning as their main initial motive for studying abroad, because they seemed to be "aware of the linguistic stakes inherent to the contemporary world scene" and realized that "language is the key which opens doors to relationships [and that] without the necessary linguistic tools, one is left behind, isolated, marginalised" (ibid, 2002: 82). However, Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 82) also notes that not all students may experience the fact of *using* – not learning – an L2 as an easy and always successful experience:

> If 'speaking foreignness' gives such jubilant pleasure, it may be because language allows for an expansion or dilatation of self, comparable to a second birth. [...] Sometimes, the opposite is true and the difficulty of living in a new language, of being 'lost in translation' provokes the painful feeling of a split between two different personalities, the intense suffering of being deprived of the ability to express oneself fully and as a consequence of being reduced to a talkative mask, a masquerade.

In the case of the participants of this study who went to the UK and to Denmark, it was the learning of the English language – local in the UK and foreign in Denmark – one of the activities that motivated them to leave their home countries and voluntarily start a period of their lives abroad. The following excerpts illustrate the way(s) in which the students who went to the UK made the linguistic dimension of their SA experience a salient one prior to departure:

Excerpt 23 Marina's motivation to learn a foreign language
(Excerpt taken from the WQ of Marina - UK)

1	What has motivated me to participate in	*El que m'ha empès a fer aquesta estada ha*
2	this stay has been my wish <u>to know the</u>	*estat la meva volença de conèixer a la*
3	<u>language perfectly</u>, which since I was a	*perfecció l'idioma que des de petita vaig*
4	kid I always wanted to study. I certainly	*voler estudiar. Sé del cert que el nivell que*
5	know that the level that I have of it is	*posseeixo sobre aquest no és el que*
6	neither the one I would like nor the one	*m'agradaria ni el que se'm demana per tal*
7	I am expected to have in order to	*de poder avançar en els meus estudis. A més*
8	continue with my studies. What is more,	*a més, gràcies a les experiències de gent*
9	thanks to the experiences of other	*coneguda m'he adonat que aquest*
10	people I know, I have realized that this	*programa és un gran ajut per arribar als*
11	programme is of great help to reach my	*meus objectius. D'alguna manera, dites*
12	goals. In a way, these experiences have	*experiències també han influenciat en la*
13	also influenced this decision.	*tria d'aquesta decisió.*

Excerpt 24 Amanda's motivation to learn a foreign language
(Excerpt taken from the WQ of Amanda - UK)

1	I want <u>to practice English</u> because I	*Vull practicar l'anglès ja que no he estat*
2	haven't been away from home more	*fora de casa més de dues setmanes i a més*
3	than two weeks and, also, I think it <u>can</u>	*penso que pot ser una experiència que em*
4	<u>be a very enriching experience both at a</u>	*pot enriquir molt tant a nivell personal com*
5	<u>personal and cultural level</u>.	*cultural.*

Excerpt 25 Roger's motivation to learn a foreign language
(Excerpt taken from the WQ of Roger - UK)

1	Mainly, what has made me decide [to	*Principalment, el que m'ha fet decidir és el*
2	participate in the Erasmus programme]	*meu interès pel món anglosaxó i la voluntat*
3	is <u>my interest in the Anglo-Saxon world</u>	*d'adquirir experiències internacionals a*
4	and the will to gain international	*nivell acadèmic que em puguin ser utilitat*
5	experiences academically speaking that	*en el futur, en el sentit que constitueixen un*
6	can be helpful in the future, in the sense	*pas més per convertir-me en un professional*
7	that they constitute one more step in	*del món del dret capaç de treballar més*
8	becoming a professional lawyer capable	*enllà de les fronteres estatals o nacionals.*
9	of working beyond state or national	*(...) espero i treballaré per tal que la meva*
10	boundaries. (...) I hope and will work so	*estada al Regne Unit em serveixi per*
11	that my stay in the UK helps me <u>perfect</u>	*perfeccionar el meu nivell d'anglès en*
12	<u>my level of English, and of legal English</u>	*general, i d'anglès jurídic en particular.*
13	<u>in particular</u>.	

As the excerpts above illustrate, the three participants express their wish to become Erasmus students whose stay abroad will allow them to engage in activities that have to do with their improving of their English language (Marina, lines 2-3; Amanda, line 1; and Roger, lines 12-13). On the one hand, Marina, as a

student of the degree in English Studies, aims to know English 'perfectly' and positions herself along an *epistemic scale* (Kärkkäinen, 2003) - 'I certainly know' (*sé del cert*), lines 4-5 - in order to evaluate her level of English prior to departure, which she characterizes, in lines 5-7, as 'neither the one I would like nor the one I am expected to have in order to continue with my studies' (*no és el que m'agradaria ni el que se'm demana per tal de poder avançar en els meus estudis*). This evaluative predicate worked as a goal that 'has motivated [her] to participate in this stay' (*m'ha empès a fer aquesta estada*), although she also mentions that her decision to leave was, at the same time, influenced by circulating discourses that somehow evaluated this SA experience positively in relation to the learning of a foreign language and that have made her realize, even before leaving, that 'this programme is of great help to reach [her] goals' (*m'he adonat que aquest programa és un gran ajut per arribar als meus objectius*) (lines 10-12).

On the other hand, Amanda expresses her wish to 'practice English' (*practicar l'anglès*) in the host country, while suggesting that this is not an activity she can engage in if she stays at 'home': 'I want to <u>practice English</u> because I haven't been away from home more than two weeks' (*Vull practicar l'anglès ja que no he estat fora de casa més de dues setmanes*). It is worth taking into account that Amanda, like Roger, chose to go to the UK despite the fact that they did not have the option to study Law there because 'the system that we have here which is civil law is very different and there we have common law' (*canvia molt el sistema que tenim aquí que és civil law i allà tenim common law*). Yet, in spite of not being able to continue their studies, their wish to go to the UK was born out of the fact that they both expected it to be the best site to learn English and, for Amanda in particular, the best site to learn what she defined as 'the correct English' (*l'anglès correcte*). Even though she does not mention it explicitly, there is a clear idealisation of and an expectation to find native speakers of English who have a "complete and possibly innate competence in the language" (Pennycook, 1994: 175). Alan Davies (2003: 1) treads a similar path when he describes this ideology, also reflected in Amanda's words, about the 'native speaker' as people who:

[...] have a special control over a language, insider knowledge about 'their' language. They are the models we appeal to for the 'truth' about the language, they know what the language is ('Yes, you can say that') and what the language isn't ('No, that's not English[...]). They are the stakeholders of the language, they control its maintenance and shape its direction.

This common view is also illustrated in the following excerpt taken from the pre-focus group, in which we can observe another student, who was also about to participate in the Erasmus programme, and Amanda talking about the UK as the best destination for learning English:

Excerpt 26 'What better than going to the UK?'
(*Excerpt taken from the Pre-focus group with Amanda - UK*)

1 2 3 4	STUDENT 1:	I looked at the list_ and there was Germany_ Finland_ and you say_ <u>what better than going to the UK</u>/	*vaig mirar la llista_ hi havia Alemània_ Finlàndia_ I dius_ què millor que anar a Regne Unit/*
5	AMANDA:	of course\	*clar*
6 7 8	STUDENT 1:	because you will find all the signs in English_ you will meet people who speak English_	*perquè trobaràs tots els cartells en angles_ quedaràs amb gent que parla anglès_*
9	AMANDA:	and the correct English\	*i l'anglès correcte*
10	STUDENT 1:	exactly\	*exacte*

In excerpt 26, Student 1 and Amanda verbally indicate their *alignment* with each other, through the use of linguistic mechanisms such as 'of course' (line 5) and 'exactly' (line 10). Besides, Amanda uses the coordinating conjunction 'and' (line 9) in order to contribute to the construction of a common *stance* regarding the reasons why the UK is the perfect site to learn the language, while adding that, apart from what Student 1 has said, it is a country where you find 'the correct English'.

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In turn, despite not being a language student, Roger, in excerpt 25, expresses his interest in the Anglo-Saxon world and, particularly, in English – a language which he does not just expect to improve but to 'perfect' (lines 11-12). The Erasmus programme, he says, is one of the academic international experiences that 'can be helpful in the future' (*puguin ser d'utilitat en el futur*). This indicates that, together with the learning of English, he juxtaposes a rather career-oriented motivation which is that of becoming 'a professional lawyer capable of working beyond state or national boundaries' (*un professional del món del dret capaç de treballar més enllà de les fronteres estatals o nacionals*). Roger, therefore, seems to show awareness of the fact that we inhabit a world of globalization, which is characterized by:

> [...] the intensification of global interconnectedness, [...] full of movement and mixture, contact and linkages, and persistent cultural interaction and exchange. It speaks, in other words, to the complex mobilities and interconnections that characterize the globe today. [...] a world where borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous, allowing more and more peoples and cultures to be cast into intense and immediate contact with each other. (Inda and Rosaldo, 2008: 4).

Learning an international language (English) and having direct contact with people from different parts of the world are two activities that are part of his *imagined identity* as a future Erasmus student, which he believes will ultimately be beneficial in order to become a future professional who can "readily (although not freely and without difficulty) cut across national boundaries" (ibid, 2008: 6); or engage in today's "cross-cultural movements [that] have become the norm [...] in the general context of globalisation" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 2).

Very similarly to Amanda, Roger and Marina, the students who went to Denmark (Mònica, Joan and Ariadna) express their interest in improving their English. On the one hand, Mònica expresses, on a number of occasions, that her 'priority is [indeed learning] English' (line 6, excerpt 27). Even in the narrative interview, one year after her Erasmus experience, she recalls that the language

objective came first in her list of motives for going abroad: 'the objective for going on an Erasmus is in first place_ for the language\' (*l'objectiu de fer l'Erasmus en primer lloc_ per la llengua*). From what she wrote in the written questionnaire (see excerpt 27), by 'the language' she is not making reference to Danish – even though it is the official language in Denmark – but to English. As the following excerpt shows, she feels the learning of Danish is, in any case, an obligation (line 5) but not at all a motivation for her:

Excerpt 27 'My priority is English'
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Mònica - DK*)

1	MÒNICA:	[Learning Danish] is honestly not my objective. It is obvious that I would like to learn some words, because if I'm living in another country for some time it is my obligation. However, <u>my priority is English</u>.	*Sincerament no és el meu objectiu. És evident que m'agradaria aprendre alguna paraula ja que si estic vivint un temps en un país és la meva obligació. Tot i això la meva prioritat és l'anglès.*
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

Unlike other students who had already been abroad and for whom mobility and the use of English was a kind of habit, Mònica takes an emotional stance toward her linguistic ability, emphasizing not the learning of English – as she has been doing for more than ten years – but to actually function with it or *use* it once abroad. In the pre-focus group, she expresses her worry, not about being an English learner, but about becoming an English *user* for the first time: 'if you ask me what I fear_ *well_ the fact of speaking English\ a·nd how to do· things there in English\' (*si em preguntes què et fa por * pues_ el parlar anglès\ i· com fe·r les coses allà en anglès*).

Similarly to Mònica, Joan, in the NI, points out that he saw the experience in Denmark as 'a very good opportunity to_ to improve my English\' (*una molt bona oportunitat doncs pe·r_ per millorar l'anglès*). Regarding the learning of the local language, before going abroad, Joan does not see it as an activity he will engage in as an Erasmus student, but rather as an activity he would engage in if he stayed there for a longer period of time: 'if I stay to work or to continue with my studies there, I will probably consider studying the local language, that is, Danish.' (*Si em

quedo a treballar o continuar els estudis allà, segurament em plantejaré estudiar una llengua pròpia, és a dir, el danès). Joan's words illustrate the relationship between integrative motivation and the willingness to communicate in the SA context (Churchill and DuFon, 2006) and, more specifically, on the impact that the length of the stay may have on the students' motivation for learning a particular language. Joan expresses his interest in learning the local language if he had to "meet more people and [establish] friendships within the host community" (ibid, 2006: 15). Yet, he knows that the language of instruction in the subjects he will take is English and he also expects the use of this language to be a shared practice among the other exchange students. This is also the case of the participants in the study of Kalocsai (2014).

For Ariadna, the third student in Denmark, although she mentions in the WQ that she 'would like to improve [her] English' (*[li] agradaria millorar el [seu] anglès*), it does not appear as her uppermost motivation for going to Denmark. In fact, as will be argued in a later section, in the narrative interview she states that her main objective is clearly that of breaking with the routine and try something *new* – an adjective which, together with 'different' and 'other' – is constantly visible in her discourse. Ariadna's desire was that of encountering cultural differences or, as Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 87) puts it, that of "living foreignness": 'I knew that I wanted a completely different place fro··m_ from what we have here\' (*tenia clar que volia un puesto completament diferent de··_ de lo que teníem aquí*). In relation to Denmark's local language, before going abroad, Ariadna does see herself learning some Danish and she has actually looked for resources to do so before setting off: 'I would like to [...] learn basic things in Danish or as much as I can. I have looked at some books of Danish for beginners' (*m'agradaria [...] aprendre nocions bàsiques del danès o fins on arriba. He mirat llibres d'iniciació bàsiques del danès*).

The language concern is also mentioned by the three participants who went to Italy (Josep Miquel, Patrícia and Verònica). As a Law student, Josep Miquel mentions different motivations for going abroad, which oscillate between personal,

academic, linguistic and cultural dimensions of a stay abroad. Apart from his desire to 'live a new experience away from my city, meet new people, [...] know the Italian Legal system, living for some time in a different culture [...], pass subjects which are probably a little bit more difficult here [in Lleida]' (*viure una nova experiència fora de la meva ciutat, conèixer gent nova, [...], conèixer els sistemes legals italians [...], conviure durant un temps amb una cultura diferent [...] i també aprovar assignatures que potser aquí són una mica més difícils*), in the WQ he mentions the learning of Italian as an activity which he, 'without any doubt' (*sense cap mena de dubte*), wants to engage in while abroad. However, as can be seen in the following excerpt, he does not seem to reject the possibility of learning other languages apart from Italian – a language which he categorizes as 'very basic' (*molt bàsic*):

Excerpt 28 Learning various (foreign) languages
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Josep Miquel*)

1	[...] without any doubt I want to	[...] *sense cap mena de dubte vull*
2	learn Italian because it is a very	*aprendre italià ja que és un*
3	basic language and because I	*idioma molt bàsic i que sempre*
4	have always liked it. Also <u>all the</u>	*m'ha agradat. També tots els*
5	<u>languages that I can learn, apart</u>	*idiomes que pugui aprendre més,*
6	<u>from Italian</u>.	*a part de l'italià.*

Besides, in the pre-focus group, he also constructs his future vision of his 'self' as someone who, toward the end of the stay, is able to speak Italian well, although not as someone born in Italy, with perfect native-like proficiency: 'when I am in Italy_ * I would like that at the end_ when going out * I would like that they said that this guy knows [the language]\ I mea·n_ he is not an Italian but_ he's been here for a long time\ (*quan jo sigui a Itàlia_ * m'agradaria que al final_ quan sortís * m'agradaria que em diguessin que aquest tio en sap\ vull di·r_ no és un italià de tota la vida però_ ha estat aquí molt temps*). Josep Miquel's words also support an ideology about the native speaker, for which he "conflat[es] language as an instrument of communication with language as a symbol of social identification" (Pennycook, 1994: 175-176) while, somehow, implying that "a language is inherited (genetically or by inclusion into a homogeneous social group), that there

is a close correspondence between holding a citizenship of a country and being the native speaker of one mother tongue" (ibid, 1994: 176).

Patrícia also mentions several reasons for going abroad (e.g. growing as a person and meeting other cultures) and, in the WQ, 'learning a new language' (*aprendre un nou idioma*) appears the first in her list. In fact, she contends that she intends to take a course in Italian in Lleida before going abroad and also any course offered by her host university in Italy.

Verònica's first intention was not to go to Italy, but to a country in which she could practice her English. Yet, Italy was her only option, given that she did not have any certificate of English – a requirement of the International Relations Office, for those students who want to study a university where English is the language of instruction. In spite of that, in the WQ, she does not seem to be disappointed but willing, instead, to get to know the Italian culture, which she deems as 'interesting' (*interessant*) and 'quite similar' (*bastant semblant*) –, and motivated to learn the local language:

Excerpt 29 Practicing English in Italy?
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Verònica - IT*)

1	My idea was not going to Italy, but	*El meu pensament no era marxar*
2	due to the lack of a Certificate of	*a Itàlia, però per falta de títol*
3	English I just had this option. Now	*d'anglès només tenia aquesta*
4	that I have to go to Italy, I like it	*opció. Ara que m'ha tocat marxar*
5	because it is an interesting	*a Itàlia, m'agrada ja que també és*
6	country and the culture is quite	*un país interessant i la cultura és*
7	similar. <u>I have thought about</u>	*bastant semblant. [M'he*
8	<u>learning Italian, because I will not</u>	*plantejat] aprendre italià, ja que*
9	<u>be able to practice English as</u>	*no podré practicar tant com jo*
10	<u>much as I wanted</u>. I will take this	*volia l'anglès. Aprofitaré per*
11	opportunity to learn Italian as	*aprendre l'italià al màxim ja que*
12	much as I can, because this will be	*així serà un punt a favor per a mi*
13	positive for me and for my CV.	*i al meu currículum.*

As the excerpt above illustrates, Verònica is determined to learn Italian, an activity which, according to her, will have a positive impact on her future professional plans (lines 12-13). Yet, in spite of going to a country in which English is not widely spoken, neither inside nor outside of the university, she still expects to engage in the activity of practising, not only Italian, but also her English (lines 9-

10), given that she expects to be immersed in an international "community whose natural lingua franca is not the local language, but English" (Caudery et al., 2008: 115).

Excerpt 30 Expecting to use English and Italian in Italy
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Verònica - IT*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	SÒNIA:	do you remember that Verònica before leaving/ with those motivations to· * hey_ I'm going on an Erasmus\ what exactly did she expect/ [...] the things you were willing to do like·· * look_ in Italy I will do this_ this_ this and this\	*tu recordes la Verònica d'abans de marxar/ de les ganes aquestes de· * ei_ me'n vaig d'Erasmus\ què és el que esperava exactament/ [...] el que esperaves amb il·lusió de·· * mira_ a Itàlia faré això_ això_ això i això*
9 10 11 12	VERÒNICA:	well_ a group of people_ willing to do things_ wi··th * from different places around Europe_ [...] you practice English_	*pues_ un grup de gent_ amb ganes de fer coses_ a··mb * de diferents llocs d'Europa_ [...] practiques l'anglès_*
13	SÒNIA:	+mhm\+	*+mhm\+*
14 15	VERÒNICA:	+um··+ <u>if you don't know English then you practice Italian</u> _	*+em··+ si no ho saps en anglès pues practiques l'italià_*

In sum, the analyses of the participants' discourse regarding their expectation *and* motivation to learn a foreign language, mainly in the case of those who went to the UK and Denmark, corroborates Abram De Swaan's (2001: 6) idea that English is "at the hub of the linguistic galaxy" and that "people usually prefer to learn a language that is at a higher level in the hierarchy" (ibid, 2001: 5). Table 7 shows that the *stance* that a substantial majority of the participants displayed is expressing their interest in learning – not necessarily the local language of the host country – but English (the students' mention of their interest in learning the different languages is indicated with black checks).

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Table 7 Language motivation

Category-Bound Activity:	Stance								
	Wales (UK)			Denmark			Italy		
	Marina	Amanda	Roger	Mònica	Ariadna	Joan	Verònica	Patrícia	J.Miquel
Learning English	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Learning Welsh	✓								
Learning Danish					✓				
Learning Italian							✓	✓	✓
Other languages									✓

Figure 7, thus, summarizes the participants' *stance* towards the *category-bound activity* of learning a given foreign language which, at the same time, acts as an *object of stance* to which the students orient themselves. The analysis of the data suggests that, although the participants who went to the UK seemed to be aware of the existence of both English and Welsh as the local languages of their host country, they all shared their motivation to learn English and thus show a similar envisioned self not only as English learners, but also as competent English users. Indeed, for the three of them the Erasmus stay is conceived as a means by which they can accomplish their objective of improving their English; a goal, which is, at no point, conceived to be stymied by the existence of another official language (Welsh), given that it is a language which, according to what they have heard, is rarely used within or outside the university. Similarly, the participants who went to Denmark, besides their apparent awareness of the existence of Danish as Denmark's local language, also articulated their willingness to learn and/or improve their English (Denmark's most spoken foreign language), an activity which some of them even refer to as their priority. Before the stay abroad, the learning of Danish is certainly not something the students feel they will need, unless the temporality of the Erasmus was longer or, as suggested by Joan, unless they stayed in Denmark for work purposes. This may have to do with the fact that the participants do not have a minimum Danish language requirement in order to go to Denmark, given that they have already been told that their classes will be

taught in English. This is corroborated by the work of Caudery et al. (2008) on the experience of exchange students in Scandinavian universities, in which "although a rather small proportion of exchange students come from "native-speaking" English countries, most take courses taught in English, and universities are offering an increasing number of such English-medium courses in order to facilitate visits by exchange students with little or no knowledge of the local language" (ibid, 2008: 115). It is, thus, of no surprise that the students who went to Denmark, and also those who went to the UK, expected "their everyday life [to have] English as the main language of interaction in both academic and social contexts" (Caudery et al., 2008: 128) or to live in "a lingua franca bubble" (ibid, 2008: 126). In fact, they *are* required to have an English language proficiency level of B2 (following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), and this may clearly have an influence over the students' motivations and, also, their expectations about what they think they will find *and* do in their host countries.

In the case of the students who went to Italy, as excerpt 29 illustrates, this country is described as a destination which the students find quite similar to their home country. As far as the learning of languages is concerned, they all imagine themselves learning mainly the local language (Italian), although Josep Miquel and Verònica do not reject the possibility of encountering other languages, such as English – the use of this lingua franca has actually been described as "a key shared practice within the [...] Erasmus community" (Kalocsai, 2014: 102) . What differentiates the experience of these students from the ones of those who went to the UK and to Denmark is (a) the fact that no language proficiency is required at the time of application for going to Italy – unless the host university asks for it -, but only their commitment to enrol in an Italian course before departure; and (b) the language of instruction at the host university which, in this case, is Italian and not English.

In sum, learning a foreign language – mostly of English – is an interest which is shared by almost all the participants in this study. Prior to departure, they all construct their imagined identities as people who will benefit from this

experience linguistically, and this somehow reinforces the idea of them as future members of the same identity category (Erasmus student) with expectable and or incumbent features that define their membership into it.

The analysis of the students' discourse on language learning and use *during* their sojourn abroad will allow us to see to what extent this initial linguistic motivation (for foreign and/or local languages) is still maintained or not, and whether English is constructed as the *only* "instrument for use in the international context" (Caudery et al., 2008: 125) thereby becoming "a force restricting or preventing the learning and even use of other foreign languages besides English" (Peckham et al., 2012: 179). This will be dealth with in section 6.2, which seeks to expand the research agenda on the students' actual practices and attitudes towards their language learning/use during their study abroad experience, as reported by them.

5.2. Encountering novelty, difference, and otherness.

The students' landing in an unfamiliar sociocultural environment sometimes involves their participation in diverse situations, which may prompt them to display attitudes of openness to difference, novelty and/or otherness encountered while abroad. As Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 217) suggests, "openness is an attitude which characterises student travellers before their departure under the guise of curiosity and readiness to change". Figure 18 illustrates and supports Murphy-Lejeune's idea, by showing the way(s) in which seven participants in this study refer to another *category-bound activity*, which is that of "liv[ing] foreignness" (ibid, 2002: 87) in their host countries – another initial motivation for going abroad:

Figure 18 Encountering novelty / difference / otherness

My motivation was_ * well_ I had it super clear\ because I'm a person who·· * well_ I go here_ I go there_ because * I don't like the routine and things like that\ and I had it clea·r_ I like people * meeting people from **other** cultures_ from **other** places in the world_ [...] I will not practice my English much_ * I said * anyway_ I will have **another** language\ (NI)

Verònica (Italy)

Of course I want to learn Welsh. [...] I have found out, however, that it doesn't have anything to do with or that it is **not similar** to any of the languages that I know. (WQ)

Marina (UK)

ENCOUNTERING NOVELTY / DIFFERENCE / OTHERNESS

Josep M. (Italy)

What has motivated me to participate in the Erasmus programme is to live a **new** experience outside my city, meet **new** people, learn **new** ways of studying in a **different** language, [...] live in a **different** culture such as the Italian for some time [...]. (WQ)

Patrícia (Italy)

A **new** experience to [...] meet **other** cultures\ (WQ)

[I want to] meet **new** people, a **new** country and to know a **new** language. (WQ)

Mònica (DK)

Ariadna (DK)

Joan (DK)

I like the idea to see how **another** culture lives, which in spite of being close, we are **very different**, mainly in relation to the lifestyle. (WQ)

I knew that I wanted a **completely different** place fro··m_ from what we have here\ (NI)

[My objective was] English and also * well_ I was also attracted to the study methodolo& methodology\ right/ [...] it caught my attention quite a lot\ hey_ look_ they do group projects\ that's good\ I don't know_ it can be interesting and besides with people from **other** countries\ (NI)

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As figure 18 illustrates, most students express their interest to meet 'a different culture' – a term they seem to use in order to make reference to 'the locals' and 'their lifestyle'. The concept of 'culture' has been questioned by many scholars who claim that (a) it is used – as is the case of the participants in this study – "as an explanation for everything that a representative of another country does, thinks, etc. while ignoring the fact that other reasons might apply" (Dervin, 2016: 113); and that (b) "you cannot meet a culture but people who (are made to) represent it – or rather represent imaginaries and representations of it" (Dervin, 2016: 9). The participants in this study do not seem to be aware of the fact that "cultures cannot meet, for 'culture' has no agency. It is just a word, a concept, and concepts do not meet" (Wikan, 2002: 83). By claiming that they expect to 'meet different cultures', the participants are somehow de-agentivizing the people who are believed to be members of a particular 'culture' and "talk[ing] as if culture were endowed with mind, feeling, and intention. [...] as if culture had taken on a life of its own" (ibid, 2002: 83). They do not seem to view the notion of culture as discursively "produced by people, rather than [as] being things that explain why they behave the way they do", as Anne Phillips (2007: 45) asserts it should be understood.

Furthermore, the participants seem to use the term 'culture' as "sometimes nothing more than a convenient and lazy explanation" (Piller, 2011: 172), given that they do not elaborate on what they mean by it, as if it was common knowledge and/or self explanatory. Indeed, Ingrid Piller (2011), who combines discourse analytic and sociolinguistic perspectives in her work on intercultural communication, reminds us that 'culture' is a key – and, yet, also a complex – concept in research on interculturality. In spite of this, the term 'culture' seems to be commonly used in daily interactions, by people who – just like the participants of this study – are not specialists in the field of research on interculturality.

The use of the term 'culture' by the students also suggests an essentialist view of the world and their detachment of the view that "cultures are not homogeneous" (Phillips, 2007: 45), but that "there are always internal contestations over the values, practices and meanings that characterize any culture" (ibid, 2007: 45). What is more, they seem to reproduce discourses that make the term 'culture' correspond to the notion of 'national culture', and not to, for instance, "any human

collectivity or category: a profession, an age group, an entire gender, or a family", as Hofstede (2001: 10) posits.

To sum up, in the excerpts above, we can grasp a sense of the term 'culture' – which seems to be widely used - as explanatory of all behaviours, as an agent and/or entity on its own, as a passepartout term (self-explanatory and justified by itself), and as homogenizing and equivalent to national culture and thus corresponding to categories defined by the nation-state. Apart from the students' reference to 'culture', all the excerpts above show the participants' "stance markers" (Englebretson, 2007: 93) and, through them, their invoked attitude, which do not only influence the ways in which they hope and expect their SA experience to be like, but they also reflect their affect towards those *different* elements they expect to find once abroad. The students' eagerness to live the difference is displayed through the use of verbs such as 'like' or 'want', as in 'I like the idea' (*m'agrada la idea*), 'I was attracted to' (*m'atreia*) or 'I want to' (*vull*).

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the adjectives 'different', 'other', 'new' and phrases like 'not similar' are repeated throughout the participants' discourse before going abroad, while conforming judgements that have to do with (a) *languages* – Marina wants to learn Welsh, even though it is a language which is 'not similar to any of the languages that I know' (*no té semblança amb cap de les llengües que conec*), and Josep Miquel expresses his desire to 'study in a different language' (*estudiar amb una llengua diferent*; with (b) *the physical environment* - and/or the university context, in particular -they will be inhabiting for some months: 'a completely different place' (*un lloc completament diferent*); or with (c) *the people* with whom they think they will interact: 'people from other cultures' (*gent d'altres cultures*), 'new people' (*nova gent*). In general, most students expect and are motivated to be immersed in 'a different culture' (*una cultura different*) – a noun phrase to which some of the students added other attitudinal markers, such as the adverbs 'completely' and 'very', which act as intensifiers through which participants project their identities and/or through which they reinforce what their *stance* is. The present section will deal with the second and third aspects which the students expected to be different (the people

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and the physical/academic environment), given that the linguistic dimension of the stay has already been tackled in section 5.1.

5.2.1. The students' attraction to live in a 'different' environment

Although some participants highlighted more their interest in learning a different language and in interacting with different people, four of them also produced evaluations of (a) the physical environment they were about to enter, and (b) the university context, in particular, based on their imagined idea about it as a different environment in many aspects. The following excerpt illustrates this by showing Ariadna's desire and evaluation of the stance object of the physical environment as 'completely different':

Excerpt 31 'I wanted a completely different place'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Ariadna - DK*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	ARIADNA:	but I was sure <u>I wanted a completely different place fro··m from what</u> <u>we have here</u>\ I wanted to go to the North\ the further North the better\ if I had been able to go to Finland o··r_ or Sweden_ [...] or Iceland_ I would have gone further North\ because I wanted difference\ I mea·n_ I didn't want to go to Italy or Portugal where +uh·+ * the quality of life is very similar to this_ a··nd many people were telling me why are you going so far/ you will not see the su··n_ there will be snow_ whatever_ * I said_ that's what I'm looking for\ because I know that it is_ it is a temporary thing_ and I would like to live the experience o··f_ of this different weather mainly\ right/ and o·f_ of lifestyle\ because I can go to Italy at the weekends o·r * it is very similar\ and I mainly said this_ since it is something temporary_ no problem\
		*però jo tenia clar que volia un puesto completament diferent de·· de lo que teníem aquí\ volia anar cap al Nord\ com a més al Nord millor\ si hagués pogut fer Finlàndia o··_o Suècia_ [...] o Islàndia me n'hagués anat més amunt\ perquè volia el contrast\ vull di·r_no volia anar-me'n a Itàlia o Portugal de que les +eh+ * la qualitat de vida és molt semblant amb aquesta_ i·· molta gent em deia on vas tan lluny/ no veuràs el so··l_ hi haurà neu_ no sé què_ * dic_ és lo que busco\ perquè jo sé que és_ és una cosa temporal_i a mi m'agradaria viure l'experiència de··_pues d'aquest canvi climàtic sobretot\ no/ i de· i d'estil de vida\ perquè per anar-me'n a Itàlia hi puc anar els caps de setmana o· * és molt semblant\ i sobretot això deia_ al ser una cosa temporal_ cap problema*

This excerpt comes from the narrative interview that I held with Ariadna, one year after her Erasmus experience. In this interview, she recalls her initial motivation to live a very different experience – it is worth noting how she intensifies the evaluative adjective 'different' with the amplified adverbial 'completely' in line 1. The recurrent use of the adjective 'different' throughout her discourse clearly implies a comparison between different objects of stance with clearly different defining and evaluative predicates. These are summarized in the following table:

Table 8 Stance towards countries

Object of stance		Evaluative stance		Object of stance		Evaluative stance
	'the North'				'Italy'	
'The weather/ lifestyle in'	'Finland'	'(completely) different'	≠	'The quality of life in'	'Portugal'	'very similar to the one here (in Catalonia/Spain)'
	'Sweden'					
	'Iceland' 'Denmark'					

For Amanda, "the same is [clearly] lame" (Dervin, 2016: 35) and she seems to imply that the further away a country is, the more different it will be from her home country. In this sense, studying abroad in neighbouring countries, such as Italy and Portugal, would not allow her to "launch into the challenge […] to break free from [her] own frame of reference [and] try and penetrate that of others" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 219). Even though she expects to encounter difference and/or difficulties, she still displays a positive stance towards the fact of being immersed in a different environment that somehow forces one to be tolerant, flexible and open; even though it may require a personal effort on her part, she does not seem to expect to experience a profound identity crisis due to the transient nature of the study abroad experience (line 12): 'since it is something

temporary_ no problem' (*al ser una cosa temporal_ cap problema*). Taking this into account, the participants in this study would clearly belong to *one* of the 'acculturating groups' proposed by John Berry (2000: 298), which is that of *sojourners*, defined as "temporary immigrants who reside for a specific purpose and time period and return to their home country".

As regards the university and/or the academic context, three participants mention that they expect to encounter a different way of teaching, learning and, an important aspect for them as students, assessment. On the one hand, Joan (DK) wrote that he expected to find a 'different teaching methodology' (*metodologia d'impartició de classes diferents*) and, even, 'more rigour and professionalism when it comes to teaching than here [in Lleida]' (*més rigorositat i professionalitat a l'hora d'ensenyar que aquí*). On the other hand, Patrícia (IT) mentions that, within the university, what she expects to be different and new is the presence and the use of another language (Italian) and the way(s) in which, according to what she has been told, students are assessed:

Excerpt 32 'Mainly the language'
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ with Josep Miquel - IT*)

1	[The difference is] mainly the language. And also the ways of taking exams, because in
2	Italy they tend to take oral exams.

[La diferència és] principalment l'idioma. Tot i que també la manera d'avaluar els exàmens, ja que a Itàlia solen ser exàmens orals.

Functioning within the university with a language which is not one's mother tongue is something that Josep Miquel also mentions and, even, worries about before leaving: 'because of the language I may find it difficult to understand the lessons or the student life in general' (*degut a l'idioma em costi entendre les lliçons o la vida estudiantil en general*). Even though the University of Lleida requires most students to have a certificate of proficiency in the language – not always the local of the host country, but the one mostly used within the university context –, some display an affective stance, expressing their worry about not learning, but being able to use a given foreign language and/or of being "lost in translation" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 82). This would isolate themselves socially and somehow "sever

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[them] from a part of their personality, as if they were 'only half a person'" (ibid, 2002: 82); or as if they could not be themselves in and through a foreign language.

In sum, regarding the physical and academic context of the host country, we could summarize the different objects of stance the participants resort to before departure into the following four:

Table 9 Stance towards physical environment and academic context

	Objects of stance	Evaluative Stance
Physical environment	The weather (in Denmark) - Ariadna	'different'
Academic environment	'Teaching methodology' (in Denmark) - Joan	'different'
	'Examinations' (in Italy) - Patrícia	'different'
	'Understanding the lesson [in Italian]' (in Italy) – Josep M.	'difficult'

The students' stance towards the physical/academic environment before leaving show their eagerness to encounter difference – we can see this through the use of the stance predicate 'different' in order to evaluate diverse elements that they expect will be part of their SA experience. Although this expected difference makes them leave with a kind of fear of the unknown, of having to go through difficult situations (e.g. feeling alone at the beginning of the stay; not being able to follow the lessons and/or communicate with others in a given foreign language, etc.), they still seem to display a positive stance towards this experience which they expect will probably make them change their mindset and show their ability to cope with the 'simplexity' (Dervin, 2016: 81) and/or "to navigate between simple and complex ideas" that characterize any act of interaction and life in general.

5.2.2. Analysing the Students' Discourses of Othering

> We simply act and have different ways of doing. The culture influences a lot.
>
> *Simplement actuem i tenim maneres de fer diverses. La cultura hi influeix moltíssim.*
>
> Mònica (Denmark)

As has already been noted, most students in the present study reported their desire to meet 'different people' and or 'a different culture', the latter being a term which, as has already been pointed out, is often put forward as a means to explain and generalize about a national group's 'behaviour'. The data gathered through the short written questionnaire allowed me to (a) see the participants' expectations and motivations to meet and interact with the 'different people' – whether they are 'natives' of the host country or other exchange students like them; and to (b) examine the students' (sometimes elicited) *discourses of othering*[9] and/or the ways in which they discursively construct this "boundary between different and same, insiders and outsiders" (Dervin, 2016: 45) and, ultimately, who they are. In this study, I follow Richard Jenkins' (2008: 17) understanding of identity as being social, "multi-dimensional [and] never a final or settled matter", and *also* very much related with similarity and difference, given that "to say who I am is to say who or what I am not, but it is also to say with whom I have things in common" (ibid, 2008: 21). He actually provides an example that illustrates this by referring to our personal name – which is a clear and "definitive marker of individual difference" (ibid, 2008: 21); and, yet, as Jenkins argues, "to name oneself is generally also to establish one's public gender" (ibid, 2008: 21). This interplay of similarity and difference, when talking about the notion of identity, is also reflected in Paul Gilroy's view of identity (1997: 301-302):

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[9] Adrian Holliday (2011: 69) defines the process of *othering* as "[…] constructing, or imagining, a demonized image of 'them', or the Other, which supports an idealized image of us, or the Self. Othering is also essentialist in that the demonized image is applied to all members of the group or society which is being Othered".

> [...] identity is always particular, as much about difference as about shared belonging... identity can help us to comprehend the formation of the fateful pronoun 'we' and to reckon with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that it cannot help but to create. This may be one of the most troubling aspects of all: the fact that the formation of every 'we' must leave out or exclude a 'they', that identities depend on the marking of difference.

One of the things the participants were asked to do in the written questionnaire was to number from 1 (most expected) to 3 (least expected) the groups of people with whom they thought they would communicate more during their stay and later specify if and/or in what ways they expected those to be different from them. The three categories of people that were proposed to the students were: (a) other Spanish/Catalan students; (b) Erasmus students, who are not Spanish/Catalan; and (c) local students from the host university. However, it is important to point out that the participants always had the possibility to add other categories and/or to make any comments which they deemed necessary.

As evidenced from the students' answers, we can observe three different expectations about the people with whom they see themselves interacting during their stay: (a) mainly with other Erasmus students and with "the locals"; (b) with other internationals and, on some occasions, with other Spanish/Catalan students; and (c) interacting inevitably with Spanish/Catalan students most of the time. By way of illustration, we see that Joan (DK) is willing to communicate, preferably, with both Erasmus students and local people. In fact, he does not intend to have so much contact with Catalan and Spanish students given that, as has already been mentioned, his motive for going abroad was mainly that of learning English. Similarly, Verònica (IT) and Mònica (DK) express that they would like to first try and meet people from other countries, although they feel that 'the easy way out is to get along with Spanish/Catalans' (*la via més fàcil és ajuntar-se amb espanyols/catalans*) [Verònica]. And, finally, Josep Miquel (IT), Patrícia (IT), Amanda (UK) and Ariadna (DK) expect that they will communicate more with other Catalan and/or Spanish students than with Erasmus students from other countries and/or the locals. In fact, as shown in excerpts 33 and 34 below, two of

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them evoke a similar stance towards interacting with co-nationals, as something one just cannot prevent from happening:

Excerpt 33 'Keeping in touch with the locals is more difficult'
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Ariadna - DK*)

1	From previous experiences I know that you always end up getting along with
2	those with whom it is easier to communicate, although I find it very interesting to
3	talk to the others [...]. I know that keeping in touch with the locals is more
4	difficult, unless it is in specific circumstances.

(*Per experiències viscudes sé que sempre acabes tirant amb els que és més fàcil comunicar-se, encara que trobo molt interessant parlar amb els altres [...]. Els locals sé que és més difícil mantenir contacte si no es que és per circumstàncies puntuals*).

Excerpt 34 Interacting with 'people who speak the same language'
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Patrícia - IT*)

1	Although I do not have any problem to communicate with any student who
2	speaks another language, we always tend to get along more with people who
3	speak the same language.

(*Tot i que no tinc cap problema per comunicar-me amb qualsevol estudiant que parli una altra llengua, sempre acostumem a relacionar-nos més entre persones que parlen la mateixa llengua).*

On the one hand, through the use of the first person singular 'I', Ariadna (DK) is clearly expressing a personal judgement about the *stance object* of interacting with those who speak the same mother tongue while abroad: it is something which *always* happens (line 1). Indeed, this epistemic stance is displayed by someone who has been abroad on several occasions and, it is taking into account those past experiences, that she marks how certain she is about the veracity of her statements by using boosters such as *always* (line 1) or *I know* (lines 1,3). On the other hand, although Patrícia (IT) has never been abroad, she expresses a similar *stance* to Ariadna's (DK): interacting with people who speak the same language is something that *always* happens. However, she makes her discourse inclusive by using the grammatical subject or, in Scheibman's (2004: 377) words, the "expression of inclusion" *we*, in line 2, which indexes that this

activity is not something only she does but, actually, an incumbent feature of those members belonging to the category 'Erasmus student'.

Unlike the rest of the participants, Marina (UK) and Roger (UK) did not seem to accept the three categories proposed by the researchers in the written questionnaire: Spanish/Catalan students; Erasmus students, who are not Spanish/Catalan; and local students from the host university. On the one hand, Marina specifies that her situation is slightly different from other Erasmus students: as she put it, 'in my case, my boyfriend is coming with me' (*en el meu cas, la meva parella m'acompanyarà en la meva estada*) and, therefore, he, together with her classmates, is the person with whom she expects to interact the most. Apart from that, she also mentions other students from the university and professors and, finally, people outside the university she may meet 'while shopping, going out for a drink, etc.' (*a l'hora d'anar a comprar, fer un beure, sortir, etc.*). On the other hand, although Roger did not specify why he rejected the proposed categories, these are the groups of people with whom he expected to communicate more: first, his parents; second, his friends from Lleida and from abroad; and, third, his friends from Barcelona.

The participants in this study somehow fall into "the temptation to be essentialist [which] is quite deeply rooted in a long-standing desire to 'fix' the nature of culture and cultural difference" (Holliday, 2011: 6). In this sense, the students actually use the term 'culture' to explain people's habits and attitudes that they expect to be generally different in the country they are about to set foot in. Their preference, as SA students, for getting in contact with 'locals' is very much present in their discourse and this has also been noted by Dervin (2016: 38), who talks about exchange students' "fear of being caught with the 'same' or 'stuck' with him/her (someone from the same country)" and/ or the common belief that "crossing a national border signifies selecting those who are different, but especially from the locality, a 'real local'[10]".

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[10] Dervin (2016: 30-31) is very critical about the notion of 'the local', by claiming that the answer to the apparently simple question of 'Where are you (really) from?' may not be that easy; yet, as Dervin suggests, "questions of origins [in spite of being quite common in intercultural encounters] can be unstable, highly sensitive, and problematic. [...] Do we define a local by place of birth,

Difference is also present in the students' response to the third question of the written questionnaire, in which they were asked to develop the aspects in which they yearned and expected their home and host societies to be different. Before leaving, most participants formulated generalizations about the local people, using *category-implicative descriptions* (Stokoe, 2009) which, in the case of those who went to the UK and Denmark, are often presented as opposed to those that define the members belonging to the categories Catalan and/or Spanish people – in this case, *othering* can be conceived to be used "to position themselves [by] claim[ing] (common/different) identities" (Dervin, 2016: 48). The following table provides a summary of the participants' categorizations of these *others* and, in particular, of 'the locals'.

Table 10 Categorizing 'the locals'

Category	Category-Bound Predicate	Category-Bound Activity
'the British'	'cold people' (Marina, UK) 'not so open or as friendly as Catalans' (Amanda, UK) 'not so expressive' / 'less impulsive if we compare it to the typical Spanish/Catalan' (Roger, UK)	
'the Danish society' / 'Danish people'	'more developed and formal' (Ariadna, DK) 'more responsible in all aspects' (Joan, DK)	'have different values from the ones here [...]: legality, doing your work well, etc.' (Joan, DK) 'have a different mentality as regards eating habits: more natural products.' (Joan, DK)
'the Italian society' / 'the Italian'	'quite similar' (Verònica, IT) 'very similar to the Catalan personality'; 'quiet'; 'carefree' (Josep M.)	'have similar customs to ours' (Patrícia)

In connection with the students who went to the UK, Marina (UK) expected to find 'cold people' (*gent freda*) in Wales and, yet, admitted that this is a 'stereotype I

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nationality, or language, or by the simple fact that this person lives in a given place?" (ibid, 2016: 38). As he argues, we should, instead, try to avoid talking about someone being 'a typical English, Italian, Danish, Catalan, Spanish' and move away from essentialism: the fact of "limiting self and/or other to a single identity, a single story ('their essence')" (ibid, 2016: 114); or, as Holliday (2011: 4) puts it, the fact of "present[ing] people's individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are". For Dervin (2009: 121), 'culture' – and also 'identity' – are nothing but "misnomers [which] suggest singularity and unicity", in a time in which there is the general understanding of the fact that every individual has not one but multiple identities.

would like to change once I get to know them' (*m'agradaria canviar al conèixer-los*). These *category-bound features* of 'British people' generated by Marina are somehow shared by Amanda (UK), who wrote that she thought the British 'are not so open or as friendly as Catalans' (*no tan oberts o tan simpàtics com els catalans*), and by Roger (UK), who contended that the main difference between the Catalan and the British societies has to do with the fact of expressing emotions – a *category-bound activity* which Roger treats as *not* tied to the category of 'British people' (see excerpt 35).

Excerpt 35 The British versus The Catalan society
(*Excerpt taken from the WQ of Roger - UK*)

1	While we Spaniards/Catalans tend to be very expressive and gesticulate quite a
2	lot, I believe that it is undeniable that the British (most of them) are not so
3	[expressive]. It is what is known as the British phlegm which, as I understand it,
4	consists in showing [...] a balanced and rational self (or, better said, less
5	impulsive if we compare it to the typical Spanish/Catalan).

Així com els espanyols/Catalans acostumem a ser molt expressius i gesticulem abastament, crec que és innegable que els britànics (en la seva majoria) no ho són tant. És l'anomenada flegma britànica, que tal i com jo l'entenc consisteix en mostrar [...] un jo equilibrat i racional (o més ben dit, menys impulsiu si el comparem amb el jo espanyol/català típic).

As can be seen in their comments, the three students who went to the UK assigned different, and even opposite, *category-bound predicates* (Stokoe, 2012b) ('very expressive'/ 'less impulsive'; 'friendly'/ 'cold', 'not so friendly'; 'open' / 'not so open') and *activities* ('gesticulate a lot'; 'show a balanced self') that, according to them, define and make the British and Catalan/Spanish people different societies. Notice that there is a stance token produced by Roger (UK), in lines 1-2, through the use of the epistemic verb *believe* (line 2) and the adjective 'undeniable' (line 2), which somehow indexes the high certainty with which Roger claims that the British are not so expressive. Roger also seems to accept, though, that these are nothing but 'biased descriptions' (*descripcions sesgades*) which are often difficult to avoid. This is actually related to Dervin's (2016: 81) claim that *othering* and, specifically, essentialism is "a universal sin" and that, although we should be aware

of the fact that we inhabit a world with *diverse diversities[11]* (ibid, 2009; 2016), "no one is immune to it" (ibid, 2016: 81).

As regards those students who went to Denmark, two of them share a similar stance towards Danish people, while highlighting positive aspects that Catalans somehow lack. On the one hand, Ariadna (DK) adscribes the Danish society the predicates 'more developed and formal' (*més desenvolupada i formal*), although she does not specify in what aspects. On the other hand, being 'more responsible in all aspects' (*més serietat en tots els àmbits*) appears to be the *category-bound description* (Stokoe, 2012b) assigned by Joan to Danish nationals. Besides, as he writes in the questionnaire, the members that form the category 'Danish people' are also defined by 'activities' such as having 'different values from the ones here [...]: legality, doing your work well, etc.' (*valors diferents als d'aquí [...]: legalitat, fer la feina ben feta, etc.*); and a 'different mentality as regards eating habits: more natural products' (*diferent mentalitat pel que fa a l'alimentació: productes més naturals*). In this case, the participants categorization of the 'locals' as expectably different does *not* seem to trigger *ethnocentrism* (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2011), which refers to the belief that "one's culture, country, or group is better than others" (Dervin, 2016: 114). Yet, the comparison between the host and home societies does sometimes "create dichotomies between the 'good' and 'bad', the 'civilized' and 'uncivilized', and the 'same' and the 'other'" (ibid, 2016: 11) and this is what we can clearly see in the discourse of the students who went to Denmark, prior to their departure.

Unlike the students who went to the UK and to Denmark, the three participants who decided to go to Italy do not seem to be "'victims' of the differentialist bias" (Dervin, 2016: 36) and asserted that they expected the Italian society to be quite similar to the Catalan society. For instance, Verònica (IT) states

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[11] Dervin (2016: 80) uses this expression to emphasize that "everybody is diverse regardless of their origins, skin colour, social background, and so on". In his work on study abroad students' 'culturalist impasse', Dervin (2009: 121) notes that individuals often resort to solid identities which are nothing but "stereotypes based on a national identity" and on a common belief that a person has a unique, solid identity – this is what he names "the unicity of the self" (ibid, 2009: 121).

that she thinks 'there are no big differences between the Spanish society and the Italian because they are quite similar societies' (*no penso que hi hagi grans diferències entre la societat espanyola i la italiana ja que són societats bastant semblants*) and Patrícia uses the same predicate – 'similar to ours' – in order to describe Italian customs. Josep Miquel's categorization of Italians goes in line with Verònica's and Patrícias' descriptions, to which he adds the predicates 'quiet' (*tranquils*) and 'carefree' (*despreocupats*). Besides, he claims that the Italian character is 'very similar to the Catalan [personality]' (*molt semblant al [caràcter] català*).

The analysis of the students' discourse on their expectation to encounter 'cultural' difference will also reveal, on the one hand, whether this initial motivation is still maintained or not during their stay, and the extent to which they report to have finally encountered such expected differences as regards other exchange students and/or the 'locals'. On the other hand, the analysis of the participants' discourse will throw light into the ongoing discursive construction of the participants' identities as (Erasmus) students: Will their discourses of othering change? Will they still construct the 'others' encountered abroad as different? Or, will they highlight the aspects they have in common and, thus, present a rather collective identity in which, in spite of not sharing the same passport, all members share similarities? This will be the focus of analysis in chapter 6.

Summary

This chapter has presented an analysis of the students' discourse prior to their departure. As has been shown, this discourse seems to go very much in line with the institutional discourse of their home university which regards mobility as a transformative experience that will have a positive impact on their lives academically, professionally and personally speaking. Among their expectations, the students highlight the activities of (a) learning a foreign language – which does not necessarily have to be the local language; and (b) encountering difference regarding, not only the people with whom they expect to interact, but also the way(s) the host university functions.

The following chapter will examine the participants' reflections and evaluations of their SA experience *while* abroad, taking into account the things they wanted and expected to do/encounter and their actual interests and behaviour once there. Through the analysis of the students' discourse and the data gathered through the shadowing period, it will be possible to examine whether the students finally do/encounter what they initially wanted/expected. Therefore, the research questions guiging the analysis will be the following: Do the students finally engage in the so desired activity of learning a particular foreign language? Does their attitude towards English as a Lingua Franca and/or towards the local language of the host country finally change? Do they finally come across with the long-awaited 'cultural difference'? Do they still show an essentialist and homogenizing view of the 'culture'? Do they finally report interacting with those with whom they expected to (the locals; other exchange students)? The analysis of the next two chapters of analysis will allow us to examine (a) the nature of the impact of the SA experience as constructed by them; (b) whether the evaluation that they make of the whole experience (which they initially deemed as very enriching in different aspects) changes throughout time and based on their initial expectations/motivations; and (c) whether the students' discourse is also convergent with that of the UdL upon return.

Chapter 6. During the Stay: The Qualities of the Study Abroad Experience

The students' *imagined identities* (Barkhuizen and de Klerk, 2006; Early and Norton, 2012) regarding their expectations and motivations for going abroad – namely foreign language learning and encountering cultural difference – were presented in the previous chapter. The focus of the current chapter rests on the analysis of the students' discourse on all the elements that they report as being part of their Erasmus experience during their stay and the impact (if any) that this is having on the students' sense of self. This chapter includes three sections of analysis. The first section (6.1) examines the students' *evaluative stance* (Keisanen, 2007) towards the beginning of their study abroad experience and the factors that somehow condition such evaluation (e.g. their adaptation to a new physical environment; their feeling of loneliness; their sense of 'home'). Section 6.2 tackles the linguistic dimension of the stay, with a focus on the languages used in order to interact with the different components of their social network abroad, and the students' self-perceived competence in those languages. Finally, section 6.3 addresses the students' encounter with 'the Others', who were expected to be 'culturally' 'different' from 'them'.

6.1.   Setting Foot in a Foreign Land

> "[...] the arrival of a Stranger has the impact of an earthquake... The Stranger shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests. He comes from afar; he does not share the local assumptions and so becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group".
>
> Zygmunt Bauman (1997) *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*

Various scholars have discussed the notion of 'strangeness' with relation to exchange students and actually refer to them as 'migrants' and/or 'strangers' (Assa-Inbar et al., 2008; Dervin and Dirba, 2008; King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Papatsiba, 2005; Siu, 1952). Paul Siu (1952) defined the concept of the 'sojourner' as one type of stranger who spends part of his/her life

abroad, always "cling[ing] to the culture of his own ethnic group [and] think[ing] of himself as an outsider [who] feels content as a spectator in many of the community affairs" (Siu, 1952: 34-36). As Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 11) points out, Siu's sojourner represents *one* of the "many variants of the kaleidoscope of the stranger" and posits that "travelling European students [also] represent another variant of the kaleidoscope" (ibid, 2002: 11).

Indeed, both of them – the sojourner and the travelling European student – share, on the one hand, a migratory motivation, which Siu (1952: 35) calls "the job". This is what has actually been tackled in the previous section, which examined the participants' explicit mention of the initial expectations and motivations (learning a foreign language and encountering 'cultural difference') that prompted them to spend part of their studies abroad and how, based on those, they discursively constructed their imagined identities as Erasmus students who, in one way or another, would go through a transformative experience. On the other hand, Siu's (1952) sojourner and the travelling European student share "their physical position in space" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 13). They share the fact that both of them are "mobile, having left a primary space and set foot in another space [and that they are] 'in between' at least two geographical, linguistic, social, cultural, national spaces" (ibid, 2002: 13).

The present section looks at the students' elicited reflection upon and evaluation of their lines of action *while* abroad, in a new milieu, which may force some of them to "go through a series of adjustments" (Siu, 1952: 34) and in which they will somehow be compelled to jump "from the stalls to the stage, the former onlooker becom[ing] a member of the cast" (Schütz, 1971: 97; as cited in Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 29).

As has already been pointed out, 'cultural difference' was made relevant by and to the participants in this study prior to departure. Before examining the strategies they used in order to cope with this difference, we first turn to the narratives of some of the participants who recall the arrival in a foreign, new and/or even strange environment as a period of instability in which emotions played a very important role (see excerpt 36).

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Excerpt 36 'I thought about_ +phooff+ going back\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Amanda*)

1	SÒNIA:	you··_ you remember with_ * with	*em··_ em recordes amb molt_ *
2		great intensity_ [the first days] and	*amb molta intensitat_ [els primers*
3		you remember them with * quite	*dies] i els recordes amb * bastant*
4		negatively\ don't you/	*negativament\ no/*
5	AMANDA:	yes\ very [negatively]\	*ja\ molt [negativament]*
6	SÒNIA:	that beginning was really hard\	*aquell principi va ser molt dur*
7		right/	*realment\ eh/*
8	AMANDA:	well _ I cried\ I mean_ I saw my	*o sigui_ plorava\ o sigui_ es que*
9		mother's face and started to cry\ I	*veia la cara de ma mare i*
10		saw my uncle's face_ and started to	*començava a plorar\ veia la cara*
11		cry\	*de· ma tiet_ i començava a plorar*
12	SÒNIA:	you even wanted to come back or	*volies tornar fins i tot o què/*
13		what/	
14	AMANDA:	yes\ I mean_ it was like_ * I mean_ I	*sí\ o sigui_ era en plan_ * o sigui_*
15		only thought_ I have four months	*només pensava_ em queden*
16		left here_ I will have a hard time_ I	*quatre mesos aquí_ ho passaré*
17		thought start accepting that you	*malament_ pensava comença a*
18		will wake up sad_ that you will go	*conscienciar-te que t'aixecaràs al*
19		to sleep sad_ (...) +phooff+ * those	*matí trista_ que te n'aniràs a*
20		days * I mean_ horrible\ from the	*dormir trista_ (...)+bua+ * aquells*
21		third day onwards it was like* I	*dies *o sigui_ fatal\ a partir del*
22		mean_ I thought about_ +phooff+	*tercer dia·· era en plan * o sigui_*
23		going back\ you know/ but it was *	*em va passar pel cap_ +bff+ tornar*
24		I mean_ what_ what_ what_ what	*cap a casa\ saps/ però era··_ * o*
25		am I going to do/ I mean_ the first	*sigui_ què_ què_ què_ què faré/*
26		time I find myself like this_ with a	*tornaré cap a casa_ sóc una*
27		problem or in a situation in which I	*cagada_ saps/ o sigui_ la primera*
28		am alone_ I go back home/ no	*que m'he trobat així_ un problema*
29		way\ you know/ I said well_ hang	*o una situació que estic sola_ m'en*
30		in there\ in fact_ no one has _ *	*torno amb la família/ pues no*
31		nothing bad has happened to	*saps/ vaig dir bueno_ aguantem*
32		anyone going on an Erasmus_ I am	*a veure_ ningú s'ha * li ha passat*
33		not going to be the first\ I am not	*res greu anant d'Erasmus_ no seré*
34		going to be the first one who will	*la primera\ i no seré la primera*
35		have a bad Erasmus experience\	*que tindrà una mala experiència*
			de l'Erasmus

The example above includes several stance markers that "index [a speaker's] relationship to what [he/she] say[s] (e.g., whether [he/she is] sure or unsure about it, happy or sad about it, surprised or not)" (Johnstone, 2007:51).

These linguistic features illustrate Amanda's negative evaluation of the beginning of her Erasmus experience, which even made her consider the possibility of returning to her home country (lines 12-14). In lines 17-18, Amanda positions herself as 'sad', an affective predicate she actually repeats twice, and as someone who could not stop crying (lines 8-11). The use of the evaluative adjective 'horrible', in line 20, also indexes the negative stance that Amanda takes towards those very first days of her Erasmus experience. However, at the end of excerpt 36, we can see the influence of circulating discourses on the Erasmus experience, for which she has never heard about someone having had a bad Erasmus experience (lines 31-35), and which somehow encourage her not to give up but to 'hang in there' (lines 28-30).

Amanda is not the only participant in this study who uses affective predicates (e.g. 'sad') to position herself towards the beginning of the SA experience. In fact, other participants in this study also use adjectives that index their affect towards those early days abroad, while defining and/or categorizing themselves as members of the category 'Erasmus student'. Indeed, most of them display an affective stance towards the beginning of their experiences abroad by positioning themselves as feeling 'out of place', 'alone' and 'nervous' in an environment in which, as the following excerpts illustrate, 'everything is new' (Josep M.; IT) and/or, even, 'super different' (Mònica; DK).

Excerpt 37 'everything is_ everything new\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Josep Miquel*)

1	JOSEP	we got there (to Italy) and then_	*vam arribar tard (a Itàlia) i llavors_*
2	M.:	*well_ I got late with my flatmate	**bueno jo vaig arribar tard amb el*
3		who was Italian\ he came for me_	*meu company de pis que era italià*
4		we went home_ *well_ from that	*em va venir a buscar_ vam anar cap*
5		moment on_ the first days * a little	*a casa_ * bueno_ a partir d'aquí _ els*
6		bi··t weird because you are kind of	*primers dies * una mica·· estrany*
7		disoriented\ at the beginning	*perquè estàs així desubicat\ al*
8		everything is everything new\	*principi és tot_ tot nou\ tot és una*
9		everything is a little bit weird the	*mica estrany_la gent·· la_ +bff+ **
10		people··_ +phooff+ * well_ meeting	*pues conèixer tota la teua gent*
11		all the new people a·nd * well_ you	*nova i · * bueno_has de· tornar a*
12		have to· start again and then little by	*començar una mica i llavors poc a*
13		little you get used to it\	*poc et vas acostumant*

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Excerpt 38 'the beginni··ng difficult because· everything is new\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Mònica*)

1	MÒNICA:	well_ the truth is that [I was] very	*doncs_la veritat que molts nervis*
2		nervous the day before\ very very	*el dia abans\ molts molts nervis*
3		nervous because· I was very	*perquè· sí que n'estava molt*
4		convinced of what I was going to do_	*convençuda del que anava a fer_*
5		but <u>once you find yourself there it is</u>	*però quan t'hi trobes sempre·*
6		<u>always· always a hard moment\</u>	*sempre és un moment dur\ no/*
7		isn't it/ (...) +uh··+ and once there·_	*(...) +eh··+ i un cop allà doncs·_*
8		+uhm··+ * well_ <u>the beginning··</u>	*+mm··+ *bueno_ el inici··_ difícil*
9		<u>difficult because· everything is new\</u>	*perquè· tot és nou\ (...) tot és nou_*
10		<u>(...) everything is new_</u> (...) it was a_ *	*(...) era un_ * ara m'he*
11		now I have to get used to all this_ to	*d'acostumar a tot això_ per estar-*
12		be here until_ Christmas\ how	*me aquí fins_ nadal\ quin pal*
13		tough\ right/ (....) * well_ so the	*no/ (...) * bueno_ doncs l'inici això_*
14		beginning_ difficult_ hard\ the fact of	*difícil_ dur\el fet d'estar amb una*
15		being with a Spanish person by your	*persona +eh·+ espanyola al*
16		side_ makes it more +uh··+	*costat_ t'ho fas més +eh··+ amè_ a*
17		comforting_ at the beginning\	*l'inici*

The two examples above illustrate the participants' use of generic *you* generalizations and how both participants shift from using the first-person-singular pronoun (*I*) to *you* constructions. On the one hand, we can see how Josep Miquel (IT) acts out his evaluation of his first days in Italy as 'a little bit weird' (lines 5-6), due to the novelty he has encountered abroad and which, at this point, he does not yet develop. However, in line 6 he switches from using the *I* to *you* – a rhetorical device he seems to employ in order to somehow strengthen his stance while making it, not just *his* individual evaluation of those very first days abroad, but that of all those students going through a similar situation. In this sense, it could be argued that, in generalizing his individual stance, Josep Miquel (IT) is somehow universalizing his own experience and, thus, reinforcing the sense of membership into the category where he feels he belongs to. He is appealing to the beliefs of all the members belonging to the category 'Erasmus student', who, as he seems to imply, would display the same affective stance (feeling disoriented). The analysis of Josep Miquel's discourse in this excerpt goes in line with Scheibman's (2007: 111) claim that generalizations are "speakers' uses of general meanings [that] have discursive and pragmatic functions", which are often used in order to

"broaden the domain of [one's] assertion thus implicitly augmenting its evidential weight or appeal in the interaction" (ibid, 2007: 114).

On the other hand, the utterance in lines 5-6 (excerpt 38) is the evaluative generalization produced by Mònica (DK). Similarly to Josep Miquel, Mònica's evaluation is conveyed lexically (through the use of affective predicates such as 'nervous', 'hard' or 'difficult'); *and* also grammatically (through the use of generic you utterances), while appealing to the beliefs of other students for whom the beginning of their Erasmus would be evaluated and constructed as 'always a hard moment' (line 6). What gives a strong expressive force to her stance utterance, apart from the use of the generic 'you' pronoun, is the use of the adverb 'always' (line 6) – we might take this to indicate that this is, for Mònica, a universal truth for all those members who, like her, belong to the category 'Eramus student'.

Indeed, those very first days abroad remain etched out, not only in Amanda's memory, but also in many of the participants who, even one year after their Erasmus experience, still recalled their Erasmus story by highlighting how intense and even hard that beginning was. This is also the case of the participants in Murphy-Lejeune's (2002: 111) study, for whom those early days were "infused with a strong emotional charge as if the senses, particularly the visual sense were suddenly endowed with unusual sharpness". In fact, although some participants in this study had willingly chosen not to mix with compatriots before their departure, some of them ended up recognizing and even evaluating positively the fact of meeting someone with whom they shared a common language. Going through that difficult beginning of their experience abroad is presented as more easily lived with a co-national, from whom they could receive affective support. This is somehow supported by Papatsiba (2006: 122-123), who contends that,

> [in] a situation of confrontation with otherness (...) The recourse to compatriots may prevent from one feeling left to one's own resources during inevitable moments of cultural fatigue, inherent in the immersion in a different language and culture. (...) The communication with co-nationals, resting on the identity of language and culture, provided a basis for emotional closeness and support. To a certain extent, fellow citizens replace the family left behind.

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In the excerpts 39 and 40, the participants reveal how helpful those bonds forged between co-nationals were at the beginning of the stay. According to them, they somehow "facilitate a smoother transition and protect against exposure to situations of great acculturative stress" (ibid, 2006: 123).

Excerpt 39 'it made me feel as if I was at home'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Mònica*)

1	MÒNICA:	+eh·+ my experience was wi··th_ with Silvia_ with +eh··+ a Spanish
2		girl_
3	SÒNIA:	+hm+\
4	MÒNICA:	a··nd_ o& our whole experience was together\ so··_ I didn't have the
5		chance to live this e··xperience as·_* alone_ and_ and I cannot tell you_
6		how I would have_ felt if I had been there alone\ bu·t_ as I told you
7		before also_ +em··+ <u>at the beginning it was_ it was extremely· +uh··+</u>
8		<u>important to be together with Sandra</u> beca··use_ it made me feel_
9		+em···+ it made me feel_ <u>it made me feel as if I was at home</u> in some_
10		in some aspects\

Excerpt 40 'if you go alone (...) it's not the same'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Patrícia*)

1	SÒNIA:	you were very sure that that	*teníeu molt clar que ho volíeu··_ que*
2		you wanted··_ that you wanted	*ho volíeu fer juntes això/*
3		to do this together/	
4	GEORGINA:	it's better\ right/ going with	*millor\ eh/ anar acompanyada*
5		someone\ because me alone_	*perquè jo sola_*
6	PATRÍCIA:	exactly\ yes\ the first day we	*clar\ sí\ el primer dia ho vam dir*
7		said that we were lucky to have	*que sort que vam anar*
8		left together_	*acompanyades_*
9	GEORGINA:	(...) and it is also easier to meet	*(...) i a part per conèixer gent és més*
10		people if you go with someone_	*fàcil si vas amb algú_ja tens més*
11		you are more confident\ you	*confiança\ saps/*
12		know/	
13	PATRÍCIA:	and the first week you already	*i clar la primera setmana ja dius_*
14		say_ let's go for a walk\ because	*pues anem a fer una volta\ perquè*
15		<u>if you go alone_</u> you will do it	*si vas sola_ pues sí que ho fas però*
16		but it's no·t_ <u>it's not the same</u>\	*no· no és lo mateix*
17	SÒNIA:	so_ you don't think you would	*o sigui_ soles no us hi haguéssiu vist*
18		have been able to do it alone/	*amb cor/*
19	PATRÍCIA:	I would have left anyway but it's	*jo hi hagués anat igual però és*
20		different\ I think you find it	*diferent\ jo crec que ho passes m···&*
21		h···& * we found it hard the first	** nosaltres vam passar-ho*
22		day\ the people who have left	*malament un dia\ la gent que hi ha*
23		alone have found it hard during	*anat sola ho han passat malament*
24		the first week\	*la primera setmana*

The respective stances of Mònica and Patrícia can be regarded as very similar, in the sense that they seem to evaluate very positively the fact of having left with someone from their country. On the one hand, Mònica intensifies the evaluative adjective 'important' (line 8) with the amplified adverb 'extremely' (line 7) in order to position herself towards the stance object (sharing the experience with a co-national). On the other hand, Patrícia seems to fully align, as evidenced in line 6, with the prior stance produced by her compatriot, Georgina, who uses the adjective 'better' (line 4) in the evaluative predicate regarding the stance object in focus. However, it is important to note that, unlike Mònica's frequent use of the first-person pronoun 'I' (lines 4,5,6,9), Patrícia uses generalisations in order to, following Jaffe's (2009: 7) words, "shift the location of epistemic [and/or affective] authority from the individual to the society level". This can be seen in line 13, when she switches from using the 'I' pronoun to the generic 'you', and thus strengthens her own stance by indirectly indexing that anybody going through this experience would agree in that 'if you go alone (...) it's not the same' (lines 15-16).

These findings are broadly in line with those of researchers such as Murphy Lejeune (2002: 184), who states that, while some of the participants in her study expressed their intention to avoid their compatriots, others "lean on them for affective and moral support, particularly at the beginning of the stay". In a similar vein, Jane Jackson (2013: 182) also remarks that "in feeling overwhelmed (...) sojourners may limit their social networks to home country nationals (e.g. members of their linguistic/ethnical group) and [thus] miss opportunities for L2 enhancement".

All in all, this section has discussed how some participants in this study evaluated the beginning of their Erasmus experience as 'difficult' and how they highlighted the importance of the production of a "social fabric"[12] – often formed by co-nationals – in helping them adapt to the new milieu they have just entered. Mònica even described this new network as making her feel as if she was at home (excerpt 39, line 9), which corroborates Murphy-Lejeune's (2002: 203) claim that

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[12] Murphy-Lejeune (2002:182) uses the notion of 'social fabric' to refer to "the whole system of relationships an individual builds up on the basis of available contacts".

"experiences lived together with other people create a sense of home wherever you are" and that, therefore, 'home' "is no longer a place of belonging. It [sometimes] becomes portable and moves with travellers". Although the participants did not seem to imagine a hard beginning in their host countries for which it was necessary to get some preparation prior to departure, during and even one year after their Erasmus experience they recall and highlight the difficulty that characterized those very first days abroad. For this reason, I considered it convenient to devote one section to the analysis of the participants' discourse on their evaluation of the beginning of their stay.

The next sections will appraise the analysis of the participants' discourse on (a) their engagement in practices that will lead them to their initial goals and/or motivations and on (b) the ways in which, according to their lines of action *while* abroad, they see these activities as having an impact on their sense of self. In other words, the next sections will focus on the students' accounts on what actually occurs in their chosen unfamiliar lands and their evaluation of their experiences abroad taking into account their initial motivations and expectations. In this sense, I aim to answer the following questions: Are the students engaging in the so desired activity of learning a foreign language? Is the experience changing their perceptions and/or attitudes towards foreign languages and/or towards 'cultural differences'? In what ways are the students experiencing a direct contact with that linguistic and 'cultural' otherness they longed for so much prior to departure?

## 6.2.	Foreign Language Learning / Use and Study Abroad

VERÒNICA:	I thought I would come back with very good Italian a··nd no_ no\ I'm not_ I'm not that sure\

RESEARCHER:	you aren't/ not even after one year_

VERÒNICA:	well_ not if I continue like this\

(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica, IT*)

As has already been pointed out, the current thesis seeks to understand, from a discourse analytic approach, the qualities of the study abroad experience, mainly from the perspective of those who experienced it in first person: the students. Jackson (2013, cited in Pérez-Vidal, 2014: 17) reminds us that "most language educators and students still assume that firsthand exposure to the native speech community along with formal classroom learning provides the best environment for learning an additional language and culture". In a similar vein, Kinginger (2008:4) contends that:

> An enhanced awareness of the relationship between study abroad and language learning is much to be desired, for teachers, program designers, researchers, policy makers, parents, and students. (...) Often basing their evaluation on their own transformative experiences, teachers expect students abroad to discover language as a medium of expressive delight and a key to world of difference.

Indeed, we have seen that foreign language learning appears as the uppermost mentioned motivation of the participants in the pre-stage, who may be influenced by certain circulating discourses presenting the study abroad experience as particularly useful for linguistic development (as is the case of the institutional discourse of the University of Lleida). In fact, there exists a vast amount of research showing, from a quantitative approach, that a study-abroad experience does make a difference in that it produces linguistic gains in certain constructs such as listening comprehension, oral fluency and accuracy (Freed et al.,

2004; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009). These quantitative studies, which focus on the language-related outcomes of study abroad, certainly present "an encouraging picture of [the study abroad experience]" as having "the potential to enhance students' language ability in every domain" (Kinginger, 2013: 4). Llanes and Muñoz (2009), for instance, conducted a quantitative study of twenty-four Catalan/Spanish-L1 students of English as a FL, who spent from 3 to 4 weeks in an English-speaking country. Their results reveal that "even in as short period of time as 3 or 4 weeks learners improved on several of the measures analyzed [listening comprehension, oral fluency and accuracy]" (ibid, 2009: 361). The design of this and other studies on the language-related impact of study abroad "reflects desire to prove the effectiveness of study abroad, with learners developing language abilities analogous to 'concrete' products" (Kinginger, 2009: 29). However, Llanes and Muñoz (2009: 362) actually mention that their quantitative study "has a number of limitations [which] are common to most studies following a quantitative approach", such as "the impossibility of examining [from a rather qualitative approach] what learners *did* during their stay abroad and in particular their social networks". Carrying out a qualitative research on the impact of study abroad, as is the case of the current study, allows us to (a) gain more insight into *the process* that leads some students to develop (or not) certain linguistic and other abilities and, thus, into their individual differences; and to (b) develop certain educational implications [e.g. linguistic preparation for the stay abroad] based on the students' needs, as reported by them, while abroad. In this sense, as Kinginger (2009: 26) contends, the story of research on study abroad should be "one of increasing emphasis on particularity (van Lier, 2005) in which efforts to arrive at generalizations [which are common in quantitative research] raise more questions than they answer". The purpose of the present study is precisely to, on the one hand, understand "what students do with their time and the subjective or other meanings they ascribe to their experiences" (Kinginger, 2013: 5); and, on the other hand, to shed light on those "individual trajectories [that] are in fact the essence of recent study abroad research, in which the focus has shifted from quantitative to qualitative, from product to process, from a search for generalizability to a recognition of complexity and variation" (Coleman, 2013: 25).

Complex and, in some aspects, contrasting are the participants' reports on their language learning experiences abroad, which allow us to explore the issue of individual differences. The following sections will look at the students accounts of their language learning and use while abroad- two activities they expected to engage in as members of the category 'Erasmus student'. The analysis of the students' discourses will show whether they accomplish their initial goal of learning and using a foreign language; and it will also illuminate "the differential prestige of languages and language varieties, and the varying access that speakers have to them" (Piller, 2011: 3). Above all, language learning will be conceived in this study as an activity that is expectably bound to those members belonging to the category 'Erasmus student' and as "a dialogic and situated affair whose success depends on not only the attributes and intentions of the student but also the ways in which the student is received within his or her host community" (Kinginger, 2011: 60). The next section will particularly appraise the participants' view of themselves as not linguistically prepared for the stay abroad.

6.2.1. Not Linguistically Prepared (pre-sojourn preparation)

Most students recall their arrival in their host countries as a difficult period mainly due to their language difficulties or "the intense suffering of being deprived of the ability to express oneself fully and as a consequence of being reduced to a talkative mask, a masquerade" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 82). Even though the university requires students to show proof of language proficiency prior to their departure, when reflecting upon their own 'linguistic self-concept'[13] (Benson et al., 2013: 80), most students felt that they should have prepared themselves better linguistically speaking – not in any other aspect. As a lead-in to the discussion below on this, let us consider the elicited reflections of three participants (one per host country) on their perception of themselves as, not only language learners, but as poor second language *users* at the beginning of their study abroad experience.

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[13] The notion of 'linguistic self-concept' put forward by Benson et al. (2013: 80) has to do with the ways in which "learners perceived their ability as users and as learners of a second language, and also to their beliefs and emotions" or with their answer to the question "Who am I and who do I become as I learn and use English in my study abroad context?".

Excerpt 41 'it is a huge feeling of impotence'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadoing, with Patrícia - IT*)

1 2 3	SÒNIA:	and how prepared would you say you were in relation to (…) language for instance/	*i com diríeu que estàveu de preparades en relació a (…) per exemple amb llengua*
4 5	GEORGINA:	I wasn't prepared linguistically speaking\	*amb llengua jo no estava preparada*
6 7 8 9 10 11 12	PATRÍCIA:	no\ me neither really\ I took that two week course bu⋯t_ (…) since I came here in the second semester * I did it in the summer and I had totally forgotten it\ (…) when I got here I didn't know anything\	*no\ jo realment tampoc\ vaig fer aquell curset de dos setmanes però⋯_ (…) al venir al segon semestre * ho vaig fer a l'estiu i ja ho havia oblidat totalment\ que m'ha sigut fàcil recuperar-ho però quan vaig venir tampoc sabia res*
13 14 15 16	SÒNIA:	(…) you would recommend this\ right/ you would say_ hey_ prepare yourself well because Italian is similar bu⋯t_	*(…) això ho aconsellaríeu\ no/ diríeu ei_ prepara't bé que l'italià s'assembla però⋯_*
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24	PATRÍCIA:	yes\ exactly\ they don't ask you for this in order to come here but it is necessary\ (…) yes\ it is a huge feeling of impotence when you say I can't handle a conversation because * I understand it but I can't_ I can't say what I want\	*sí\ clar\ no t'ho demanen per venir però és necessari\(…) sí\ és molta impotència de di·r no puc mantenir la conversa perquè * l'entenc però no·_ no li puc dir el que vull*

Excerpt 42 'I was blocked\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Ariadna - DK*)

1 2 3 4 5	SÒNIA:	and now that you have bee··n here for a while_ how prepared would you say you were [linguistically speaking] at the beginning of this stay/	*i ara que portes un temps_com diries que estaves de preparada [amb la llengua] al principi per a fer aquesta estada/*
6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	ARIADNA:	no\ I should have gone⋯ do a little bit of speaking before coming here because⋯ I remember that when the buddies picked me up (…) at the train station_ I was inside the car and wanted to say that it was very windy in Lleida and I just couldn't\ you know/ I was blocked\	*no\ hagués tingut d'anar⋯ a fer una mica de {(ENG) speaking} o algo abans de venir perquè·· m'en recordo quan me van venir a buscar les {(ENG) buddies} (…) a l'estació de trens··_ estava dins del cotxe i volia dir que a Lleida feia molt vent i no hi havia manera\ saps/ això que dius bloquejada*

Excerpt 43 'I thought I was prepared'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Amanda - UK*)

1 2	RESEARCHER:	did you feel you were well-prepared with English/	*us sentíeu ben preparats amb l'anglès/*
6 7 8 9 10 11	AMANDA:	<u>I wasn't\ I wasn't\ I thought I was prepared\</u> if I have a C1_ I thought I had the level to undertake an Erasmus\ right/ a··nd and I have had to overcome this\	*jo no\ jo no\ jo pensava que venia preparada\ si jo tinc cinquè d'Escola Oficial i pensava·· per fer un Erasmus·· tinc el nivell\i no\ i·· i m'he hagut d'espavilar\ vull dir m'he hagut d'espavilar*

The analysis of the students' elicited reflections on how they felt in the languages they had to use abroad yields insight into the ways in which those language-based subjective experiences have an impact on their sense of self, while shedding light on "the local relationships between language and experience" (Koven, 2007: 62). Most participants in this study admitted that they felt they were not well prepared from a linguistic point of view, in order to live in a second language. These three students' stance utterances such as 'it is a huge feeling of impotence' (excerpt 41, lines 19-20); 'I was blocked' (excerpt 42, lines 13-14); and the repetition of 'I wasn't\ I wasn't\'(excerpt 43, line 6), index their affective stance toward the fact of not being able to 'handle a conversation' (excerpt 41, lines 21-22) in the target language, of realizing that they were not as prepared as they thought and, ultimately, of not being able to be themselves in and through that foreign language. These three excerpts serve as introductory examples of the many instances that show how most of the participants in this study express the ways in which their self-perceived lack of initial linguistic preparation leads to an initial frustration at being unable to (a) express and, thus, be themselves in/through a given foreign language; to (b) follow classes in that language; and (c) to establish contacts with those with whom they do not share the same L1, mostly at the beginning of the stay.

As another example of a student's frustration over her poor competence in English once abroad, the following excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview shows Verònica expressing her discontent towards not being able to

communicate in English, even though she has 'studied' this language for many years:

Excerpt 44 'the language (...) is what worries me the most\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica – IT*)

1	VERÒNICA:	the language (...) is what worries	*la llengua (...) és lo que em*
2		me the most\ I knew this would	*preocupa més\ jo sabia que em*
3		happen to me because every time	*passaria això perquè sempre quan*
4		I have travelled_ (...) the same has	*he viatjat_ (...) sempre m'ha*
5		happened to me\ we are the ones	*passat el mateix\ naltres som els*
6		who speak the worst English_ we	*que sabem parlar menys anglès_*
7		are the worst\ (...) but the thing is	*som els pitjors\ (...) però és que he*
8		that I have got here and they have	*arribat aquí i m'ho han acabat de*
9		confirmed this to me\ I feel bad\	*confirmar\ jo em sento*
10		I don't understand why this	*malament\ no entenc per què*
11		happens\ (...) I don't even think	*passa això\ (...) no ho veig ni*
12		this is normal\ I don't understand	*normal\ no entenc perquè*
13		why we can't reach this level and	*nosaltres no podem arribar a*
14		they can\ and I think * I have	*aquest nivell i ells sí\ i m'ho paro*
15		been studying English for a lot of	*a pensar * porto molts anys*
16		years\ 12 years studying and I	*estudiant anglès\ 12 anys*
17		have a B1\ is this a joke/	*estudiant i tinc un B1\ què és*
			aquesta broma/

Through the use of the affective verb 'worries' (line 1), Verònica is clearly displaying her affective stance towards a particular stance object: the poor competence in English of not only herself, but of Spanish students in general. Verònica treats the activity of 'speaking the worst English' as a defining feature of those members belonging to the category 'Erasmus Spanish student'; a category she also feels part of, as indexed by the use of the 'we' pronoun (lines 5, 6, 13). Speaking the worst English also constitutes a stance object to which she orients affectively ('I feel bad', line 9) and which she evaluates as 'not normal' (line 12) and even as 'a joke' (line 17). This is, for Verònica, something she cannot find an explanation for, given the number of years she has been studying English: this is just something she cannot understand (line 12-13). Indeed, this evidences Matthew T. Prior's (2016: 3) conception of emotion as "an integral part in the lives and practices of L2 users"; and, in fact, the students' accounts on their experiences abroad tend to highlight the affective dimension of many aspects of the stay and, in particular, of their language learning and use.

The next excerpt shows a similar stance of another student, Marina (UK), who also evaluates those first weeks abroad as 'a little bit complicated' (*una mica complicades*), given that 'you get blocked because you want to say a lot of things and you don't know how\ you find it difficult\' (*et bloqueges perquè vols dir moltes coses i no saps com\ ho trobes difícil*). Marina also uses generalizing you utterances when talking about the inability of communicating with others in and through a foreign language; by generalizing her stance, she is somehow making reference to knowledge that other members of the category 'Erasmus students' would undoubtedly share.

Excerpt 45 'you would like to say many things but you don't know how\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Marina - UK*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	SÒNIA:	one of the most negative aspects that I have heard in·_ in your discourse has been_ that * you have said that you get blocked_ that you don't know how to say things\ therefore one of the problems that you probably encountered at some point was with the language/ with English/	*un dels aspectes potser més negatius que sí que he sentit en· en el teu discurs ha sigut_ que * has dit que et bloqueges_ que no saps com dir les coses\ per tant un dels potser problemes que et vas trobar en algun moment va ser amb la llengua/ amb l'anglès/*
10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	MARINA:	yes\ yes_ yes\ because obviously_ when_ <u>when you arrive you don't have enough level to to [talk about] everyday aspects\</u> for instance_ I had to manage to call the gas companies_ the water companies_ all this\ to have Internet at home_ * everything\ I mean_ things that I didn't even know how to do_ I had to take the phone and say_	*sí\ sí_ sí\ perquè clar_ quan_ en quan arribes_ no tens el nivell suficient per_ per tots els aspectes de la vida quotidiana\ per exemple_ jo em vaig haver d'espavilar per trucar a les companyies del gas_ de l'aigua_ * tot això\ per tenir internet a casa_ tot\ o sigui_ coses que jo no sabia ni com fer_ vaig haver d'agafar el telèfon i dir_*
21	SÒNIA:	*+mhm\+*	*+mhm\+*
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	MARINA:	look_ I want this_ I want this_ * I mean * and_ and obviously_ * I mean_ <u>it's hard</u> because_ it is a * they are aspects that_ that you have never studied\ bu·t_ but * well_ you end up managing and you end up knowing it\ and also_ * I don't know_ here··_ wi··th_ * well_ since we start to· to learn English_ what we need to work	*mira_ vull això_ vull això_ * o sigui * i_ i clar_ * o sigui_ costa perquè_ és un as& * són aspectes que· que no has treballat mai perquè estan fora de l'àmbit d'estudis_ (…) però·_ però * bueno t'acabes·_ t'acabes espavilant i ho acabes sabent\ i a part_ * no sé_ aquí··_ amb··_* bueno_ des de que comencem a·*

32		on the most should be speaking	*a aprendre l'anglès_ el aspecte*
33		and we don't do this\ and I think	*que més necessitaríem hauria de*
34		it is essential a·nd and * <u>when</u>	*ser el {(ENG) speaking_} i no el*
35		<u>you arrive there you would</u>	*tenim\i trobo que és un punt*
36		<u>obviously like to say a lot of</u>	*essencial i· i * clar_ en quant*
37		<u>things but you don't know how\</u>	*arribes allí t'agradaria dir*
			moltes coses però no saps com

In the narrative interview, Marina touches upon the issue of not being able to use everyday language in English and of having difficulties in 'speaking' that language (lines 33-34). In fact, we can observe how she explicitly displays alignment with the researcher, by repeating three times the stance marker 'yes' (line 10), in evaluating the linguistic aspect of the stay as one of the 'problems encountered' (lines 7-8) at the beginning of the stay. As she seems to suggest in the interview, once abroad she realizes the importance to work on 'speaking', which she deems as 'essential' and, yet, at the same time, as an aspect which should be given more emphasis in the instructional approach to English at school in Catalonia. Further evidence supporting something similar lies in the study of Masuko Miyahara (2015: 85), in which Sayaka, one of the six participants, is presented as being "caught 'knowledge-based school subject' and English as a 'communicative tool', where communication becomes an important objective in learning English". Sayaka's study-abroad experience, similarly to that of many participants in this study, changed her view of English as no longer a "dreary school subject, devoid of its functional purposes for communication" (Miyahara, 2015: 97) but as an important medium for self-expression with those with whom she does not share the same L1.

Indeed, frustration seems to mark the first stages of the Erasmus experiences of most participants, "whose personality is [somehow] perceived as diminished for want of being fully expressed" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 120). For instance, Joan (DK) also contends that '[he] wasn't as well prepared as [he] thought' and that he lacked basic vocabulary; and, Mònica (DK), similarly to Amanda (UK), is surprised about the fact of not feeling prepared for the stay abroad, in spite of the B1 English language requirement of the University of Lleida prior to departure.

Excerpt 46 'you need more'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Mònica – DK*)

1	MÒNICA:	the girl from the Philippines had	*la de Filipines_ va haver de*
2		to take the TOEFL exam_ to be	*passar el TOEFL_ per estar aquí_*
3		here_ for the international	*a lo d'internacional\ nosaltres*
4		relations office\ we needed	*n··· no vam necessitar res_*
5		almost nothing\ (...) well_ it's not	*quasi\ (...) a veure_ no es que no*
6		that we can't follow the classes\	*puguem seguir les classes\ però*
7		but obviously if we had a better	*evidentment si tinguéssim més*
8		level_ * I mean_ I believe that you	*nivell_ * a veure_ crec que amb*
9		can be here with a B1 level\	*un B1 pots estar aquí\ eh/ (...)*
10		right/ (...) but of course it is like if	*però clar_ és com que necessites*
11		you need mo··re_ * I don't know\	*mé··s_ * no sé*
12	RESEARCHER:	it's hard for you\ right/	*ho passes més malament\ no/*
13	MÒNICA:	yes\ (...) if the programme you	*sí\ (...) si tot el programa que*
14		are participating in is in E& * is	*vas a fer fora_ és amb a- *és amb*
15		in English_ they should make you	*anglès_ des de Lleida que et*
16		take a test in Lleida_ of speaki·ng_	*facin passar un examen_ de*
17		of * I don't know what\	*parla·r_ de * jo què sé què*

In the above excerpt, Mònica makes reference to another student from the Philippines she has met in Denmark who, in spite of also being a member of the category 'exchange student', was required to certify a higher level of English prior to departure. Mònica seems to evaluate the B1 language requirement as 'almost nothing' (line 5) and as not very helpful in order to go to a university in which English is the language of instruction (lines 14-16). Indeed, she evaluates this as making the beginning of her Erasmus experience 'hard' (lines 13-14).

The following excerpt shows how Mònica positions herself towards her ability to express emotions in a foreign language. The excerpt is taken from the second elicited written report, in which the participants were asked to write (if possible) in English about their social networks, the languages they used on a daily basis to interact with those and their stance towards their communicative practices abroad.

Excerpt 47 'it's difficult to express how I feel'
(*Excerpt taken from the second elicited experiential report, written by Mònica – DK*)

1	SÒNIA:	how do you feel about those people / languages you interact with?
2	MÒNICA:	it's difficult to express how I feel when I interact with Anja, Laws, Tizia
3		and Beatrice because using a foreign language such English makes me
4		feel strange. I can't explain what I would like to say.

This excerpt somehow corroborates Dewaele's (2010: 1) claim that "emotions play a crucial part in the lives of [both] monolinguals and multilinguals"; and also Susan R. Fussell's (2002: 1) idea that "one's own and others' affective experiences are frequent topics of everyday conversations, and how well these emotions are expressed and understood is important to interpersonal relationships and individual well-being". While Mònica has no difficulties in expressing emotions in our interviews held in Catalan, her personality does not seem to "adequately come through the simplified language [she] use[s]" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 117). In fact, this is why she evaluates the fact of 'expressing how I feel [in English]' (line 2) as 'difficult' and displays her affective stance towards this by contending that she feels 'strange' (line 4) in and through that foreign language (English). Another interesting point that arises in this example is the student's use of the negative modal 'can't' (line 4), which gives more emphasis to her positioning towards the fact of expressing herself in English: it is something that she is not able to do at the beginning of her stay.

Another language-related episode that somehow evidences the students' need for a better linguistic pre-sojourn preparation has to do with their ability to follow the classes. By way of illustration, Patrícia (IT) and Verònica (IT) seem to position themselves affectively towards the classes they had to attend abroad. On the one hand, the following excerpt from the narrative interview shows how Patrícia still recalls her first classes at the Italian university and how she uses the evaluative adjective 'difficult' to describe her ability to follow them through Italian:

Excerpt 48 'difficult to follow the classes\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Patrícia – IT*)

1	PATRICIA:	at the beginning we found it a little	*al principi les classes ens*
2		bit difficult to follow the classes\ but	*costava una mica entendre*
3		(...) there were also a lot of people *	*però (...) també molta gent *

4		when we said hey_ we are Erasmus	quan dèiem ei_ que som
5		students_ they already told you oh_	Erasmus_ ja et deien ah_
6		don't worry_ we'll lend you our class	tranquil_ et passem apunts_
7		notes_ don't worry\ that was great\	no et preocupis\ molt bé\

Besides Patricia's evaluation of those first classes in Italian as 'difficult', we can also see how she constructs herself overtly as a member of the identity category 'Erasmus student' (lines 4-5) and how, as she explains, this self-categorization immediately produced an empathetic response on the part of her interlocutors, who were willing to share their class notes with her (lines 6-7) – something Patrícia evaluates very positively through the use of the evaluative adjective 'great' (line 7).

On the other hand, and, as evidenced from excerpt 49 below, we can see that something similar happens to Verònica, who contends that 'we didn't understand anything' (*no ens enteràvem de res*) in class. By the use of the first-person-plural pronoun 'we', Verònica is implicitly voicing other Spanish/Catalan Erasmus students who, like her, would position themselves as not being able to follow the classes. The following excerpt shows Verònica's affective stance towards the way in which, according to her, classes for Erasmus students were treated at her university:

Excerpt 49 'you will do something different\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while abroad, with Verònica – IT*)

1	SÒNIA:	you don't go to class_ why not/	i les classes què tal/
2	VERÒNICA:	(…) what enraged me was tha··t_ in	(…) lo que em feia ràbia és
3		many subjects they told you don't_	que··_ moltes assignatures et
4		don't come because you will do	deien no_ no vinguis perquè··
5		something different\	tu faràs una cosa diferent\
6	SÒNIA:	+mhm\+	+mhm\+
7	VERÒNICA:	there was one subject which was	hi havia una que era política·
8		political economy (…) in which the	econòmica (…)_ que el profe
9		teacher had been on an Erasmus	havia estat d'Erasmus a··_ a
10		i··n_ in the Canary Islands_ and * he	Canàries_ i * ens va agafar a
11		took all the Spanish students and	tots els espanyols i ens va dir
12		told us that no_ that he would_ he	que no_ que ens_ que ens
13		would give us a book and that we	donaria un llibre i que
14		should study it in Spanish_ and that	l'estudiéssim en castellà_ i que
15		we would take the exam in Spanish	faríem l'examen en castellà\
16		because he understood Spanish\	perquè entenia castellà\

As evidenced from excerpt 49, the use of Spanish was not only the students' easy way out, but the teacher's. Verònica's attempt to improve Italian was cut short by the teacher's desire to make the students use a Spanish textbook and take an exam in Spanish, too. In this case, language learning was hampered by the teacher who, among other things, separated the Spanish students from the others and who did not encourage them to make an effort to understand and to use the Italian language within the university context. The affective stance predicate 'enrages' (line 2) clearly indexes Verònica's feelings and/or positioning towards the way classes worked and towards the Spanish Erasmus students feeling of alienation from other internationals and the 'locals' – this is the object of stance to which she is orienting affectively. Suggestive that this is not an unusual pattern in the SA context, Eton Churchill (2006: 207) suggests that certain individual teaching approaches may indeed become a "negative factor affecting student participation" in the SA setting and that this – among other factors – could be re-shaped by pre-program planning with the intention of making the SA experience not be "a loss of precious time" (ibid, 2006: 221).

Not being able to follow the classes at the beginning of the stay was also reported by Amanda (UK). Although after a few months she reports feeling at ease with foreign language use, she also positions herself as completely unable to follow the classes (line 3):

Excerpt 50 'I don't understand anything\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Amanda – UK*)

1	AMANDA:	and the classes (...) at the beginning	*i a les classes (...) al principi*
2		I also +uh··+ thought * I don't	*també +mm··+ pensava * no*
3		understand anything +uh+ they	*entenc res_ +eh+ parlen molt*
4		speak very fast_ maybe I don't pass	*ràpid_ a veure si no aprovaré·_*
5		[the subject]_ (...) but at the end as	*(...) però al final conforme van*
6		days go by you start adapting_ you	*passant els dies i et vas*
7		see·_ that you can perfectly go	*adaptant_ veus que·_ que te'n*
8		through this\	*pots sortir perfectament*

Amanda's affective stance is displayed in lines 4-5, in which she expresses her worry about failing the subject due to her lack of language competence. Another interesting point is the student's use of generic *you* subjects (lines 6 - 7),

by which she is generalizing her epistemic stance to other possible members of the category 'Erasmus student' who, despite experiencing language difficulties at the beginning of their sojourn, would finally 'go through this' (lines 7-8). This somehow evidences Murphy-Lejeune's (2002: 119) idea that "adaptation follows the progress of language competence".

Regarding the students' subjective language-related experiences at the beginning of their stay, we could summarize the different interrelated objects of stance some of the participants resort to while abroad into the following six and their evaluation as users of a foreign language:

Table 11 Participants' stance towards their language-based experiences

Objects of stance	Evaluative Stance / (Self) Positioning
The first days abroad	Horrible (Amanda) Difficult (Mònica)
(Pre-sojourn) linguistic preparation	'necessary' (Patrícia) 'essential' (Marina)
(Not) being able to handle a conversation in a foreign language	'it is a huge feeling of impotence' (Patrícia) 'I couldn't' (Ariadna) 'I was blocked' (Ariadna) You find it difficult (Marina) 'worries me' (Verònica) It's hard (Mònica)
Expressing emotions in a foreign language	'difficult'; 'I can't'; 'makes me feel strange' (Mònica)
Being able to follow the classes in a foreign language	'difficult' (Patrícia) 'We didn't understand anything' (Verònica) 'I don't understand anything' (Amanda)
Attending classes and taking exams in Spanish while abroad	'enrages me' (Verònica)

Indeed, through the analysis of the participants' discourse, we can see what actually occurs while abroad as reported by them and how they evaluate and position themselves towards, among other aspects, their foreign language use in

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their host destination. Indeed, the experience has raised their awareness of her second language ability and of their lack of linguistic preparation in their initial communicative situations in a given foreign language. Table 11 above illustrates the participants' use of evaluative adjectives (e.g. 'difficult'; 'horrible'; 'hard'); affective verbs (e.g. 'enrages'; 'feel') and of the modal 'can't', which actually index their subjective positioning towards their language-based experiences as users of a given foreign language (in this case, English and/or Italian) who cannot fully express themselves through that language and who, therefore, realize and evaluate a pre-sojourn linguistic preparation as 'essential' and 'necessary'. In fact, as has been shown in this section, most of them categorize themselves as 'not prepared' linguistically speaking at the beginning of their stay abroad. It is this poor competence in the foreign language that, according to some of them, crystallized in social isolation, in the impossibility of building a rich social network formed by people from different countries and, ultimately, as will be seen in the next section, in a somehow inevitable joining with people with whom they share the same L1. The following section deals with the relationship between foreign language learning/use and social networks, which emerged as one of the major themes in the data set.

6.2.2. Linguae Francae, L2 Learning/Use and Social Networks

SÒNIA:	did you see that the Spanish students tended to stay_ to stay with Spanish students/ (*vas veure que era una tendència dels espanyols a estar_ a estar amb els espanyols/*)
JOAN:	yes··\ totally\ totally\ (*sí··\ una tendència total\ total*)

(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Joan - DK*)

The analysis of the participants' discourse on their language-related experiences shows that, as has also been claimed by Christina Isabelli-García (2006: 231), "learners may not magically become fluent speakers simply by being surrounded by the target language". However, there are many 'extra-linguistic factors' that may affect the learners' acquisition of a foreign language. In this

section, I will focus on one of these, which is the "informal relationships contracted by the individual learner" (ibid, 2006: 231); in other words, their social networks.

Ioannis Tsoukalas (2008: 139) highlights the strong sense of community of Erasmus students, who "really come close to each other; even if only for a short time"; a community which is "created, among others, by intense socialization" (Krupnik and Krzaklewska, 2013: 215). The current section will present those communicative practices described by the participants with the three main types of social networks which they make relevant in their discourse: the locals, other international students, and co-nationals. Particular attention will be directed, on the one hand, to the ways in which language use varies according to whom they interact with. On the other hand, the focus will also be on how their communicative practices abroad might affect (or not), (a) their beliefs about language learning and study abroad, and (b) their attitudes towards the different languages encountered abroad and, in particular, towards *English as a lingua franca* (ELF). This is, as has been shown in the previous section, "a global medium of communication" (Kaypak and Ortaçtepe, 2014: 363) and/or a means by which students can build a rich social fabric formed by people with different L1s and, therefore, be part of these *ELF communities* (Kalocsai, 2014; Kaypak and Ortaçtepe, 2014).

These three 'kinds of friendship ties' have also been pointed out by Ainhoa de Federico de la Rúa (2008: 90), who actually works on the kinds of social relationships Erasmus establish during their stay abroad, and who contends that "it makes a difference if they make friends with local students, with fellow countrymen or with other international students". According to de Federico de la Rúa (2008), examining the development of the students' networks abroad may provide insight into (a) the extent to which integration into the host society takes place, which is "often automatically assumed to be the result of exchange programmes" (ibid, 2008: 93); (b) whether the students prefer to have friends who come from the home country and thus whether they consider "the exchange [to be] a failure in terms of intercultural contact" (ibid, 2008: 93); and (c) the negotiation and adjustment that may take place within what de Federico de la Rúa names 'the Erasmus community', formed by people who "share the experience of being 'strangers'" (ibid, 2008: 94).

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Sections 6.2.2.1, 6.2.2.2 and 6.2.2.3 deal with the students' accounts on their communicative practices with other [non-Spanish] international students abroad, with co-nationals and with 'the locals', respectively.

6.2.2.1.   Communication with Other (Non-Spanish) International Students

The analysis of the qualitative data collected during the participants' stay revealed that English was, indeed, for most of them, the *only* common language among the different international exchange students and a tool that they needed in order to establish interpersonal relationships with them. Excerpt 51 is an instance of one of the participants in this study, Marina (UK), who evaluates English as 'a language you *have to* speak' during her study abroad experience:

Excerpt 51 'I must talk in English'
(*Excerpt taken from the second elicited experiential report on 'social networks', written by Marina - UK*)

1	I am very gratefully of doing that experience because <u>I have met a great sort of</u>
2	<u>people with who I must talk in English in order to understand and be understood</u>,
3	and it has made me improve in lots of aspects, such as feeling me confidence when
4	talking, achieving new vocabulary, get manage to express myself I different ways,
5	etc.. A part from the aspects I have already mentioned in the chart above, <u>I speak in</u>
6	<u>English in other occasions because, for instance, in classes I must speak with other</u>
7	<u>students, discuss debates, put our ideas I common, and I also try to participate in</u>
8	<u>them, etc.</u> It was also difficult to speak in English when we arrived to Aber because
9	thus there are people from every part of the world it turned very complicated to
10	get every dialect; right know, I very happy to get them all in a 90/95 per cert.

Although Marina was one of the participants who reported feeling insecure while using English at the beginning of her sojourn, she somehow realizes that "learner autonomy play[s] a paramount role in improving [her] English" (Kaypak and Ortaçtepe, 2014: 362) and presents herself as active in relation to the use of the English language both inside the university (lines 6-8) and outside of it. Her active role in improving her English can be observed through the use of verbs like 'discuss' (line 7), 'put [ideas] in common' (line 7), 'participate' (line 7), 'speak' (line 6) and 'express' (line 4). Marina clearly displays a positive stance towards the fact of being part of an ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) community formed by people

'with whom I must talk in English', through the use of the adjective 'grateful' (line 1), which indexes her affect towards this community. As can be interpreted from Marina's words, the student's lack of English proficiency was not the only aspect that made those initial interactions among other exchange students 'difficult' (line 10), but she also singles out the differences in accent as another "major cause of non-understanding" (Smit, 2010: 174). As she expresses in this report, apart from having improved her confidence in talking in English (line 4), her linguistic development also involves the fact of being able to 'get every dialect' (lines 12-13).

A similar picture emerges from the analysis of Ariadna's (DK) second elicited-experiential report on her social networks and the languages she uses to interact with them. She refers to English as so present in her everyday life abroad that she feels 'collapsed' (line 1) – meaning overwhelmed – by this language.

Excerpt 52 'I always speak English'
(*Excerpt taken from the second elicited experiential report on 'social networks', written by Ariadna – DK*)

1	After these three weeks I can say that <u>I'm a little collapsed of</u>
2	<u>speaking English, I always speak English</u> unless when I speak with my
3	dorm and school mate Isabel. With her I speak Spanish, but I really
4	miss speaking Catalan. In these three weeks I just spoke Catalan
5	twice... when I did the Skype with my parents, and really... I missed
6	that. Last week I was in the street and I heard a boy speaking Catalan
7	and I felt excited.

Even though she, later in the semi-structured interview, recognizes that 'English makes things easier' ('*és més fàcil amb l'anglès*'), in this excerpt we can see how, after three weeks abroad, she already constructs her identity as an English-as- a-lingua-franca-user who feels 'collapsed' of using this language which she 'always' speaks (line 2). This is in line with Tsoukalas' (2008) in-depth research on the potential consequences of Erasmus students' interpersonal contacts, in which he contends that exchange students, as is the case of the participants in this study, "do not [always] have the privilege of expressing themselves in their mother tongue but are forced to use English" (ibid, 2008: 135) and that "the constant speaking of English constitute[s] a psychological strain for many students that [do] not have it as their mother tongue" (ibid, 2008: 135). Besides, it is significant to

note that Ariadna displays an affective stance towards the fact of not using her L1 much – the use of the verb 'miss' (line 5) indexes the nostalgia she feels for the use of her L1 (Catalan), a language for which she actually feels 'excited' whenever she hears it.

Marina's and Ariadna's report on using English support Alan Firth's theory (1996: 240), which touches upon the social aspects of language use by defining English as "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication". Jennifer Jenkins (2014: 24), however, asserts that the definition of ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) is not at all clear-cut but "problematic and controversial" and includes native English speakers in her definition of ELF, by describing it as "English when it is used as a contact language between people from different first languages (including native English speakers)" (ibid, 2014: 24). Barbara Seidlhofer (2011: 7) reveals a similar understanding when she claims that "it has to be remembered that [although the majority of its users are not native speakers of English] of course ELF interactions [may] include interlocutors from the Inner and Outer Circles[14]", and that ELF should be conceived as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (ibid, 2011: 7), as is the case of the participants in this study.

As has already been pointed out, this is actually corroborated not only by Marina (UK) and Ariadna's (DK) words but also by other participants in this study who, in spite of being in three different countries (UK, Denmark and Italy) present English as a means by which they *must* communicate with other internationals. Yet, excerpts 53, 54 and 55 below constitute three examples of the ways three students, despite being in a different country and despite recognizing the social

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[14] Braj B. Kachru (1985) represents the spread of English in three concentric circles which he names the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle refers to those countries (the USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) in which English is "the primary language" (ibid, 1985:12); the Outer Circle includes those regions (e.g. Nigeria, Zambia, Singapore and India) which "have gone through extended periods of colonization, essentially by the users of the Inner circle varieties" (ibid, 1985:12) and in which English is institutionalized; the Expanding Circle encompasses the geographical regions where a vast population use English as an international language (e.g. China, Indonesia and Greece).

advantages of being able to use this language, reported not being able to do it due to their perceived poor L2 competence in English:

Excerpt 53 'my English is not enough\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview during the shadowing period, with Verònica – IT*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	VERÒNICA:	the problem is that if I could speak English as I can speak Catalan * (…) I would obviously be able to speak more wi··th_ with these people and I could make social contacts\ but the thing is that <u>my English is not enough</u>\ and I have been studying English since I was eight\	*el problema és que si pogués parlar anglès com puc parlar català* (…) pues clar que podria parlar més amb··_ amb aquesta gent i em podria relacionar\ però és que el meu anglès no és suficient\ i porto des dels vuit anys estudiant anglès*
9 10 11 12	SÒNIA:	(…) the obstacle you have found to establish a relationship with the Erasmus from all over the world has been the language\ English/	*(…) l'obstacle q t'has trobat per relacionar-te amb els Erasmus de tot el món ha sigut la llengua\ l'anglès*
13 14 15 16	VERÒNICA:	the language\ yes\ English\ (…) but I don't understand what they do in those countries and [what we do] in ours\	*la llengua\ sí\ l'anglès\(…) però jo no ho entenc què fan en aquells països i en el nostre*

Excerpt 54 'we can't establish communication (…) for the moment'
(*Excerpt taken from the second elicited experiential report on 'social networks', written by Mònica – DK*)

| 1
2
3 | I think we aren't so different, only that express all the feelings and talk in another language it's difficult and <u>we</u> <u>can't establish communication</u> and make much more contact for the moment. |

Excerpt 55 'I can't be who I really am with them'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Amanda – UK*)

1 2 3	SÒNIA:	and then you also said that when you started_ you started to live with the Dutch girls_ * right/	*i després has dit que també quan vas començar_ vas començar a viure amb les noies holandeses_ * no/*
4	AMANDA:	yes_	*sí_*
5 6 7 8 9	SÒNIA:	you said at the beginning that they were very nice and so on_ but when I visited you_ * [they were] very nice but you didn't have much contact with them\right/	*has dit al principi súper majes i tal_ però quan et vaig anar a veure_ * súper majes sí però poca relació\ no/*
10	AMANDA:	yes because··_ * I mean_ I obviously *	*sí perquè··_ *o sigui_ clar jo al * jo*

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11		I * I found it very hard_ * I mean I	* *a mi em va costar molt_ *o sigui*
12		thought_ no * <u>I can't be who I really</u>	*jo pensava_ no_ no puc_ ser com*
13		<u>am with them because I don't have</u>	*sóc realment amb elles perquè no*
14		<u>enough fluency to talk at ease</u>\ you	*tinc suficient fluïdesa com per*
15		know/ sometime we did go * I don't	*parlar pim pam\ saps/ algun cop*
16		know_ shopping or we went out for	*pues sí_ pues anàvem * jo què sé_*
17		a drink and so on_ o·r * I didn't	*de compres o vam sortir algun cop*
18		spend all the day with them as I	*i tal_ o·· * no en plan per estar tot*
19		could do with a friend from here	*el dia com podria estar amb*
20		[Lleida]\ you know/ because I don't_	*alguna amiga d'aquí\ saps/*
21		* I can't say * now I was thinking of	*perquè no_ no li puc dir * ara em*
22		something and share this with	*passava això pel cap i dir-li això*
23		them\ you know/ I couldn't\	*saps/ no*
24	SÒNIA:	right\ so_ +uh·+ you·· * I guess this is	*ja\ per tant_ +mm·+ tu·· * això*
25		something that had a very big	*suposo que és una cosa que va*
26		impact on you\ right/ because you	*tenir un impacte molt gran en tu*
27		are a very sociable person_ and you	*no/ perquè tu ets una persona*
28		speak a lot with people_	*bastant sociable_ i tu parles molt*
			*amb la gent_*
29	AMANDA:	obviously\ obviously\ yes\	*clar\ clar\ sí*
30	SÒNIA:	and there I saw that you were quite_	*i allà jo et vaig veure bastant_*
31		quite alone\ right/	*bastant tu sola\ no/*
32	AMANDA:	I was closed in myself\	*tancada*
33	SÒNIA:	you really_ * I mean_ you socialized	*realment_ * vull dir_ socialitzaves*
34		very little_ a··nd_ and you say that	*poc_ i··_ i tu em dius que la causa*
35		the reason why this was so * the	*de·· de·· d'això de que· * del fet que*
36		reason why you socialized little is	*socialitzessis poc és la llengua*
37		the language\ right/ it is English\	*no/ és l'anglès*
38	AMANDA:	yes\ yes\	*sí\ sí*
39	SÒNIA:	so English was an obstacle for you	*per tant l'anglès també va ser un*
40		to_ to say·_	*obstacle per per tu per_ per di·r_*
41	AMANDA:	yes yes\ of course\ I am sure that if I	*sí sí\ i tant\ jo estic segura de que*
42		had gone instead of Wales to··_ to	*si me n'hagués anat enlloc de*
43		Vic_ {(@) I would have found my	*Gal·les a··_ a Vic_ +@+ hagués*
44		group and I would have} * you	*trobat el meu grup i hagués **
45		understand/	*m'entens/*

In excerpt 53, Verònica (IT) evaluates the fact of not knowing 'enough English' as a 'problem' (line 1) that prevents her from 'making social contacts' (line 5). She evaluates this situation negatively by somehow complaining about her inability to interact with other exchange students, despite having been 'studying' – it is interesting to see how she uses the verb 'study' not 'use' – English since the age of 8 (lines 7-8). Verònica displays an affective stance towards her and other Spanish Erasmus students' inferior competence in English ('we') compared to that

of non-Spanish Erasmus students ('they'): she just can't understand 'what they do in those countries and [what we do] in ours\'.

Excerpt 54 is part of the second elicited-experiential report in which Mònica (DK) accounted for the social networks she interacted with on a daily basis and the languages she used to do so. At the end of the report, Mònica wrote a reflection on what she thought about her social networks, which by that time, were mostly Spanish and Catalan. As can be observed, she categorizes the other internationals as 'not ['culturally'] different' and, thus, suggesting that the reason why she is not interacting with them is not their 'culture' but her inability to use English with them: this is something she regards as 'difficult for the moment' (line 3).

In excerpt 55, Amanda's (UK) words clearly index an affective stance towards the fact of not being able to communicate and even be herself in English – in relation to this, she contends that 'I found it very hard' (line 11) and defines herself as 'closed in myself' (line 32) and/or as not being able to interact with her Dutch flatmates due to her perceived poor L2 competence. The ethnographic data that were collected through the shadowing period enabled a better insight into these aspects and later led to a co-construction of Amanda's Erasmus story in the interviews – this can be seen in the utterances such as '*when I visited you*' (lines 6-7) and/or '*I saw that you…*' (line 30). Amanda's words in lines 12-13 ('*I can't be who I really am with them*') reveal what Chantal Hemmi (2014: 80; 85) describes as the "duality or multiplicity of identities [that] may emerge through the use of the different languages. […] [T]his duality is [often] perceived […] as a factor that [is] 'frustrating'", by many bilingual speakers[15] who, like Amanda, find themselves regularly using two languages. In the book entitled *Bilingual minds: Emotional experience, expression, and representation*, Pavlenko (2006: 3) talks about the metaphor of 'linguistic schizophrenia' characterized by "the fact that in different languages [bilinguals'] voices may sound differently even when telling the 'same' stories". In other words, as she contends in this illuminating study on bilingual

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[15] In this study, I follow the view of Grosjean (1982) in conceiving "the regular use of two languages as the defining feature of bilingualism, as depending on the purpose and function of the social situations in which they use their language, one language may take dominance over the other" (as cited in Hemmi, 2014: 81).

minds, some bi- and multilinguals "may perceive the world differently, and change perspectives, ways of thinking and verbal and non-verbal behaviours when switching languages" and that this is not 'aberrant' but just "part of what makes us human" (ibid, 2006: 29). Indeed, excerpt 55 above illustrates how Amanda sees her own identity in respect to the languages she uses abroad and how she evaluates her poor skills in English as 'an obstacle' (lines 40-41) that conditions the establishment of interpersonal relationships and which, therefore, does not facilitate her adaptation. It is interesting to see how she constructs her imagined identity in Vic – a Catalan city in the Barcelona province – as very different from the one in Wales, since in the first city she 'would have found a group [of friends]' easily, through the means of her L1 (Catalan).

There exist many studies dealing with the relationship between L2 linguistic confidence and cross-cultural adaptation (e.g. Yu and Shen, 2010). For instance, Zoltán Dörnyei and Kata Csizér (2005: 328) conclude that "L2 proficiency, by definition, creates the medium of communication between members of different ethnolinguistic communities" and this is, according to these scholars, one of the main aims of learning second languages. In a similar line of thought, Maureen Snow Andrade (2006: 131) contends that "adjustment challenges are primarily attributable to English language proficiency", among other factors.

Indeed, we have seen how the students in this study express the difficulties that some of them experienced in their social lives due to their lack of proficiency in the English language. This finding resonates to some extent with Eda Kaypak and Deniz Ortaçtepe's (2014: 361) findings. In their study, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods, they focus on 53 Turkish Erasmus exchange students and conclude, among other things, that the participants "felt insecure while using English at the beginning of their study abroad sojourns since they felt less competent than their European contemporaries". In fact, one of the students in Kaypak and Deniz Ortaçtepe's study contended that 'the worst ones are the Turkish and Spanish in terms of English' – a belief which has also been expressed by some of the participants in this study (e.g. Verònica, IT) in respect to their perceived competence in English and that of others.

In spite of these initial difficulties, and as has been shown in the previous excerpts, most participants who went to the UK and to Denmark reported that they were "exposed to a large amount of L2 input and [somehow] forced to use their L2 in everyday and academic interactions" (Schauer, 2007: 194) during their sojourn abroad. This somehow resulted in an improvement of their linguistic competence, mainly with regards to their 'fluency' or 'confidence' in using English (see figure 19).

Figure 19 The students' self- perceived competence in English during their stay
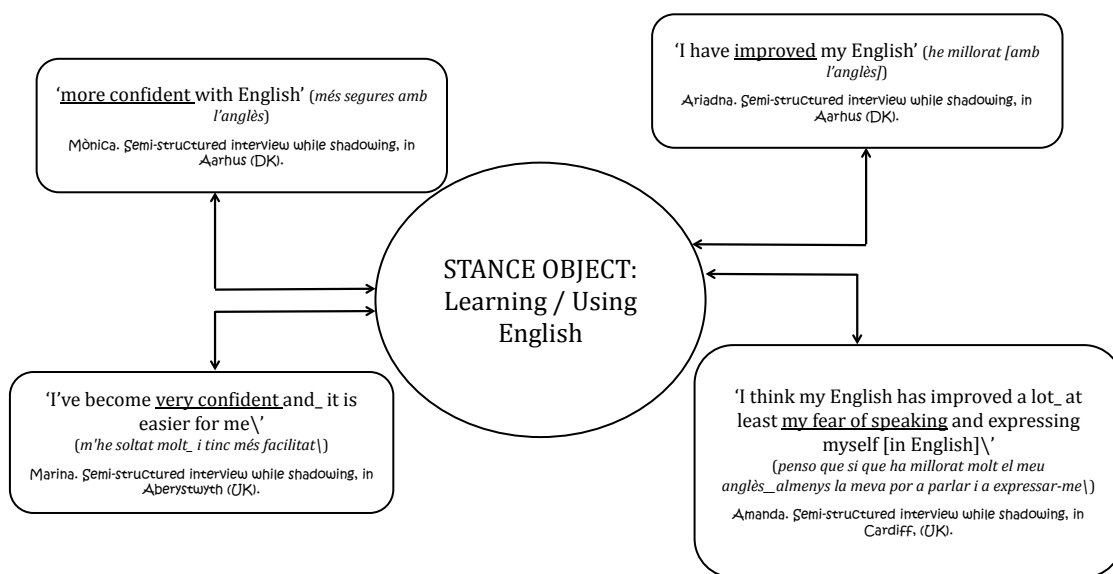
Although the figure does not include the potential diversified influences of different (con)textual factors that define the students' positioning towards English learning while abroad, we can see how three students display an affective –rather than an epistemic – stance towards the fact of being able to use English; that is, they do not construct themselves as knowing more the language, but as *feeling* more confident when using it. This is mainly the case of Mònica (DK), Marina (UK) and Amanda (UK), who, thanks to the stay abroad, now construct their identities as 'very/more confident' and as now having no *fear* of using English. Although Ariadna (DK) does not specify the aspects in which she thinks her English is

improving, the accounts presented in figure 19 are generally concerned with the participants' change in perception of their linguistic improvement as a result of the study abroad experience. Therefore, the Erasmus seems to be presented as an experience characterized with an intensive exposure and contact with the target language and which is, ultimately, enhancing their learning of English. An example of this can be seen in excerpt 56 below, where Marina (UK) comments on her improvement of English in a context where she feels her exposure to English is much more intense than in Lleida.

Excerpt 56 'thirty per cent of English and seventy per cent of Spanish/'
(***Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Marina – UK***)

1 2 3 4	SÒNIA:	can you give me a percentage_ * I use this percentage of English and of Catalan or Spanish\ what would you say/	*pots donar-me un percentatge_ * utilitzo tant anglès i tant català o castellà/ què em diries/*
5	MARINA:	it would be a···_ thirty seventy\	*seria un···_ trenta setanta*
6 7	SÒNIA:	thirty per cent of English and seventy per cent of Spanish/	*trenta anglès i setanta espanyol/*
8	MARINA:	yes\	*sí*
9 10 11 12	SÒNIA:	a·nd even this * using this * <u>a thirty per cent of English</u> _ (...) you think that with this thirty per cent you are already improving\	*i· inclús aquest * utilitzant aquest * un trenta per cent l'anglès_ (...) tu creus que amb aquest trenta per cent ja estàs millorant*
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27	MARINA :	yes\ I think so\ just with this_ yes\ I could do more but just with this * because obviously i··n_ in Lleida_ Spain (...) the classes are_ (...) * the teacher explains and the students shut up_ listen and take notes\ [English] is not spoken at all\ you do··n't_ * and when they make you speak with the classmates_ you do start talking in English but then_ you speak in your own language\ and it is the easy way out\ but obviously_ here_ +uh···+ we are very few students and the teacher makes them participate_	*sí\ jo crec que sí\ només amb això_ sí\ podria fer més però només amb això * perquè evidentment a··_ a Lleida_ Espanya (...) les classes són_ (...) * el professor explica i els demès alumnes callen_ escolten i prenen apunts\ no es parla res\ no·· * i quan et fan parlar amb els companys_ sí comences a parlar amb anglès però després_ parles amb la teva llengua\ i és el camí fàcil\ però clar_ aquí·_ és que_ a part de que les classes_+eh··+ hi som súper pocs alumnes i el professor fa participar els alumnes_*

Even though Marina recognizes using a very high percentage of her L1 (Spanish) during her stay, she feels that the input and/or exposure to the English language is higher than in Lleida (lines 15-19) and that 'just with this' (line 14)

30% of English use she is definitely improving her English (line 13). Marina comments on the dynamics of the study-abroad classroom which bolster the student's confidence in English, mainly due to the active role played by the students in Wales who, as opposed to the ones in Lleida, tend to participate a lot. This is summarized in the following table.

Table 12 Marina's opposite category-bound descriptions of students in Wales and Lleida

Category	Category-Bound Activity		Category	Category-Bound Activity
Students in Lleida/Spain	shut up (in class)	≠	**Students in Wales**	participate (in class)
	listen (in class)			
	take notes (in class)			
Teachers in Lleida/Spain	explain		**Teachers in Wales**	make students participate

Through this categorization practice, Marina seems to implicitly evaluate aspects in the AH (*at home*) teaching approach negatively, as a learning environment characterized by the paucity of input and exposure to the English language and as not helping students improve their linguistic competence in that language. In this sense, Marina is contrasting two different learning environments (study abroad and formal instruction) – the latter being characterized by "affording learners a lower intensity of exposure to the target language and hence potentially fewer opportunities for substantial linguistic improvement" (Pérez-Vidal et al, 2012: 213). This somehow fits to the results offered by Carmen Muñoz (2012: 144) in her study on "the existence and nature of turning points in L2 learners' trajectories to investigate the role played by intensive exposure in them". In this study, Muñoz concludes that, although some "learners may create their own immersion environment at home" (ibid, 2012: 154), most participants contended

that "a stay abroad brought about the change" (ibid, 2012: 154) and, thus, present this experience as a major turning point in their language-learning histories.

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that most of the students report that the experience abroad is bolstering their confidence in their language learning/use abroad, and although they seem to "prioritise communicative effectiveness over narrow predetermined notions of correctness" (Jenkins, 2011: 928), their concern about making mistakes or not speaking 'correctly' is still prominent in their discourses. Excerpts 57 and 58 below illustrate how two participants allude to the fact of not using the language 'correctly':

Excerpt 57 'I still make some mistakes'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Ariadna - DK*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	have you noticed any change in you_ from the beginning until now/	*tu has notat algun canvi_entre el principi i ara amb tu/*
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17	ARIADNA:	in relation to English_ yes\and in fact they have told me that I have improved [my English] bu··t <u>I still make some mistakes</u>\ that's why I always want tha··t they correct me\ (…) I always go * I get on very well wi··th with the girl fro··m Toledo and wi··th a Polish girl that lives in Ireland·· a··nd I tell her to correct me\ because otherwise I won't * because if I say something and they understand me but don't say it we··ll_ I will think that I have said it correcting and will keep on saying it\ (…) in relation to English_	*amb el tema anglès_ sí\ i ademés m'ho han dit que he millorat però·· també·· hi ha faltes que les continuo fent\ per això dic que·· m'ho corregeixin\ (…) vaig sempre * amb les que em faig més són amb·· amb la de·· Toledo i amb·· una polaca que viu a Irlanda·· i·· li dic_que em corregeixi\ perquè sinó no·· * perquè si jo·· dic una cosa però m'entenen però no la dic bé··_ pensaré que està ben dita i la continuaré dient\(…) lo del tema de l'anglès_*
18 19	SÒNIA:	what do you want to say about English/	*què passa amb el tema de l'anglès/*
20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	ARIADNA:	when talking to_ to the buddies_ who are my age··_ I see that_ when they were kids they didn't know English either\ and they speak it super well\ and I started to study English at the age of five·· (…) at the private language school and my Eng& * a··nd I have always been studying English\ and I see that I haven't_ I haven't improved\ (…) here_ just the fact of watching TV in English·· is being very helpful for me\	*parlant amb els_ amb els {(ENG) buddies}_que tenen la meva edat·· _ jo veig que_quan eren petits tampoc sabien anglès\ i el parlen súper bé\ i jo vaig començar a estudiar anglès a p5·· (…) a l'acadèmia i el meu ang& * i·· sempre he estat fent anglès\ i veig que no_ no he avançat\ (…) aquí ja només·· amb el fet ja de la tele amb anglès·· a mi m'està anant súper bé ara*

Excerpt 58 'I won't be able to speak because maybe I make mistakes'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview during the shadowing period, with Roger and Amanda* – UK)

1 2	ROGER:	we have surely improved our level of English_ (...)	*segur que el nivell de llengua l'hem millorat_ (...)*
3	SÒNIA:	do you also think so/	*tu també ho creus això/*
4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	AMANDA:	I do think so\ I mean_ in spite of it being the first time I go abroad for such a long_ long time_ I think I have improved my English a lot_ at least my fear of speaking and expressing myself\ right/ I mean_ the first days _when I got here I was always scared of * I won't be able to speak because maybe I make mistakes and the people_ * but no\now when I have to express myself I do so\	*jo penso que sí\ vull dir_ tot hi ser la primera vegada que vaig a l'estranger amb un temps tant_tant llarg_ penso que sí que ha millorat molt el meu anglès_almenys la meva por a parlar i a expressar-me\ no\vull dir_ els primers dies_ que vaig arribar sempre tenia por a* no parlaré perquè igual cometo errors i la gent_ * però no\ ara quan m'he d'expressar m'expresso*

On the one hand, in excerpt 57, Ariadna (DK) expresses the impact that her study abroad experience is having on her identity: she would now construct herself as someone whose English has improved (line 3). Indeed, the words of Ariadna – and also of other participants in this study – somehow reflect Smit's (2010: 58) claim that language use cannot be split from language learning, but that they are "two social practices which tend to reinforce each other. (...) In other words, language use and language learning do not stand in an either-or relationship, but are rather complementary to each other". This is, in fact, an aspect Ariadna emphasizes when she comments on how different her level of English is from that of the Danish buddies she has met abroad, who, unlike her and despite being the same age, 'speak [English] super well' (line 23). The difference, as Ariadna seems to imply, rests in the environment where they have learnt English. She has realized that in Denmark input in English is higher than in Lleida, where she has studied English in a language school in which the focus was on the form and not so much on content (hence her – and other participants' – constant concern about their faulty English). As can be observed in this excerpt, Ariadna – like the majority of the participants in this study – has studied (not used) English in a language school for many years (lines 24-29), and this may explain why, in

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spite of this, she does not feel she can communicate in English as successfully as her Danish buddies. A recent study carried out by Benson et al. (2013: 9), which centres on the analysis of the narratives of 48 study abroad students of Hong Kong, concurs that the participants' stories on their study abroad experience signal whether the students "subscribe to language 'learner' and 'user' identities". This is also reflected in Ariadna's words, who somehow realizes that she can best improve her English, not by studying in a private language school (as she has been doing for many years and where she would construct herself as a language learner), but simply by being immersed in the target language environment where she has no other choice but to *use* the language. Indeed, for Ariadna and for most of the students in this project, the study abroad experience awakens their sense of self as language *users* – and probably as language-users-for-the-first-time –; something which they feel the at-home context does not foster.

On the other hand, excerpt 58 constitutes another instance in which Amanda comments on her initial affective stance towards her ability to use English while abroad: she felt 'scared' (line 10) of making mistakes in English (lines 11-12). Yet, as she says, the study abroad experience has also had an impact on her identity, not just as a language learner, but as a language user who is now more aware of the communicative value of English and less worried about the correctness of her speech: 'now when I have to express myself I do so\' (lines 13-14).

The experience of the three participants who went to Italy appears to be slightly different as regards their language learning and use abroad. Even though the participants do state that English is the lingua franca used among [non-Spanish] Erasmus students, they (as members of the category Spanish Erasmus student) express not being using/learning English because (a) they do not feel their English is as good as that of the other international students; and (b) because their motivation in Italy was to learn the local language (Italian), rather than English. However, and as will be discussed in the next section, two participants – Patrícia (IT) and Verònica (IT) – admit that they are not using/learning as much Italian as they initially expected and wanted, due to the fact that their social networks were mostly formed by co-nationals.

6.2.2.2. Communication with co-nationals

As has already been pointed out in chapter five, most participants in this study stated that they wanted to avoid compatriots in order to be able to totally immerse into the new environment and to learn a given foreign language. This finding resonates to some extent with Kalocsai's (2014) findings about Erasmus students and their communicative practices through ELF (English as a Lingua Franca). In this study, Kalocsai (2014: 91) concludes that "most members were keen to make new friends and sought out for opportunities to get to know other than the L1 speakers of the same language and/or their flatmates". However, the building up of initial ties with compatriots is an aspect Ute Smit (2010: 124) tackles in her study and about which she contends that these "L1-based units" or "linguacultural nets" were formed because they "helped in reducing feelings of loneliness and homesickness on the one hand and, on the other hand, in following lessons or explaining subject matter". Indeed, we have already seen these bonds with co-nationals as playing a very important role for some of the participants in this study, inasmuch as they made reference to this mainly during the interviews. For instance, we have seen that for Mònica (DK) sharing her Erasmus experience with her compatriot, Silvia, makes her feel as if 'I was at home'. Similarly, Amanda (UK) contends that she mostly interacts with a girl from Mallorca (the Balearic Islands) because, as she claims in the interview that was held with her during her stay, being able to 'tell her [in Catalan] * look_ this has happened to me\ and be understood a hundred per cent\' (*poder-li explicar *mira m'ha passat això\ i què m'entengui al cent per cent*) makes her feel 'more comfortable' (*em sento més còmoda'*). We have also seen that Marina (UK) feels she is using a 70% of Spanish and a 30% of English. This is somehow corroborated by the following table, in which she accounted for the social networks and the languages she used abroad.

Table 13 Marina's social networks and languages used while abroad

WHO	RELATIONSHIP	HOW?	HOW OFTEN and HOW LONG	LANGUAGE
Eduard	Boyfriend	We live together in Aber. Face-tot-face and Whatsapp	Everyday 8/9 hours a day	Catalan if we are alone, Spanish if we are with some Spanish Friends or

				English if we are with other friends
Miriam	Friend of Oviedo that is doing her ERASMUS here	Face-to-face, Facebook and Whatsapp.	I almost see her every day because we coincide in some classes but we also meet out of the Uni. We interact 2/3 hours a day	Spanish if we are just both of us and English if we are with other people or in class
Becca	She is a Welsh girl. She was assigned to me to be my tandem	Face-to-face and Whatsapp	I usually meet with her twice a week and we spend more or less 3 hours	Spanish and English because we have to practise both languages
Maria Elena, Jose, Valeria and Eric	They are other ERASMUS students	Face-to-face and Whatsapp	I see them once or twice a week, but mainly we coincide in classes, we spend 2/3 hours more or less	Spanish because all of us are Spanish but English in some occasions, also I class
Meritxell, Marina and Carla	They are my friends in Catalonia	Whatsapp and Skype	We talk almost every day through Whatsapp but we do no spend lot of time. And maybe we made a Skype once a week or two weeks.	Catalan
Dionis and Geno	Parents	Whatsapp and Skype	We are in contact almost every day, we made Skypes twice/three times a week and we spend one hour in each Skype.	Catalan and Spanish
Dionis and Balbina	Brother and sister-in-law	Whatsapp and Skype	We usually talk through Whatsapp nearly 4/5 days a week, and once every two weeks we talk one hour through Skype	Catalan
Emma, Emily, Eleri, Kristy, Ismael, Giulia, Gemma, Adam, Patricia...	They are members of the ERASMUS Society where I am member	Facebook and face-to-face	We usually met in parties that they prepare on Fridays. We usually spend 3/4 hours a night	English because they are all over the world and maybe a little bit of Spanish because the majority of them are learning Spanish
Gabriella, Lucy, Sam, Edward, James...	They are friends of Becca (my tandem)	Face-to-face	We sometimes coincide in some parties. We talk in common maybe for 2/3 hours every time we see us.	English

In the interview that I held with Marina (UK) during my shadowing visit in her host university, she mentioned that she mostly interacted with other Spanish Erasmus students, as can be observed in the table above. According to Marina, this was 'the easy way out' (*el camí fàcil*) and claims that 'you make Spanish friends_

and you normally meet Spanish friends' (*fas amics espanyols_ i normalment quedes amb amics espanyols*) – notice her epistemic stance by her use of generalizing 'you' statements by which she is somehow appealing to the behaviour of, not only herself, but that of other Spanish Erasmus students.

Indeed, the discourse of many participants in this study seems to corroborate the idea that joining a group of compatriots is a defining category-bound activity of most members belonging to the category 'Spanish Erasmus students'. The following quote is particularly interesting because Joan (DK) treats 'interacting mainly with co-nationals' and 'having no confidence with the English language' as *category-bound features* of 'Spanish Erasmus students'. He does not only comment on this but evaluates this as 'a total tendency' (line 5).

Excerpt 59 'they got together because of the language\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Joan*)

1 2 3 4	SÒNIA:	did you see that the Spanish students tended to stay_ to stay with Spanish students/ why do you think this is so/	*vas veure que era una tendència dels espanyols a estar_ a estar amb els espanyols/ per què creus que és això/*
5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	JOAN:	*ye··s* a total trend\ total\ I don't know_ I think it is because_ they feel more confident\ I think it is also due to the fact that they leave with a level of English_ * many of them left without a certificate of English\ I mean_ they had a B1 a·nd * you know/ well_ they spoke poor English\ you know/ (...)	*sí··\ una tendència total\ total\ no ho sé\ jo crec que és perquè_se senten més segurs\ jo crec que perquè també van amb un nivell d'anglès_* molts dels que anaven amb un nivell d'anglès no estava acreditat\ és a dir_tenien un B1 i· * saps/ pues parlaven _*
14	SÒNIA:	poor English\	*{(esp) flojillo\}*
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	JOAN:	yes\ many thought_ it is better if I can be with people of my country\ (...) <u>I think they got together because of because of the language\</u> you know/ because many people were embarrassed to speak ca& * in English\ I remember I was_ in an office of a * of my supervisor and there were groups outside that were speaking Spanish\ right/ they were Spanish groups\ and one said to the other_ {(Spa) you ask because your English is better\} (...) {(Spa) it's always me asking\} you know/ I	*sí\ molts pensaven_ si puc estar amb gent de la meva terra pues mira_ estic amb ells i ja està\ (...) jo crec que per la_ jo crec que per la llengua_ s'unien bastant\ saps/ perquè molta gent tenia vergonya a parlar amb ca& * amb anglès\ jo me'n recordo d'estar_ en un despatx de un * del meu tutor de projecte i hi havia grups a fora que parlaven castellà\ vale/ eren grups (...) espanyols\ i li deia un a l'altre_ {(esp) pregunta tú que a ti se te da mejor el inglés\} (...) {(esp) siempre tengo que preguntar yo\} saps/ vull di··r_ hi havia···_*

30		mean_ there was···_	
31	SÒNIA:	no confidence with the language/	*inseguretats amb l'idioma/*
32	JOAN:	yes\ mainly the people fro··m	*sí\ sobretot per gent que era de·· fora*
33		outside Catalonia\	*de Catalunya*

Joan (DK) is somehow displaying his epistemic stance by using generalizations or "statements about [...] a group as the basis of stating something about a category" (Hauser, 2011: 183), namely the fact of 'getting together because of the language' (lines 17-18); specifically, due to their lack of confidence with English (lines 31-32). As I will try to illustrate below, generalization may be understood, in this case, as a categorization practice of those members belonging to the category 'Spanish [Erasmus] students'. In a similar vein, Eric Hauser (2011: 184) also conceives generalizations as a categorization practice by which a speaker "provide[s] an instruction for how to understand the identity of a specific member or members of a particular category". On the other hand, though, this categorization practice allows Joan to position himself towards those defining features and, thus, construct his identity as *not* a member of that category. In fact, it is interesting to note how Joan is repeatedly using the personal pronoun 'they' (lines 6, 11, 17 and 25) and how he somehow suggests that 'Spanish [Erasmus] students' and 'Catalan [Erasmus] students' (lines 32-33) have opposing category-bound features in relation to language learning and use in the SA context.

Figure 20 Joan's positioning detached from 'Spanish [Erasmus] students'
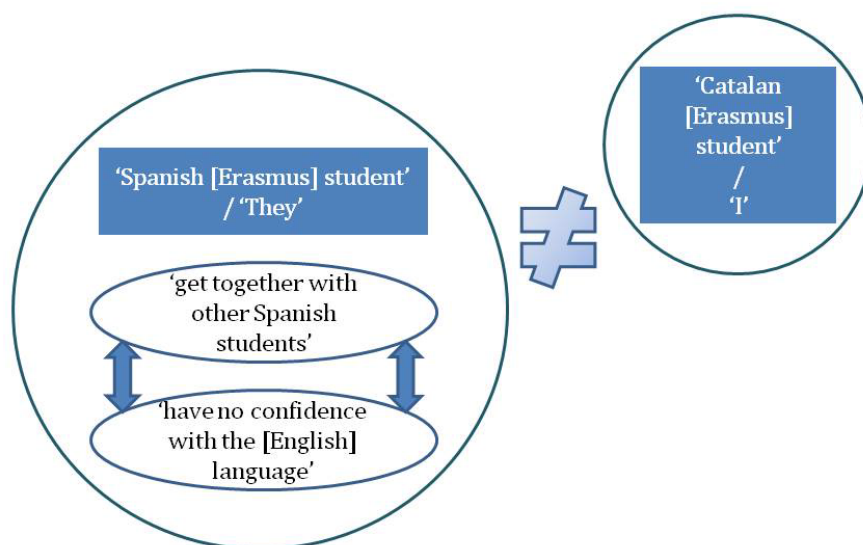
As shown in excerpt 59, Joan presents this inevitable tie among Spanish Erasmus students as being related to their poor competence in English, which does not allow them to interact with other internationals with whom they do not share the same L1. An example of this can be seen in excerpt 60, in which Verònica (IT) evaluates her poor competence in English as 'the problem' (line 1) which prevents her from socializing with non-Spanish Erasmus students and which is, therefore, not facilitating her improvement of this foreign language.

Excerpt 60 'my English is not enough\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Verònica – IT*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	VERÒNICA:	the problem is that if I could speak English the same way I speak Catalan (...) well of course I would be able to speak with them_ with_ with those people and I could have contact with them but <u>the truth is that my English is not enough</u>\	*el problema és que si jo pogués parlar anglès com puc parlar català (...) pues clar que podria parlar amb ells_ amb_ amb aquesta gent i em podria relacionar però és que el meu anglès no és suficient*
8 9 10 11 12	SÒNIA:	(...) the majority of your Erasmus colleagues * well_ the Erasmus students in general speak English\ right/ would you say that the majority speak English/	*(...) la majoria dels teus companys Erasmus * bueno_ dels Erasmus en general parlen anglès\ no/ tu diries que la majoria parlen anglès/*
13	VERÒNICA:	they speak or try to speak [English]\	*parlen o intenten parlar*
14 15	SÒNIA:	are you talking about the Spanish [Erasmus] students/	*m'estàs dient dels [Erasmus] espanyols/*
16 17 18 19	VERÒNICA:	yes\ look_ there's a huge difference and that is that the Spanish do not know how to speak in English_ and the others know English very well\	*sí\ mira_ hi ha una gran diferència i és que els espanyols no saben parlar en anglès_ i l'altra gent en sap parlar un montón*
20 21 22	RESEARCHER:	(...) and Italian* do the Spanish speak Italian and the others don't o··r_	*(...) i l'italià * els espanyols parlen italià i els atres no o··_*
23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32	VERÒNICA:	the Spanish can understand Italian and it is much easier and the others find it more difficult\ there are people who have come here without taking any course [in Italian] and without doing anything\ but what I don't understand is how it can be that everybody who is not Spanish know how to speak English_ and we don't\	*l'italià els espanyols el poden entendre i és molt més fàcil i als altres els hi costa molt més\ hi ha gent que ha vingut aquí sense fer cap curs i sense fer res\ però jo tampoc no entenc com tothom que no som els espanyols sap parlar anglès_ i nosaltres no*

It is interesting to note how Verònica is constantly emphasizing the opposing features between the categories 'non-Spanish [Erasmus] students' and 'Spanish [Erasmus] students' in relation to their ability to use the English language and the social consequences that this entails. On the one hand, Verònica treats the activity of 'not knowing how to speak in English' as a defining feature of, not only herself, but of all the members who like her belong to the category 'Spanish [Erasmus] students' (lines 29-32). On the other hand, she categorizes non-Spanish Erasmus students as 'knowing English very well', which is, in fact, presented as the reason why they do not feel the need to learn the local language (lines 25-28). In any case, in Verònica's stance utterance (lines 28-29), the first person pronoun (I), indexing the stancetaker, is followed by the phrase 'don't understand' which adds an affective component of frustration towards this 'huge difference' (line 16) between the two opposing categories, with regards to their respective ability to use English.

Verònica (IT), thus, clearly aligns with Joan's claim that her and other Spanish students' competence in English is low and that this results in the formation of a 'Spanish ghetto' of which, in this case, she also regards herself as a member. Immediately observable in the excerpt below, which is taken from the semi-structured interview held with Verònica during her stay, is her account of the social networks she interacts with while abroad, which were mostly 'from Spain\' (*d'Espanya*).

Excerpt 61 'we [Spanish Erasmus students] were all together\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Verònica*)

1	SÒNIA:	and with how··_ * with how many	*i amb quan··* amb quantes*
2		cultures do you interact with	*cultures et relaciones tu*
3		normally/ the Erasmus with whom	*normalment/ els Erasmus amb*
4		you have contact_ where are they	*els que tens contacte d'on són/*
5		from/	
6	VERÒNICA:	from Spain\	*d'Espanya*
7	SÒNIA:	and that's it/ bu··t * I mean_ you	*i·· prou/ però·· * vull dir _vius*
8		live with a girl from * where/	*amb una * d'on/*
9	VERÒNICA:	from Slovakia\(...) from time to	*d'Eslovàquia\ (...) de tant en*
10		time [I interact] with (...) my	*tant [interactuo] amb (...) el*
11		neighbour who is Italian\ you	*meu veí que és italià\ saps/*
12		know/ when he sees me * hey_	*quan em veu * ei_ què tal*
13		how are you Verònica/ (...) well_ I	*Verònica/ (...) bueno_ també*

14		also have a friend from France	*tinc un amic meu que és de*
15		a··nd * I don't know\ yes\ Spanish\	*França i·· * no sé\ sí*
16		besides_ we go together to_ for	*espanyols\ a més a més és*
17		instance_ some subjects_ the	*que_per exemple_anem amb*
18		Spanish Erasmus students and the	*assignatures junts amb·· amb*
19		other [Erasmus students] and we	*els Erasmus espanyols i els*
20		[the Spanish Erasmus students]	*altres i directament anem per*
21		just go separately\(…) there is a	*separat\ (…) hi ha una*
22		subject which you can take in	*assignatura que la fan amb*
23		Italian and in English\ you know/	*italià i en anglès\ saps/ i clar*
24		and they obviously go to·· the	*ells van a·· la d'anglès i*
25		English one and we go to the	*nosaltres a la d'italià\ però un*
26		Italian\ but one day the teacher_	*dia aquest professor_ens ha fet*
27		organized a meeting with all the	*una trobada a tots els Erasmus*
28		Erasmus students and then I	*i llavors vaig veure que érem*
29		realized that <u>we [Spanish Erasmus</u>	*[els Erasmus espanyols] tots*
30		<u>students] were all together</u>\ you	*junts\ saps\ i vaig dir què*
31		know/ and I said what is going on here/	*passa aquí/*
32	RESEARCHER:	so_ all the rest of the countries mix	*o sigui tots els altres països es*
33		together but the Spanish don't\	*barregen però els espanyols no*
34	VERÒNICA:	yes\	*sí*

As evidenced in excerpt 61, Verònica (IT) tells us that she mostly interacts with other Spanish Erasmus students, within the university context (line 25) and also in informal gatherings (lines 26-31). Like Joan (DK), Verònica (IT) presents the fact of 'not mixing with students from other countries' as a category-bound feature of those members belonging to the category 'Spanish Erasmus student' of which, in this case, she also indicates her own membership through the use of an inclusive 'we' (lines 16, 19, 25 and 28). In this sense, Verònica is not only reporting on *her* behaviour abroad, but on that of all the other members belonging to this category; in other words, she is grouping herself and the other Spanish students she has met abroad into the same category with the same defining features. This is illustrated in the following figure in which we can see how Joan and Verònica both use generalizations as a categorization practice that allows them to position themselves (in this case, very differently) towards the reality they are constructing and, at the same time, evaluating.

Figure 21 Verònica's positioning towards her and other Erasmus students' behaviour abroad
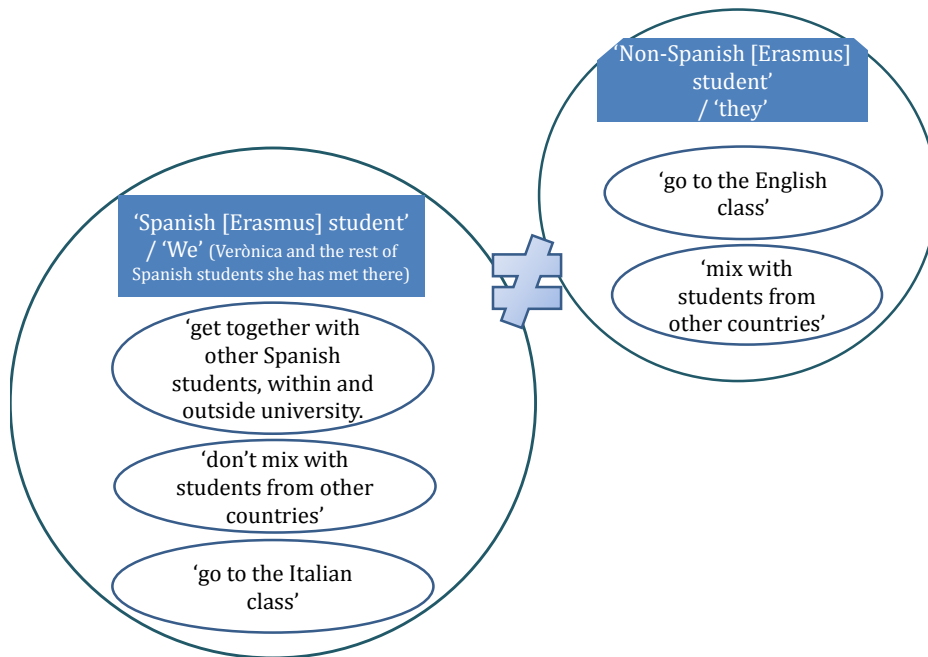
Figure 22 Joan's positioning towards his and other Erasmus students' behaviour abroad
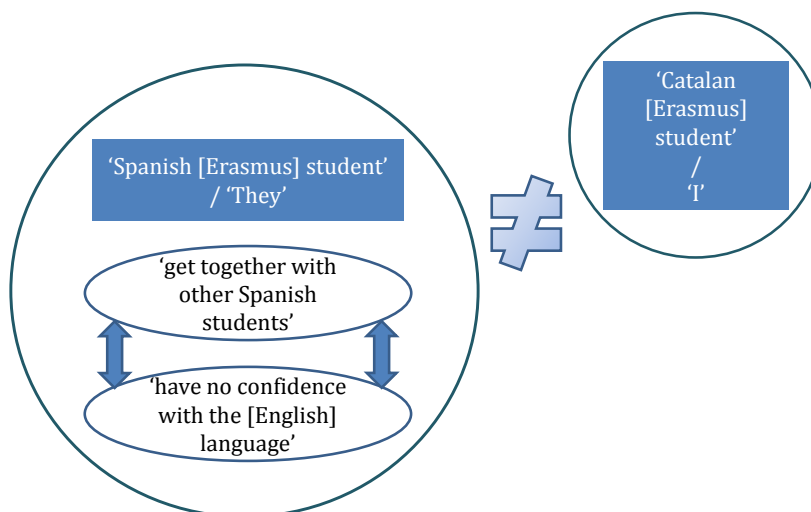
The interest of non-Spanish Erasmus students in learning and using English – not Italian – in Italy (as indicated by Verònica in excerpt 61, lines 25-28) is also corroborated by Patrícia (IT) who, in the semi-structured interview abroad, contends that 'the international students do not learn Italian because they speak English well and that's it\' (*els de fora no aprenen italià perquè parlen bé l'anglès i prou\ els únics que aprenem italià som els espanyols*). In this sense, the participants' reports on the languages used while abroad seem to illustrate that English is a 'shared practice' (Kalocsai, 2014), mostly among non-Spanish Erasmus students who, as Verònica, Patrícia and Joan point out, have a higher level of English. It is precisely the fact of "crossing the language threshold [which seems to act as] a requirement for embarking on the integration process" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 117). The analysis of the data suggests that it is mainly those students who went to Italy the ones who reported having no choice but to interact mostly with other Spanish Erasmus[16] students due to their perceived poor competence in English.

Even though foreign language learning (namely Italian) was also one of the main goals of Josep M. (IT), Patrícia (IT) and Verònica (IT), in the interview that was held with the participants during my shadowing visit on site, they were asked to give a percentage that would show their perceptions of the languages they used abroad. Their answers are shown in the following figure.

Figure 23 Percentages given by the students of the languages used abroad
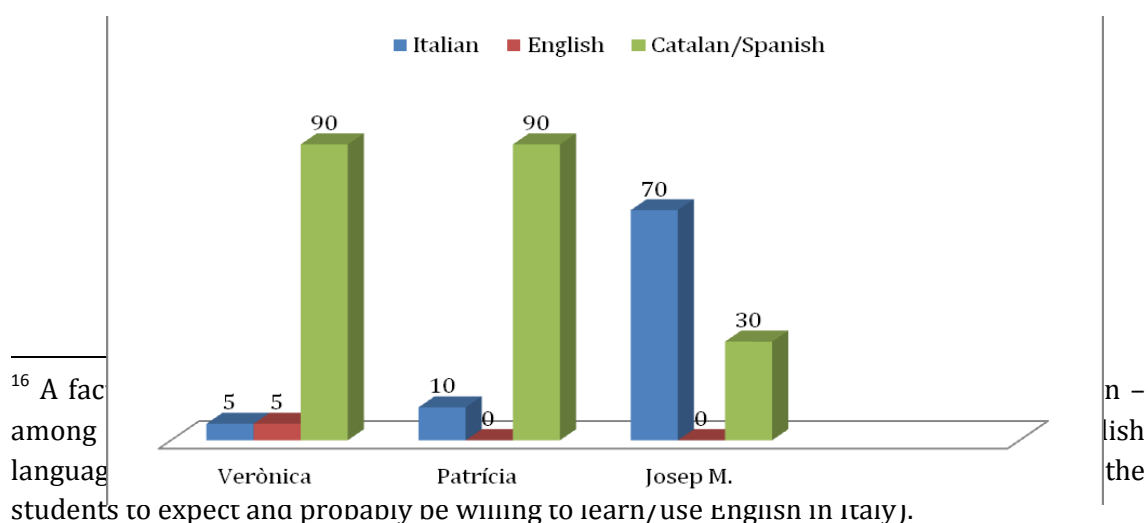
[16] A fac... n – among ... lish languag... the students to expect and probably be willing to learn/use English in Italy).

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As illustrated in figure 23, Josep M. is the only student who reported using Italian most of the time during his stay abroad, probably due to the fact that he is the only one who lived with an Italian student who, in turn, introduced him to other Italian friends. Yet, in the post focus group, Josep M. also presents the fact of joining compatriots as 'inevitable' (see excerpt 62 below, line 2) and aligns with Eva – another Catalan student who spent a semester in Italy – when claiming that the reason why it is inevitable to have contact with co-nationals is because 'we are a lot of students from different parts of Spain' (lines 4-6).

Excerpt 62 'it is kind of inevitable to join other Spanish students\'
(*Excerpt taken from the post focus group, with Josep M. – IT*)

1 2 3	JOSEP M.:	I think that <u>at the e··nd it is kind of inevitable to join other Spanish students</u>\ because··_	*jo crec que al final·· és com·· inevitable ajuntar-te amb espanyols\ perquè··_*
4 5 6	EVA:	the thing is that we are a lot\ we are a lot of students from different parts of Spain\	*és que som molts\ de tot arreu d'Espanya som molts*
7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	JOSEP M:	yes\ (…) look_ the other student [from Lleida] who came (…) at the beginning he liv& lived in a residence·· (…) and he said I don't wa& * I don't want to join Spania··rds_ and four days after he was saying {(SPA) damn\ where are you/} it is just like this\	*sí\ (…) mira per exemple el nou [de Lleida] que va venir (…) al principi vivi* vivia en una residència·· (…) i me deia no vu& *no vull ajuntar-me espanyo··ls_ i als quatre dies ja deia {(ESP) hostia\ dónde estáis/} es que és així*

This is somehow corroborated in his report on his social networks and languages used abroad, which shows that (a) Spanish and Catalan are certainly present in his everyday life abroad; and (b) English is not even mentioned.

Table 14 Josep Miquel's social networks and languages used while abroad

WHO	RELATIONSHIP	HOW?	HOW OFTEN and HOW LONG	LANGUAGE
Matilde	Is my mother	Via WhatsApp	Interact every 3 days, approximately 30 minuts every day.	I have always spoken in Spanish with my mother
Patricia	Friend of Lleida	Via WhatsApp	Interact every day, 2 hours every day.	I have always spoken in Catalan with most of my friends of Lleida
Munta	Is a student Erasmus like me.	Face to Face	Interact every day.	I speak in Catalan, because he is an Erasmus student from Catalonia
Fabrizio	A guy that goes out with the Erasmus	Face to face	Interact every day.	I speak Italian, because he's an Italian guy and so, I learn the language better
Norvis	Norvis is my roommate	Face to face	Interact every day.	I speak Italian, because it is a Greek boy, spent many years in Italy and we get better in Italian, I know nothing of Greek haha
Giuseppe	A guy that goes out with the Erasmus	Face to face	Interact every day.	I speak in Italian, is an Italian guy
Maria	Is a student Erasmus like me.	Face to face	Interact every day.	I speak Spanish, because he is an Erasmus student from Cordoba and is easier to understand in Spanish

Contrary to Josep Miquel's distribution of languages, Verònica mentions Spanish, English and Italian in her description of the social networks in which she takes part. However, she clearly stresses her high use of the Spanish language (70%) during her stay in Italy. In fact, in the interview that I held with her on site, she expresses her disappointment about her Erasmus experience abroad due to, not only her poor competence in English, but also the big number of Spanish students she has found there (see excerpt 63), which does not allow her to progress or 'move on' (lines 6-7) with her initial motivations for going abroad.

Excerpt 63 'they are all Spanish here\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica – IT*)

1 2 3	SÒNIA:	Verònica_ how is this going/ what would you say/ how is this Erasmus going/	*Verònica_ com t'està anant això/ què ens diries/ com t'està anant aquest Erasmus/*
4 5 6 7 8 9	VERÒNICA:	(...) I made a mistake in choosing this country\ because·· there are a lot of Spaniards_ I can't move on\ the thing is that they are all Spanish here _ * I mean_ in my residence we are ninety	*(...) m'he equivocat de país\ perquè·· hi ha molts espanyols_ no puc tirar endavant\ és que tots són espanyols aquí_ * o sigui_ la meva residència som noranta espanyols_ i jo que sé cinquanta_*

10		Spaniards_ and about fifty_ fro··m	*de·· tot el món\ vaig arribar i*
11		all over the world\ I got there	*estaven els lletreros am··b amb*
12		and the signs were i··n in Italian	*italià_ i amb espanyol abans*
13		and in Spanish rather than i··n	*que·· anglès i clar tots anem*
14		English and of course we all go	*amb* o sigui_ gairebé sempre*
15		with * I mean_ most of the time	*anem amb gent espanyola i clar*
16		we [Spaniards] get together and	*a mi no m'agrada\ però * vull*
17		of course I don't like it\ but * I	*dir_ és que tampoc hi ha molt a*
18		mean_ you don't have much	*triar\ saps/*
19		choice\ you know/	

Verònica's utterance in line 4 ('I made a mistake') indicates negative affect towards her Erasmus experience in Italy, mainly due to the fact that Spanish Erasmus students outnumber the other Erasmus students. Her use of *all* in 'they are all Spanish here' (lines 7-8) highlights the high presence of Spanish students she has found in Italy. Besides, she treats the activity of 'getting together most of the time' as being bound to the category 'Spanish Erasmus students' (of which she also regards herself as a member through the use of the pronoun 'we', in line 16) and as a tendency you cannot escape from ('you don't have much choice', line 19). In fact, in her report on her social networks and the languages used abroad (see table 15 below), we can see how the languages she uses to communicate with others during her stay are chiefly Catalan and Spanish, English is just mentioned twice because she occasionally uses it with non-Spanish Erasmus students.

Table 15 Verònica's social networks and languages used while abroad

WHO	RELATIONSHIP	HOW?	HOW OFTEN and HOW LONG	LANGUAGE
Anna	She is doing her erasmus in Italy too.	Facebook or phone	I interact with she when I need or if i need to explain something	Catalan, Spanish, Englisho or Italian depends if we are with another friends
Silvia	My mum	Email or whatsapp	When I need something to ask	Catalan
Andrea	Friend from Spain	Facebook	Four times per week	Catalan
Kate	My roommate	Face to face	All days	English or Italian
Eva and Carol	Two of my new friends	Face to face or facebook	All days	Spanish
Carme	My grandmother	Skype	One time per week	Catalan
Adhara	My ex-flatmate	facebook	One time per week	Catalan

In the interview that I held with Verònica (IT) during her stay, she is constantly displaying a negative stance towards her Erasmus experience, mainly because she is not learning *any* foreign language – this was one of her main goals for going abroad and, due to the large number of Spanish students, she contends she cannot accomplish it. The following excerpt illustrates another instance in which we can see Verònica's negative evaluation of her SA experience, which is not helping her accomplish any of her initial goals for going abroad:

Excerpt 64 'I'd rather stay in Spain'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica – IT*)

1	SÒNIA:	do you see this the Erasmus	tu veus l'estada Erasmus com una
2		experience as a problematic or	experiència problemàtica o
3		positive one/	positiva/
4	VERÒNICA:	yes [positive]_ but not in these	sí [positiva]_ però no amb les
5		conditions\ what happens here	nostres condicions\ (...) aquí el que
6		is that they are all Spanish\ I	em passa és que tots són
7		don't have to go to Italy to do	espanyols\ jo per fer això no me'n
8		this\ I'd rather stay in Spain\	vaig a Itàlia\ em quedo a
9		(...) here it's like if I'm doing *	Espanya\(...) aquí sembla que
10		how do you call that thing you	estigui fe·nt * com es diu allò que es
11		do in Spain/ like an Erasmus	fa a Espanya/ lo mateix d'Erasmus
12		but in Spain\ I don't know what	però a Espanya\ no sé com es diu
13		it's called\	això\
14	RESEARCHER:	a SICUE\	un SICUE\

Throughout this sequence, Verònica clearly casts a very negative stance towards her Erasmus experience by suggesting that the SA experience is not helping her develop in any aspect and that it actually feels as if she was participating in a SICUE instead (Exchange Programme among Spanish Higher Education Institutions - *Sistema de Intercambio entre Centros Universitarios de España*). The inevitable tie with other Spanish Erasmus students is again presented as being related to (a) the poor competence of Spanish students in English – which does not allow them to interact with others with whom they do not share the same L1; and also to (b) the big number of Spanish students in Italy.

Patrícia offers a very similar picture of the study abroad experience, in relation to her language learning and use in Italy. Her second elicited written experiential report also provides an inside look at the social networks and languages she uses abroad. As the following table shows, the languages she uses

more often are Catalan and Spanish – the latter being the languages she uses 'every day, all the day' to interact with 'my group of Spanish people' with whom, very similarly to Verònica, she 'go[es] together always'.

Table 16 Patrícia's social networks and languages used while abroad

WHO	RELATIONSHIP	HOW?	HOW OFTEN and HOW LONG	LANGUAGE
Montse, Carlos and Carla	mother, father and sister	whattsapp and skype	firstly,almost every day, now, often. one hour	Catalan
Janira and Anna	bestfriends	whattsapp and skype	less than twice a week. one hour.	Catalan
Gemma	friend and roommate in Italy	face to face and whattsapp	every day, all the day	Catalan, Spanish and Italian. We alwahys have talked in catalan but if we are with Tamara we speak spanish and we also speak Italian to practice.
Paula	friend from Lleida	face to face, whattsapp and facebook	Often	Catalan and Spanish. We talk spanish because of Tamara that is from Ciudad Real
Clara and Tamara	friends in Italy. I've met Tamara in the residence and Clara is the roommate of Paula.	face to face, whatts app and facebook	Often	Catalan and Spanish
Marco and Rita	coordinators of ESN Italy. I've met them on a trip of ESN to Venice	face to face and facebook	Often. We meet sometimes to have dinner or going out	Italian, Spanish and English. We use all the languages to make us understand
Mercè del Castillo	coordinator of the Erasmus people of Law from the UdL and teacher of one subject I am doing in Lleida	e-mail	sometimes. Just if I have any question about this subject or the Erasmus documents	Catalan
Noe, Rocio, Reyes, Belén, Monica, Dani, Maria and Adriana	They are the girls of the residence. Now they are my group of Spanish people and we go together always.	Face to face, whattsapp .	Everyday, all the day	Spanish

Patrícia reasserts this in the post-focus group (see excerpt 65 below) by highlighting that, although she initially took the trouble to make local friends and tried to avoid co-nationals, she ended up joining a group of compatriots and,

therefore, using a high percentage of Spanish and/or Catalan, instead of using any other foreign language. In excerpt 65 below Patrícia is somehow explaining the reason why (a) she has not joined the locals students' networks; and (b) she has interacted mostly with other Spanish Erasmus students, and not so much with Erasmus students from other countries.

Excerpt 65 'I think you feel more at home'
(*Excerpt taken from the post focus group with Patrícia, her Catalan friend Georgina and Verònica – IT*)

1	RESEARCHER:	so you had contact with Italians	*o sigui vau fer contacte amb els*
2		but then you joined other Spanish	*italians però després us vau*
3		students\	*ajuntar amb els espanyols*
4	PATRÍCIA:	yes\ (...) <u>I think you feel more at</u>	*sí\(...) jo crec que et sents més en*
5		<u>home</u>\ a··nd_	*família\ i··_*
6	GEORGINA:	I don't know because I wanted to	*no ho sé perquè_ jo volia anar amb*
7		go with Italians\ right/ I was like *	*italians\ +eh+/ és allò de * no aniré*
8		I won't go with Spanish_ I won't go	*amb espanyols_ no aniré amb*
9		with Spanish_ but without realising	*espanyols_ però sense voler acabes*
10		it you end up there\	*allí*
11	PATRÍCIA:	yes\ yes\ I also think that it is	*sí\ sí\jo crec que també pel dia a*
12		because of the lifestyle\ because as	*dia\ perquè al ser Erasmus_ vas a*
13		an Erasmus student_ you go to the	*les mateixes festes_ fas les mateixes*
14		same parties_ you do the same	*coses\ nosaltres per exemple_ * els*
15		things\we for instance_ * the	*italians o estudiaven o*
16		Italians were either studying or	*treballaven\ hi podies quedar*
17		working\ and you could meet them	*però··_ (...) costava\ (...) nosaltres*
18		bu··t_ (...) it was complicated\ (...)	*vam començar amb italians però*
19		we started meeting Italians but	*vam acabar també_ caient amb*
20		also ended up_ joining with all the	*tots els espanyols*
21		Spanish\	

On the one hand, Patrícia expresses the view that joining other co-nationals helps you feel at home (lines 4-5) and, on the other hand, she stresses the sense of community among (Spanish) Erasmus students and/or a 'we-feeling' shared by all the members belonging to this category, who 'do the same things' (lines 14-15) and who, thus, share the same 'defining' activities (e.g. 'go to the same parties', lines 13-14). Besides, this lifestyle of Erasmus students is presented as not always being compatible with that of the locals who study *and* work (lines 16-17) and with whom establishing a social relationship is conceived as 'complicated' (line 18).

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It is also interesting to see how, as illustrated in the following excerpt, Patrícia and her Catalan flatmate move from a description of their own subjective language learning/use experiences to a categorization of what they (as members of the category 'Spanish Erasmus student') generally do, as opposed to those features that define the rest of the international students.

Excerpt 66 'the Spanish are the ones who want to learn Italian'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Patrícia and her Catalan friend Georgina*)

1 2 3 4	SÒNIA:	if I ask you what percentage· o··f Spanish you speak and what percentage of Italian_ what would you say/	*si jo us pregunto quin percentatge· de·· espanyol parleu i quin percentatge d'italià_ què em diríeu/*
5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	PATRÍCIA:	right now_ ninety per cent of Spanish and ten Italian\ right now_ yes\ at the beginning_ I would say that eighty per cent of Italian\ we even spoke Italian between us to learn it\ the internationals don't learn Italian\ they come here to learn English\ they speak English well and they just speak English\	*ara mateix_ noranta per cent espanyol i deu italià\ ara mateix sí\ al principi_ et diria que vuitanta italià (...)\ hasta nosaltres parlàvem italià per aprendre\(...) els de fora no aprenen italià\ venen a aprendre anglès\ parlen l'anglès bé i ja·· simplement parlen l'anglès*
14	SÒNIA:	they don't want to learn Italian/	*no volen aprendre l'italià/*
15	GEORGINA:	they don't want to speak it\	*no el volen parlar*
16 17	PATRÍCIA:	no no\ <u>we the Spanish are the ones who want to learn Italian</u>\	*no no\ els que aprenem italià som els espanyols*
18	SÒNIA:	(...) did you expect to find English/	*(...) l'anglès us l'esperàveu trobar/*
19 20 21 22 23 24 25	PATRÍCIA:	I * well_ I knew we wouldn't use it much\ but I expected to for instance * what we've told you before about the caretaker at the residence or in a bar_ to ask [in English] and be understood\ and no no\	*jo * a veure_ sabia que no el tocaríem gaire\ però m'esperava per exemple * això que t'hem dit abans del porter de la residència o amb algun bar_ preguntar [en anglès] i que t'entenguessin\ i no no*
26 27	GEORGINA:	they have no idea\ they are worse than in Spain\	*es que no en tenen ni idea\ són pitjor que a Espanya*
28 29	PATRÍCIA:	they even understand you better in Spanish than in English\	*es que hasta t'entenen abans amb espanyol que amb anglès*
30 31	GEORGINA:	they don't know English at all here\	*aquí no en saben gens d'anglès*
32 33 34 35 36 37	PATRÍCIA:	it's what the Germans say that * sometimes when we meet we tell them that we speak English very bad and they say yes yes_ but * well_ it's we [the Spaniards] and the Italians\	*és lo que diuen els alemans que * a vegades quan quedem els hi diem es que parlem molt malament l'anglès i diuen ja ja_ però bueno_ vosaltres i els italians*

In this interview, Patrícia admits that one of the reasons why she is not using Italian is because their relationship with 'the locals' is almost inexistent. This is an aspect which was also reported by some of the participants in a study carried out by Benson et al. (2013: 157), who claim that "one of the most positive and [yet] often frustrating experiences of students' stay abroad was making contacts with locals". Apart from this and, as evidenced from the excerpt above, Italian is *not* the lingua franca used by the international students, but English – a language which again seems to only be mastered by those members belonging to the category non-Spanish Erasmus students.

However, as will be dealt with in the next section, English does not *always* seem to work as a lingua franca in the SA context, specifically when interacting with 'the locals' who, as is the case of Italy, are categorized as speaking worse English than Spanish people (lines 26-27) and, thus, as 'understanding you better in Spanish than in English' (lines 28-29). The analysis of the data corroborates Claudia Borghetti and Ana Beaven's (2015) finding that English is not always a lingua franca among people who do not share the same L1[17]. Besides this, it is interesting to highlight how Patrícia also presents very different and even opposing categorial phrases, with their inbuilt generalizing quality of (a) 'Non-Spanish Erasmus students' and of (b) '[Spanish] Erasmus students', with regards to their language learning and use while abroad.

Table 17 Patrícia's opposite category-bound descriptions of Spanish and Non-Spanish [Erasmus] students

Category	Category-Bound	Category	Category-Bound

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[17] Borghetti and Beaven (2015:17) carried out a study which explores the beliefs and attitudes of 141 Erasmus students at an Italian university regarding their subjective language learning and use in their study abroad experiences. Among other aspects, the scholars stressed the fact that the lingua franca used among international students may be the language of the host country, which does not necessarily have to be English. On the one hand, this could be influenced by the students' "belief that the language of the destination country should be prioritised over English" (ibid, 2015:17); or, on the other hand, and as seems to also be the case of the participants in this study, another factor could be that the students "do not have a sufficiently high level of English to use this as an LF" (ibid, 2015:17).

Activity			Activity	
Non-Spanish [Erasmus] student	'don't learn Italian' (line 11)	≠	**Spanish [Erasmus] student**	'want to learn Italian' (lines 16-17)
	'come here to learn English' (lines 11-12)			'speak English very bad' (lines 34-35)
	'speak English well' (lines 12-13)			
	'just speak English' (line 13)			

As Patrícia mentions, the activity of 'speaking English bad' is also treated by the German Erasmus students in Italy as category-resonant of both Italians *and* Spaniards (lines 36-37). Patrícia seems to align with the Germans' categorization of the Spanish and the Italians and, finally, highlights the importance of learning the local language in contexts like Italy, where English is presented as being not always enough: 'maybe in other countries_ maybe in Germany and the Netherlands where they speak [English] * well_ there maybe yes [English is a lingua franca]\ but here [in Italy]_ no\ you need to know the local language to make yourself understood\' (*potser altres països * potser Alemanya i Holanda que allí el parlen bé * pues potser sí\ però aquí·_ no\ necessites saber l'idioma d'aquí per entendre't*).

In brief, the analysis of the data presented in this section has shown that most of the participants have realized that English is, in the three contexts (UK, Denmark and Italy), a shared practice among international students. However, many of them stress their perceived poor competence in English (as opposed to the high level of English of non-Spanish Erasmus students), a reason for which most of them ended up joining other co-nationals – with whom they can communicate without difficulties – and, thus, using more Spanish than they initially expected and/or wanted. Despite this, those students who went to the UK and to Denmark feel that their confidence when using English is increasing even in the middle of their stay abroad. In this sense, although some of them also claimed to be using a lot of Spanish, being immersed in a social and/or academic

environment in which you 'have to speak in English' (Marina, UK) is something that they feel is helping them improve their linguistic competence in English.

However, as regards those students who went to Italy, the predominance of English as a lingua franca among the Erasmus community has affected their initial expectations and motivation to learn and use the language of the host country (Italian). For them, there are actually two main factors that trigger their 'no learning' of the local language. On the one hand, they make reference to the fact that English is *the* language of communication among the internationals, in a country where they had not been required to have an English certificate but their commitment to learn the language of the host country. On the other hand, and, to make matters worse, their perceived poor competence in English does not seem to help them fight against their dependency on those interactions with compatriots who, as has been pointed out, outnumber the rest of Erasmus students. In fact, this is somehow suggested by Verònica, who states that the reason why she has made a mistake in choosing Italy as her host destination is because a lot of Spanish students go there, precisely due to the fact that (a) their English level is not good; and (b) because '[in Italy] they don't ask you for any [certificate] \ and they do so in other countries\ (*[a Itàlia] no demanen res_ cap certificate d'anglès\ i als altres països sí*\).

The next section looks at the students' interactions with 'the locals', and at the role the local language (English/Welsh; Danish; and Italian) plays in their SA experience.

6.2.2.3.   Communication with 'the locals'

In the previous two sections, we have looked at two types of social networks (those with other internationals and co-nationals) the students resort to during their stay and the consequences for language learning and use that these networks entail. Indeed, as Krupnik and Krzaklewska's (2013: 213) claim, one of the aspects that "matters more for ERASMUS students is social life"; yet, as Van Mol (2014: 66) points out, "studies that look specifically into how Erasmus students reconstitute their social network abroad are scarce" – this is one of the aspects this

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project deals with. Concerning the international students' social networks, it is important to recall the participants' initial expectation and motivation to meet people from 'different cultures', *including* members of the host society. The purpose of this section is to see whether the students' expectation to interact with the host society – also outside the academic context – is fulfilled and how they see that this affects their learning and/or use of the language of the host country in particular (being it English or another language).

As illustrated in the following figure, 'local students' do not seem to be part of the participants' "social fabric" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 182) or their social network "linked together through communication, exchanges and interactions" (ibid, 2002: 182). Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 183) states that "different social settings contribute to the students' social encounters" and, in this study, the

I thought I would make Italian friends but I haven't even made one\ (...) this is how it goes\ the Erasmus make Erasmus friends but not with the people of the host country\ they look at us but ignore us\

(*jo pensava q faria amics italians però no n'he fet ni un \ (...) és així la cosa\ els Erasmus es fan amics entre ells però no del país que van\ ells ens miren però passen de nosaltres*)

Verònica. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in Italy.

Interacting with the locals

SÒNIA: and you talk about the Dutch gi·rls_ the Spani·sh_ et cetera_ et cetera_ and * where were the English/
AMANDA: the English do··n't don't * never\ I mean here [in Lleida] (...) they say we ignore the Erasmus students_ but there [in the UK] twice as much\ you know/ twice as much\ and sometimes you asked something_ they answered_ but they weren't willing to keep on talking\ I mean_ I found them very_ ve··ry_ very very cold\

SÒNIA: *i em parles d'holandese·s_ dels espanyo·ls_ etcètera_ etcètera_ i *els anglesos on estàven/*
AMANDA: *es que els anglesos no·· no * mai\ o sigui_ aquí [a Lleida] (...) diuen que passem d'ells [dels Erasmus]_ però és que_ allà [al Regne Unit]_ el doble\ saps/ el doble\ i a vegades que preguntaves algo_ i et contestaven allò_ i no et donàven peu a·_a a seguir parlant\ saps/ o sigui els vaig trobar molt_ mo··lt_molt molt freds*

Amanda. Narrative interview, in Lleida.

our [university] (...) was small\ one could see that we were the foreigners because they were·· all from there_ and we were the small group\ and they did * at the beginning they looked at us but then it was like··_ * well_ they ignored us\

(*la nostra [universitat] (....) era petita\ se'ns notava que érem nosaltres els estrangers perquè tots eren·· eren d'allà_ i nosaltres el grupet\ i sí que ens * al principi ens miraven però després era com··_ * bueno_ens ignoraven*)

Ariadna. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in Denmark.

participants did not report participating in any activity in the local environment and, thus, tended to socialise more with other Erasmus students and/or compatriots within the university context, rather than with locals – the interactions with the latter are presented as being almost inexistent (see figure 24 below).

Figure 24 Interactions with the locals

Veronica (IT), Ariadna (DK) and Amanda (UK) coincide in presenting the local students of the host country as 'ignoring' the Erasmus students and, thus, as Amanda expresses in the narrative interview, as 'very_ ve··ry_ very very cold' and not willing to socialize with them. The quotes above constitute three examples of the many instances in which most participants claim that their relationship with the locals is almost inexistent. Both Verònica (IT) and Amanda (UK) underline that the fact that Erasmus students are ignored by the local community is something universal, which happens everywhere (see excerpt 67 below); as Verònica claims, 'this is how it goes'.

Excerpt 67 'you [as a local] don't pay attention to Erasmus\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Verònica*)

1	SÒNIA:	listen_ * but where were the Italians	escolta_ * però els italians on
2		during your stay/ I mean_ you didn't	eren a la teva estada/ vull dir_ no
3		have contact with Italians\ right/	vas tenir contacte amb els italians\ oi/
4	VERÒNICA:	no\	no\
5	SÒNIA:	but * why not/ because you would	però * per què no/ perquè tu
6		have_	haguessis_
7	VERÒNICA:	we did go to class with Italians\ yes	a classe sí que anàvem amb
8		but * well_ this is_ this is what	italians\ sí però * bueno_ és que_
9		happens\ here [in Lleida] when you	és lo que passa\ aquí [a Lleida]
10		come as an Erasmus_ you don't pay	quan vens d'Erasmus_ tu no els hi
11		attention to Erasmus\ the people	fots cas als Erasmus\ la gent
12		join * Erasmus join other Erasmus\ I	s'ajunta amb * Erasmus amb
13		don't know_	Erasmus\ no sé_

Although Verònica initially expected to interact with the locals, she has come to the conclusion that the fact that 'you don't pay attention to Erasmus' (lines 10-11) is a general fact that takes place everywhere, including Lleida (lines 9-10), where Erasmus students normally socialize with other Erasmus students (line 12), and not with the residents of the host society. Some of the participants in this study tried to come up with an explanation for this almost inexistent tie between Erasmus students and the local community. For instance, in the semi-structured interview that was held with Patrícia in the middle of her stay, she states that she has more contact with other Erasmus students than with the locals because the former 'live the same [hectic] lifestyle' (*porten el teu ritme de vida*), and because

with the Erasmus students they 'have something to do every day' (*tenim una cosa a fer cada dia*). This is an issue Van Mol (2014: 67) touches upon by stating that students somehow find themselves in a 'migration context' where they can be conceived as "a specific group of international migrants" (ibid, 2014: 68) who, similarly to migrants, "prefer to interact with people they consider similar to themselves". In a similar vein, Patrícia's (IT) words seem to also be confirmed by Magali Ballatore and Martha K. Ferede (2013: 525), who claim that "compared with sedentary students, Erasmus students engaged in more academic and leisurely travel".

Joan (DK), however, mentions that it is the very same Danish university that does not favour the interaction between Erasmus and local students, because they always go to different classes (see excerpt 68, below). This is also one of the findings reported by Neil Harrison and Nicola Peacock (2010: 884) who, from the perspective of home students living 'internationalisation at home' contend that, "it was clear from the comments of home students that they and international students mostly inhabited semi-distinct social spaces within the university environment. [And that] social encounters with international students were generally coincidental and unplanned".

Excerpt 68 'you were within the Erasmus bubble\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Joan – DK*)

1	SÒNIA:	would you say that in general_ the Erasmus_ stay with the Erasmus_ a·nd that there is little interaction with the locals of the host country/	*tu diries que en general_ els Erasmus_ es queden amb els Erasmus_ i· que hi ha poca interacció amb els locals d'aquell país/*
2			
3			
4			
5			
6	JOAN:	I think so\	*jo crec que sí*
7	SÒNIA:	I also had this impression\ right/ <u>I thought you were within the Erasmus bubble</u>\ I think I already told you\	*jo també vaig tenir aquesta sensació\ eh/ jo pensava que estàveu amb la bombolla Erasmus\ que us ho vaig dir crec*
8			
9			
10			
11	JOAN:	yes\	*sí*
12	SÒNIA:	you were all like·· * the Erasmus with the Erasmus and about the Danish_ most of you said to me_ I have no idea\	*estàveu tots com a·· * els Erasmus amb els Erasmus i els danesos la majoria em dèieu_ jo què sé*
13			
14			
15			
16	JOAN:	<u>well they made this separation</u>\ <u>right</u>/ I mean_ {(SPA) listen\} you·· * in the classes * there were	*és que et feien separació\ eh/ vull dir_ {(esp) al loro\} tu·· a· la * a les classes * tenies les classes de··*
17			
18			

		classes fo··r exchange students	{(ENG) exchange students_} i les
19		classes fo··r exchange students	{(ENG) exchange students_} i les
20		and classes fo··r the students	classes de·· els alumnes d'allí\
21		from there\ then * obviously_	llavors * clar_ tu· no tenies
22		you· didn't have the opportunity	oportunitat de realment relacionar-
23		to really socialize with Danish	te amb danesos\ (...) en el meu cas
24		people\ (...) not in my case	no perquè tots els alumnes que
25		because we were all students	estàvem érem de fora_ d'altres
26		from abroad_ from other	països\ érem tots barrejats\ +mm··+
27		countries\ we were all mixed\	i llavors * doncs per això crec que
28		+uh··+ and then * well for this	tampoc * vull dir_ al final t'acabes
29		reason also I think that * I mean_	relacionant amb els Erasmus\
30		at the end you end up socializing	
31		with the Erasmus\	
32	SÒNIA:	would you say this is a negative	això és un punt·· negatiu diries del
33		aspect of the Erasmus	Erasmus/
34		experience/	
35	JOAN:	yes\ I think that it is to some	sí\ jo crec que en part sí\
36		extent\	

According to Joan, the reason why there exists an 'Erasmus bubble' (line 9) and the fact that 'you didn't have the opportunity to really socialize with Danish people' (lines 22-24) has to do with the fact that Erasmus and local students were separated at university – a 'spatial separation' which, as Van Mol already underlines, "limits interaction between both groups" (Van Mol, 2014: 69).

Roger (UK) also evaluates the fact of interacting with the locals as 'not so easy' (*no és tan fàcil*), but not because of his language competence in English – he expected his perceived high language proficiency to be a facilitator, rather than a barrier, for establishing social contact between him and the host society. According to Roger, what acts as a real barrier is the (biased) image that the British have about Spanish people as 'coming from the third world' (line 10) and as not being 'able to speak decent English' (line 11) (see excerpt 69, below).

Excerpt 69 'they are looking at me as if I had come from the third world\'
(*Excerpt taken from the second experiential report on social networks abroad, written by Roger*)

1	Another idea that is constantly coming to my mind these days is that,
2	funnily enough, I feel more patriotic when staying here than when I
3	happen to be at my hometown. I am not saying that I cover my room with
4	flags from my country, but I do feel that I have to defend my identity (I
5	hate this word, it's so vague) and my cultural background more fiercely
6	than ever. When I was in Oxford I already had to explain a 22-year old girl

7	that Spain was not in Africa, and that things weren't as terrible as the
8	media was recounting. Here this has not happened to me, but I still have
9	the impression that when I am talking with some British people they are
10	looking at me as If I had come from the third world, as if they could not
11	really believe that Spanish people were able to speak decent English.

In excerpt 69, we see that Roger (UK) makes the category 'British people' relevant in his discourse and links the activities of 'looking at me as if I had come from the third world' (line 10) and 'not (…) believ[ing] that Spanish people were able to speak decent English' (line 11) as tied to the members belonging to this category. These category features of British people have affected Roger's willingness to interact with the locals and his need to 'defend my identity' (line 4) as a member of the category 'Spanish people' who is definitely able to communicate through the English language. Roger also makes his evaluation of the British people explicit in the narrative interview, in which he asserts that the British 'believe that they are better than us' (*ells s'ho creuen que són millors que nosaltres*) and that 'reality' has indeed challenged his initial motivation to socialise with the locals: '[I expected] the relationship wi·th_ with_ with the British (…) to be a little bit more intense' (*la relació amb·_ amb_ amb els British potser sí que m'esperava que fos una mica més intensa*).

Ariadna (DK) and Mònica (DK) are the only ones who mentioned having some kind of contact with the Danish society through the figure of 'the buddy'. In the second written experiential report on her social networks abroad, Ariadna, just upon her arrival in Denmark, displays an affective stance towards her expectation not to interact with locals, due to the fact that she was grouped with other internationals in the same class: 'when I saw that we were all internationals I was afraid of no knowing Danish people, but the University interacts us with danish students, making them to our buddies'. Providing Erasmus students with a 'buddy system' is something Ariadna evaluated very positively, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 70 '[I have contact with the Danish] because the university has facilitated this\'
(***Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Ariadna – DK***)

1	SÒNIA:	do you interact with Danish people/	*tu et relaciones amb danesos/*
2 3	ARIADNA:	the buddies\ (...) the buddies and that's all\	*els {(ENG) buddies}\ (...) els {(ENG) buddies} i prou*
4	SÒNIA:	the buddies and that's all\	*els {(ENG) buddies} i prou*
5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13	ARIADNA:	exactly\ because * I mea··n_ they are my age\ (...) but the fact that the university provided us with Danish buddies is something I have appreciated a lot\ because·· they have been involved a··nd and this way we can meet [local] people_ because if not_ what happens is that_ you just socialize with people··_	*clar\ perquè * vull dir··_ són de la meva edat\ (...) però el fet de que ens fiquessin els {(ENG) buddies} danesos·· a mi m'ha agradat molt\ perquè·· s'han implicat i·· i així coneixem gent [local]_perquè si no··_ és lo que passa_que només et fas amb gent··_*
14	SÒNIA:	with Erasmus\	*amb Erasmus*
15	ARIADNA:	yes\	*sí*
16	SÒNIA:	why do you think this happens/	*per què creus que passa això/*
17 18 19 20 21	ARIADNA:	because it's the easiest thing to do\ the same happens in Lleida\(...) but [I have contact with the Danish] because the university has facilitated this\ right/	*perquè és lo més fàcil\ a Lleida també passa\ (...) però [jo tinc relació amb els danesos] perquè la universitat m'ho ha facilitat\ eh/*

In this excerpt, Ariadna (DK) is clearly displaying an affective stance towards the figure of the buddy in Denmark, which is something 'I have appreciated a lot' (line 9) mainly because it is thanks to this buddy system provided by the host university that she can socialize with someone of the host society. Otherwise, she would have followed the easy way out, which is socializing only with other Erasmus students (line 17). For Lucien Brown's (2013: 279) Anglophone exchange learners of Korean, the buddy system provided by the host university also "represented an important first point of access for making Korean friends". In a similar vein, Doyle et al. (2010: 483) argue that "the provision of academic mentors and student buddies" act as facilitators for studying overseas given that, as noted by Krzaklewska & Skórska (2013: 124),

> A buddy or mentor in a host country (preferably, a student who comes from a host university) for each ERASMUS student can constitute a secure source of up-to-date information that can lower stress levels in critical moments, such as arrival in the host country or occurrences of culture-clash events and lack-of-information events.

The little contact of exchange students with the locals – as opposed to the strong bond among Erasmus students and, sometimes, among co-nationals – has been noticed by different scholars (e.g. Caudery et al., 2008; Harrison and Peacock, 2010; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Tsoukalas, 2008; Van Mol, 2014; Waters and Brooks, 2011). For instance, Van Mol (2014: 81) also contends that "mobile and local students might cross each other's paths at university, but [that] social interaction likely remains limited". A similar finding was reported in a study conducted by Johanna Waters and Rachel Brooks (2011: 574) in which, for instance, one student explained that "local students returned 'to their families' in the evenings, limiting the possibilities for social contact". Waters and Brooks (2011: 576) conclude that the students' social networks "both inside and outside the classroom, were generally confined [as is also the case of most of the participants in this study] to an 'international student community", or to the 'Erasmus bubble' as I described to the participants. Tsoukalas (2008: 144) offers a very interesting and accurate description of the 'self-contained enclave' where Erasmus students live and their subsequent little contact with the locals. The participants of the present study would undoubtedly fit into this characterization:

> While the group is culturally diverse on the inside it functions as a socially exclusive group vis-à-vis the host country and its local population. Thus the Erasmus students do not usually manage to get in contact with the local society, even less so to integrate or assimilate with it. [...] Their contact with natives is thus usually minimal and insignificant. Instead they often remain within the confines of the Erasmus group, where they share a common status, or seek out the company of their compatriots thereby restricting even more the chances of intercultural learning. Most Erasmus students actually live in a sort self-contained enclave. Especially in European cities which have big university campuses and student residential areas this segregation can be quite marked. (Tsoukalas, 2008: 144)

Concerning students' social networks abroad, Coleman (2013: 29) points out that it is commonly thought that "the social networks a student establishes, maintains and develops while abroad are crucial to learning outcomes, since they

can determine access to linguistic and cultural input". However, due to this segregation of the Erasmus community Tsoukalas (2008) talks about (and which the participants in this study also seem to confirm), the use – and, therefore, the learning – of the local languages is presented as a somewhat difficult task and, for some of them, as even an unreachable one. In what follows, we will see how this difficulty is reflected in the participants' discourse who, in most cases, confess not having used and learnt any foreign language, except for English, given that this is, as we have observed in the previous section, (a) the lingua franca among Erasmus students; and (b) the language of instruction in two of the three countries in our study (Denmark and the UK).

Indeed, those students who went to the UK and Denmark clearly highlight that they were highly exposed to the English language (mostly within the academic context) and, yet, not so much to Welsh (also a local language in Wales) and Danish (the local language in Denmark). English appears to be "the predominant academic language of the current period" (Altbach, 2004: 11) and, actually, many countries are "increasingly offering academic programmes in English – to attract international students [who, very similarly to the ones in this study, are] unwilling to learn the local language" (ibid, 2004: 11) and, for whom, their priority is to improve their English-language skills. The participants' evaluation of these 'small' languages (Welsh and Danish) – as compared to the big language (English) – is summarized in the figure below.

Figure 25 The students' evaluation of the 'small' languages (Welsh and Danish)
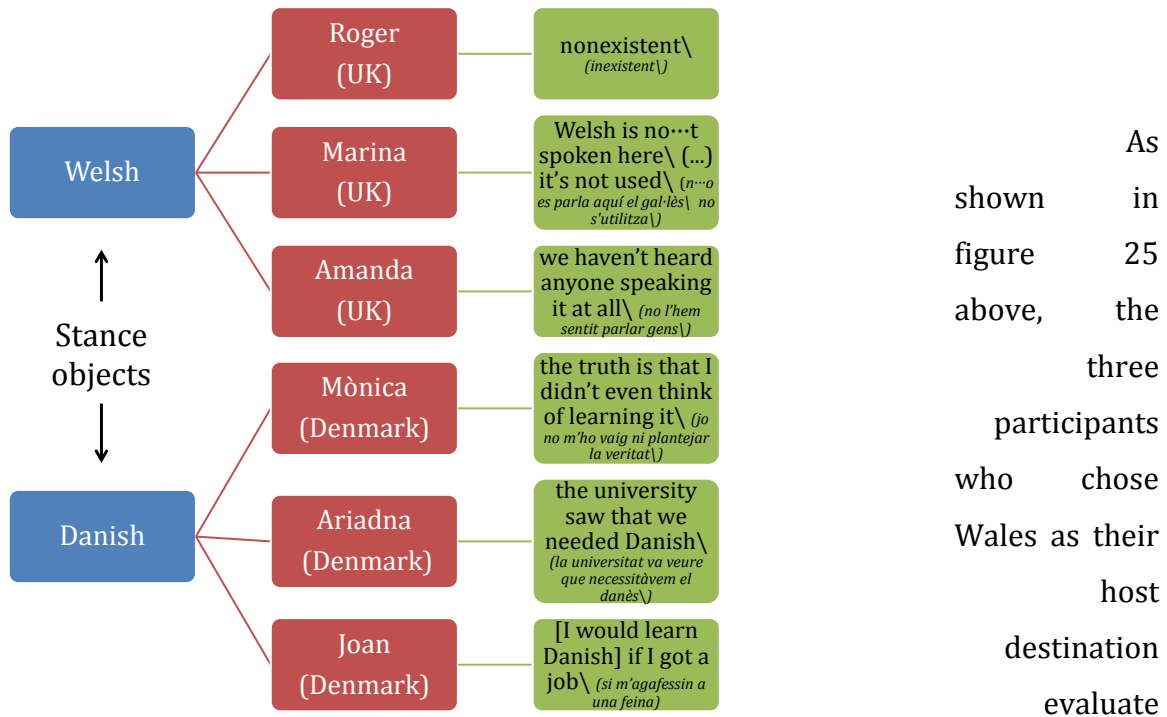
As shown in figure 25 above, the three participants who chose Wales as their host destination evaluate 'Welsh' as a language which is 'not spoken' and/or 'inexistent'. Even though most of them initially expected Welsh to be more present in their daily lives abroad and to learn some basic words in this language, during their stay they all position themselves as *not* wanting to learn Welsh because they do not need it to communicate with people (see excerpt 71 below).

Excerpt 71 'it's no···t spoken here\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Marina – UK*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	and how about Welsh/ are you learning it/	*i el gal·lès què tal/ l'estàs aprenent/*
3 4	MARINA:	super difficult\ +u··h+ there are many Welsh people_ * no\	*súper difícil\ +eh··+ hi ha moltes persones gal·leses_ * no*
5 6	SÒNIA:	(…) you don't want to study Welsh\ you don't need it\	*(…) tu·· no vols estudiar gal·lès\ no el necessites*
7 8	MARINA:	{(@) study Welsh/} +@@+ {(@) no\} +@@@+	*{(@) estudiar gal·lès/} +@@+ {(@) no\} +@@@+*
9 10	SÒNIA:	(…) do you hear a lot of Welsh around here or not/	*(…) tu sents molt gal·lès per aquí o no/*
11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18	MARINA:	no\ no\ (…) I mean_ <u>it's no···t spoken here</u>\ the only who speak it is * the elderly_ do··_ +uh···+ do communicate with each other in Welsh\ you mainly see_ +uh·+ the older women_ that for instance they are on the street and you do hear that they speak i··n_ in Welsh_	*no\ no\ (…) o sigui_ n···o es parla aquí el gal·lès\ lo únic que es parla és * la gent gran_ sí que··_ +mm·+ sí que es comuniquen més en gal·lès\ sobretot veus_ +eh·+ a les dones grans_ que per exemple estan pel carrer i sí que sents que parlen amb··_ amb gal·lès_ però no*

19	but it's not used\ it really isn't\ in	s'utilitza\ és que no\ de fet_ +eh··+
20	fact_ +uh··+ Welsh people from	gent d'aquí que és gal·lesa_ * la
21	here_ * my tandem_ +uh··+ only	meva {(ENG) tàndem}_ +eh··+ només
22	speaks_ a little bit of Welsh at	parla_ una mica a casa seva el
23	home\ (...) they supposedly want	gal·lès\ (...) aquí es suposa que volen
24	to preserve the language· because *	preservar la llengua· perquè· *
25	well_ since it i·s_ * well_ it's_ it's	bueno_ com és·_ * bueno_ ja_ ja
26	already dying\	s'està perdent\

Even though Marina (UK) has met many people who would claim their nationality to be Welsh (lines 3-4), she evaluates the Welsh language as 'super difficult' (line 3), 'not spoken' (line 3), not used (line 19) and, even, as a language that is 'already dying' (line 26). Her evaluation of Welsh actually constitutes her motives for not learning this language. Besides, Marina's laughter token (lines 7-8) could be interpreted as a form of stance by which she is positioning herself towards my inquiry about her possible interest in learning Welsh (lines 1,2), as someone with no intention to learn a language which is 'already dying' (line 26).

As is also illustrated in picture 3, English does not only 'win' over Welsh but also over Danish: a language towards which, in spite of being the only official language in Denmark, the three participants who went to this country position themselves as not needing it in their daily lives abroad. Similarly to those who went to the UK, the priority of these students is, indeed, to improve their skills in English in a context where they somehow realize the widespread use of the English language: they use it to interact with other internationals and they find it almost everywhere inside and outside university – I actually took a photo (see picture 3) of a sign written in both languages (Danish *and* English) through which the Danish university welcomed its students.

Picture 3 Instance of the third phase of the narrative interview

It is interesting to note that whenever the students found themselves in a situation where Danish was the *only* language used (which was rarely reported to happen), some of them clearly displayed a negative stance towards the lack of English. An example of this contention is given in the following excerpt, in which Ariadna (DK) comments on the widespread use of English in Denmark within and outside the university context.

Excerpt 72 'but then with basic things I think they don't logically use it\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowin, with Ariadna – DK*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	the linguistic situation here is the one you expected/	*la situació de llengües aquí és la que t'esperaves/*
3 4	ARIADNA:	I was told that people spoke English well\	*m'ho van dir que la gent parlava anglès bé*
5 6 7	SÒNIA:	(…) did you expect to find so much Danish/ (…) because you have just sai··d_	*(…) t'esperaves trobar tant danès/ perquè (…) ara m'has di··t_*
8 9 10	ARIADNA:	that at_ at the residence_ the instructions are··n't_ * everything is in Danish\	*que a_ la casa_ les instruccions·· no·· * està tot en danès*
11 12 13 14	SÒNIA:	and this you have said_ * taking into account that there are internationals_ they could put it in English\ but it's in Danish\	*i això m'has dit_ * sabent que són internacionals_ podrien posar-ho en anglès\ però està en danès*
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25	ARIADNA:	exactly\ yes\ this is something that we * many of us have been talking about because we have all been shocked\ <u>that everybody speak English_ that this is like·· a second language_ that it is very·· use··d but then with basic things I think they don't logically use it</u>\ because the university o··r some_ some menus are in English\ that is great\ the instructions at the residence_ if you	*clar\ sí\ això és una cosa que ens ha * molts ho hem estat comentant perquè ens ha xocat\ que tothom parla anglès_ que és com·· la segona llengua_ que està molt·· utilitzada··_ però després amb coses bàsiques de lògica jo crec que no ho utilitzen\ perquè sí la universitat o·· algunes_ algunes cartes amb anglès\ molt bé\ les instruccions de casa_ si saps que*

26		know there are people from	que ve gent de fora·· * sí que també
27		abroa··d_ * it is true that there are	hi han estudiants danesos_ però
28		also Danish students_ but put it in	fica-ho en anglès\ (...) però per
29		English\ (...) but for instance when	exemple quan hem fet viatges
30		we have travelled by·· by bu··s (...)	amb·· amb autobús·· (...) el
31		the bus driver has said thi··ngs in	conductor quan ha dit coses·· les ha
32		Danish but since he knew that there	dit en danès però com que sabia
33		were English people·· he repeats the	que hi havia anglesos·· ho repeteix
34		same in English\	en anglès\

Ariadna left with the belief that people in Denmark speak English well (lines 3-4) and, in fact, once abroad she seems to corroborate this idea when she treats the activity of 'speaking English' (lines 18-19) as being bound to the category 'everybody [in Denmark]' (line 18). Indeed, she produces a clear evaluation of the English language as 'very used' (line 20) and as a 'second language' (line 19-20) in Denmark. However, an aspect that she seems to evaluate negatively in relation to the languages used in Denmark is the lack of English she has found at the residence where she lives in which, although it is a context inhabited mostly by people who, like her, come 'from abroad' (lines 26-27), 'everything is in Danish' (lines 9-10). This critique seems to rest on the belief that English is a 'contact language' among speakers with different first languages and, for some of them, it is even the "only communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7), as has already been stated. Similarly to Ariadna (DK), Mònica (DK) also talks about English as *the* common language among the other international students she has met abroad and as the language used within the university context. Yet, as evidenced in the following excerpt, Mònica and her Catalan flatmate take a negative stance towards some situations (outside the university context) in which they found Danish was the only language used and in which they also missed the presence of English (see excerpt 73).

Excerpt 73 'menus at the restaurants are all in Danish\'
(***Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Mònica***)

1	RESEARCHER:	in relation to languages_ * is it	amb el tema de les llengües_ * és
2		what you expected/ +uh·+ the	el que esperàveu/ +em·+ (...) la
3		amount of English use··d_	quantitat d'anglès que hi ha·· _
4	MÒNICA:	no\ we knew that\	no\ això ho sabíem\

5	FLATMATE:	you knew that everything would be * at the university everything would be in Danish\	*ja sabíeu que tot seria * a l'escola tot seria amb danès*
6			
7			
8	MÒNICA:	in English\	*amb anglès*
9	RESEARCHER:	bu··t_ in the resta& * <u>I mean menus at the restaurants are all in Danish\</u>	*però··_ en els resta& *o sigui_ cartes als restaurants tot amb danès*
10			
11			
12	MÒNICA:	<u>yes\</u>	*sí*
13	FLATMATE:	you go and see the menu of a restaurant outside of it and say let's see +uh··+ what they do or what they have_ and you have to enter the restaurant and ask for the English menu and say_ ok I'll come back\ (...) you can't see the English version on the menu outside of the restaurant\	*que tu vas a veure un restaurant de fora i dius a veure·· +mm··+ què fan o a veure què hi ha_ i has d'entrar a dins del restaurant i demanar la carta en anglès i dir_ bueno ja tornaré\ (...) a fora··_ no pots veure_ el· * l'a- l'anglès*
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			
21			
22	MÒNICA:	exactly\ it's in Danish\	*exacte\ està amb danès*

The functional role of English within the university was something Mònica clearly expected before going to Denmark (line 4) and this may explain why she positioned herself as someone who 'didn't even think of learning Danish' (as illustrated in figure 25). What they did not seem to expect was to be immersed in situations outside the academic context – like reading the menus outside of the restaurants – in which Danish was the only language used. However, since this was something that rarely happened and even though the university gave them the chance to take a course in Danish while abroad, none of them felt the need to learn the local language. Learning Danish would be, in any case, an activity they would see themselves engaging in, were they not members of the category 'Erasmus student' but of the category 'international worker in Denmark'; or, as Joan (DK) puts it, '[I would learn Danish] if I got a job'.

In relation to the students who went to Italy, we can see that Patrícia (IT) and Verònica (IT) describe similar trajectories as regards their language learning-and-use experiences in Italy. Although one of their initial motivations was to learn Italian, they both admit that they are not achieving this, mainly due to their almost inexistent interaction with the locals and their inevitable tie with co-nationals. The following excerpt comes from the semi-structured interview that I held with Patrícia and her Catalan friend in Italy, in the middle of their study abroad experience. In this instance we can see that, although Patrícia initially wanted and

expected to learn Italian, she now admits she is not achieving this and that her objective has changed in the course of the experience (see excerpt 74).

Excerpt 74 'if we take a course in Italian we will learn it anyway'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Patrícia and her Catalan friend Georgina*)

1	SÒNIA:	your objective was to learn Italian\	*el vostre objectiu era aprendre italià*
2 3	GEORGINA:	yes_ this hasn't been very successful\	*ja_ això ha fallat una mica*
4 5 6 7	PATRÍCIA:	yes\ but of course_ the next years we are determined to take a course in Italian [in Lleida] and keep on learning\	*sí\ però clar_ l'any que ve ja tenim pensat fer un curset d'italià i seguir aprenent*
8 9 10 11 12	SÒNIA:	so_ although learning Italian was your objective_ you are not doing it_ not as much as you could_ * right/ but you are not_ * you don't_ you don't regret it\	*per tant_ tot i que era el vostre objectiu aprendre italià_ no ho esteu fent_ no tant com podríeu_ * no/ però no esteu_ * no_ no teniu remordiments*
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22	PATRÍCIA:	no because what really··· * for instance_ <u>if we take a course in Italian we will learn it anyway</u>\ and now travelli··ng with the people * because you will not make a group of sixteen people\ once you are there [in Lleida] you may travel with three_ four people\ now this is what we want to enjoy which we see we will not be able to do the next year\	*no perquè realment el que··· * per exemple l'italià si ens apuntem a un curset l'aprendrem igual\ i viatja··r ara amb la gent * perquè fer un grup de gent de·· setze persones no el faràs\ un cop estiguis allí potser viatjaràs tres_ quatre\ ara és això el que volem aprofitar que veiem que l'any que ve no podrem fer*

In spite of not achieving her initial goal to learn a foreign language, Patrícia (IT) does not seem to display a negative stance towards this; instead, as she contends in the interview, learning Italian is something she can do back at home (lines 14-15). Patrícia now seems to look at Erasmus as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, with constant trips within the Italian country shared with many other [Spanish] Erasmus students and which, as opposed to learning a foreign language, 'we will not be able to do the next year' (*l'any que ve no podrem fer* - line 22).

Similarly to Patrícia (IT), Verònica (IT) also reports *not* learning Italian because, as we have seen in a previous section, she does not have much contact with the locals, but rather sticks around with other [Spanish] Erasmus students.

However, Verònica *does* display a negative stance towards the impact that her inevitable Spanish social networks are having on her foreign language learning and use in Italy. We have already seen that, as she claims in the semi-structured interview, 'to do this_ I'd rather stay in Spain' (*per fer això_ em quedo a Espanya*); and, in another instance (see excerpt 75 below), she stresses the fact that she has not interacted with Italians, 'not even two days' (*ni dos dies*).

Excerpt 75 'I haven't spoken with them [with Italians]\ not even two days\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica*)

1 2 3	RESEARCHER:	did you study a little bit of Italian [before going to Italy] o··r_	*italià n'havies fet una mica [abans d'anar a Itàlia] o··_*
4 5 6 7	VERÒNICA:	that month in Venice but * I mean_ there I learnt a lot of Italian and I have come here and I'm starting to forget it all\	*el mes aquell a Venècia però * vull dir_ allà en vaig aprendre molt i he vingut aquí i se m'està oblidant tot*
8 9	SÒNIA:	you are forgetting Italian in Italy/	*a Itàlia se t'està oblidant l'italià/*
10 11 12 13	RESEARCHER:	you don't practi& * you don't find someone * and you don't have the opportunity to·· mix with Italians o··r_	*no practique& * no trobes amb* i no tens ocasió de·· barrejar-te amb els italians o··*
14 15 16 17 18 19	VERÒNICA:	Italia··ns * well_ there aren't Italians who study my degree\ (...) we do sometimes mix but very little\ I mean_ I haven't spoken with them\ not even two days\	*italians·· * és que_ italians que estudien la meva carrera com_com si diguéssim no estan\ (...) de vegades si que ens barregem però molt poc\ vull dir_ no he parlat amb ells\ ni dos dies*

Before going to Italy, Verònica spent one month in Venice with other Eramus students in order to gain some linguistic preparation (in Italian) for her experience in Italy. Indeed, Verònica displays a very positive stance towards that month in Venice when saying that 'what I liked about [that month] there is that I met people fro·m_ from everywhere\' (*lo que m'agradava d'allà és que vaig conèixder gent de·_ d'arreu*). However, the fact that (a) Spanish Erasmus students outnumber the rest of the international students in Italy; and that (b) the international and local students are normally separated at the residence makes Verònica come to the conclusion that she cannot achieve her initial goal of learning Italian in Italy. In fact, as she seems to suggest in line 7, instead of practicing Italian, she feels she is 'starting to forget it all' (*se m'està oblidant tot*).

The analysis of the participants' discourse *during* their study abroad experience has presented an in-depth template of their social networks abroad and how these shaped their attitudes and opportunities to learn and use a given foreign language. The following figure provides a summary of the findings resulting from the analysis of the students' discourse, while linking social networks and language use.

Figure 26 Participants' social networks and language use
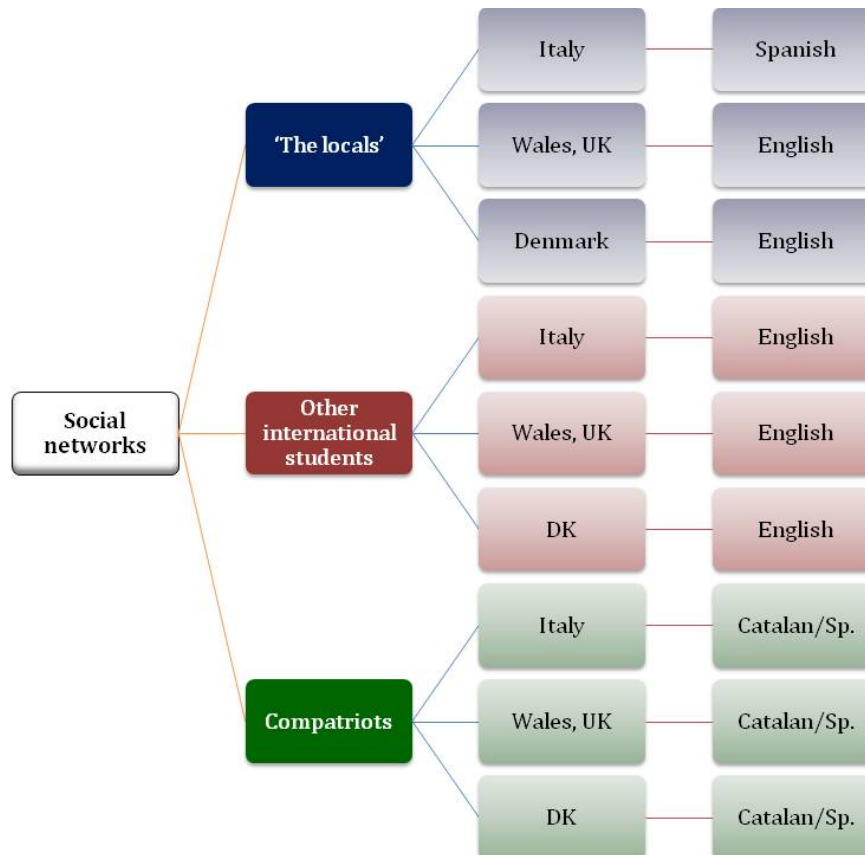
The three networks the students make reference to in their discourse are basically three: the locals, other international students and compatriots. The interaction (or lack of it) with each of these networks has indeed affected the participants' use and/or learning of certain languages.

In general, we have seen that in the three countries there has been little interaction between the participants and the locals. However, in the case of UK and Denmark, the contact language or lingua franca is English, which is also the language of instruction in the courses they take. In fact, we see that the students positioned themselves as not wanting to learn Welsh and/or Danish. On the one hand, they see Welsh as a language which is rarely used and, therefore, as a language they do not need in their everyday life abroad. On the other hand, although Danish is obviously used by the members of the host society, the students also position themselves as not needing it as Erasmus students who are temporarily staying in Denmark (they would consider the learning of this language

if they stayed there for a longer period for work purposes). The learning of English – not Welsh or Danish – is, in both contexts (UK and Denmark), the students' objective.

With regards to those students who went to Italy, 'speaking English well' is not treated as an activity that is bound to the Italians and the Spanish and, therefore, the contact language between these two groups is Spanish, rather than English. It is for this reason that Patrícia underlines the importance to learn Italian because, in this context, English does not always function as a lingua franca.

We have also seen that there is a strong bond between Erasmus students, who seem to live within a 'bubble' or within what Patricia A. Duff (2007) names a 'third space' between their home and host countries. Kalocsai (2014) describes this 'third space' as a space that is created for Erasmus students and which they occupy during their study abroad, without "actively [being] involved in any of their home country or host country social networks". Yet, we have to take into account that (a) the students in this study left with the expectation to meet and interact with residents of their host society (an expectation which, as we have seen, has not been fulfilled); and that (b) learning from other internationals as well as from the locals is one of the objectives of the European Commission in relation to the Erasmus programme. For this reason, I follow Kalocsai (2014: 99) in inviting us to ask ourselves the following questions:

> Does the European Commission want the Exchange students to occupy a "third space" between their home countries and the host country? Further, if the above question is answered with a "No", the next question to ask is, "What can the European Commission do in order to facilitate the exchange students' access to the local students' social networks?

All the participants in this study seem to coincide that the lingua franca among the Erasmus students occupying that space is no other than English. In spite of this, the students – mainly those who went to Italy – have stressed their self-perceived poor competence in English which has, on some occasions, become a barrier for socializing with non-Spanish Erasmus students.

Finally, although some of them initially had the intention not to interact with co-nationals, all of them have ended up explaining that these have definitely been part of their social networks abroad and that, for some of them, co-nationals have actually been an indispensable and necessary support, mainly at the beginning of their stay. As regards those who went to Italy, though, the interaction with compatriots is presented also as inevitable, basically for two reasons: (a) because there are a lot of Spanish [Erasmus] students in Italy; and (b) because, as has already been mentioned, their poor competence in English made them somehow become more dependent on their compatriots than they would have liked.

In conclusion, in this section 6.2 we have analysed the participants' stance towards their main pre-sojourn expectation: the learning and use of a foreign language during their stay abroad, supplying information about the factors that the students recognise as conditioning it. Special interest has been placed on the nuances and individual particularities of their experiences as language learners and, for most of them, as 'first-time-users' in the SA context.

First, we have delved into the students' discourses on their linguistic sense of impotence felt at the beginning of their stay abroad, when most of them experienced frustration for not being able to express and being themselves fully in and through an L2; especially despite the fact of having studied English for many years in their home country and of having obtained the language certificate required by their university before departure. This seemed to be one of the greatest factors of difficulty at the beginning of their SA, and thus the origin of their major regret: not having had a better linguistic pre-sojourn preparation.

Self-perceived L2-competence is constructed by the participants as closely related to the social networks they have established abroad (as tackled in section 6.2.2). In particular, students seem to distinguish among three types of networks, to which they relate differently in terms of language use: the locals, other international students, and co-nationals. Interacting with the locals of their host country appears to be for most of them a frustrated expectation. Among the reasons, they mention the locals' disinterest in establishing ties with them, the university's segregationist system (with different class groups for internationals

and for local students) or the language barrier that obstructs their communication with non-co-nationals. Indeed, having almost no contact with local people is constructed as a rather common feature of 'Erasmus students'. This fact seems to have implications mainly for the (scarce or inexistent) learning and use of local languages other than English, since this is the common language used among international students, and thus is present in most of the participants' daily interactions. With reference to the learning of English, as has been suggested, rather than an epistemic stance, for which students claim improving their language knowledge or skills, the participants in this study display an affective stance by expressing that they feel more confident and less concerned with the "mistakes" they might make. However, students with very poor competence in English seem to be headed toward interacting with other co-nationals mainly, or even exclusively, which, in spite of the reluctance of most participants before departing, was finally a useful resource for some of them.

The next section (6.3) will deal with the students' encounter with 'the Others', namely, host residents and other international exchange students who were initially expected to be 'culturally' 'different' from 'them', and the consequences that this may have for their construction of their self and, ultimately, for their perceptions of 'cultural difference'.

6.3. Encountering difference

> It's easier to split an atom than a prejudice.
> Einstein (as cited in Dervin, 2012)

As we saw in section 5.2, the participants in this study expected their Erasmus stay to be a very positive and transformative experience, regarding their learning and using of foreign languages – which not all the participants report doing once abroad – and also regarding their encounter with a *different* 'culture' or 'lifestyle', from which they can learn and develop at a personal level[18]. This goes in

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[18] As has been shown in chapter 5, the students' discourse prior to departure aligns with that of the UdL, which also presents a study abroad experience as an effective means that provides students with different competencies. In this institutional discourse, particular emphasis is placed on the activities of 'getting to know other cultures, other ways of doing and of thinking' as benefits of the

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line with Papatsiba (2006: 108), who equally stresses that "for the majority of individuals who deliberately decide to experience a stay abroad, a certain curiosity and desire of encounter with the culturally different Other exist".

To recall, we have seen that some of the participants in this study initially (a) expressed their motivation to 'see how another culture lives' (Ariadna, DK); to 'live in a different culture' (Josep M., IT); and/or to meet 'people from other cultures' (Verònica, IT); and that (b) they seemed to use the term 'culture' as a passepartout term (self-explanatory and justified by itself) and as homogenizing and corresponding to categories defined by the nation-state. In fact, when asked to develop their expectation about living 'cultural difference' in the host country, they would, for instance, come up with culturalist or essentialist category-implicative descriptions (Stokoe, 2009) of 'the locals'. For example, Joan treated 'eating more natural products' and 'being more responsible' as category-bound descriptions of 'Danish people'; and Amanda categorized the British as being 'not as open and friendly as Catalans'. In this sense, the participants seem to use the notion of 'culture' as encompassing "everyday activities where there are choices about eating, washing, clothing, communicating, timing, surroundings, being together and so on" (Holliday, 2013: 6) and as representative of *all* its members. Indeed, most of the participants in this study initially expected these day-to-day activities to be unfamiliar to them; yet, as Adrian Holliday (2013: 3) claims, these daily 'cultural practices' "are most commonly associated with 'our culture' or national culture" (ibid, 2013: 3) without bearing in mind that these everyday activities may "also differ between small groups *within* [emphasis added] a particular society" (ibid, 2013: 2).

The analysis of the students' discourses of Othering prior to departure, through which they generalized about the Other by suggesting that they are all the same and that they share the same habits and way of thinking, has shown that they are somehow "solidify[ing] culture and community, bounding them together (I *am*

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study-abroad experience which, in this study, are considered as expectable category-bound descriptions of those members belonging to the category 'exchange student' or 'Erasmus student'. In fact, as Philip H. Anderson and Leigh Lawton (2011:87) point out, "academic and intercultural competencies are common to virtually all [study abroad] programs".

a Pakistani so I do it this way)[19]" (Dervin, 2011: 40). This "uncritical and systematic use of the word culture in discourse" (ibid, 2011: 39) is what Ulf Hannerz (1999) refers to as 'culturespeak'. In a similar vein, Piller (2011: 49) contends that "'culture with a (national) name' is often an a priori assumption"; whereas authors like Hannerz (1999) affirm that culture should be conceived as a series of differing *individual* performances (Hannerz, 1999) at a certain moment and place, which – far from being stable and permanent – are changing as we keep on interacting with people (from our own country or another) who have different ways of doing, and/or within a different environment from the one we are used to. This is, ultimately, as Hannerz (1999: 404) notes in the following excerpt,

> (...) a way of arguing that we are not necessarily stuck forever with either our own culture or those of other people, including those of our neighbors. Culture is in no small part a matter of cumulative experience, and exchanges about that experience. Meanings and practices can be changed; culture is a matter of doing as well as being (which is not to say that we will always want it changed).

The purpose of the present section is not to assess the students' 'intercultural competence' but to examine the (discursively constructed) impact that the students' contact with people from different countries during their study abroad has on their visions of Self and the Other. More specifically, this section aims to see (a) whether and in what ways the students report having encountered the so longed-for 'cultural difference' (as regards other international students and/or the 'locals'); (b) how they evaluate and position themselves towards the 'cultural differences' (if any) they have encountered abroad; and (c) whether and in what ways they present the Erasmus experience as changing their 'culturespeak' or their initial pre-conceived ideas about the Self and the Other. In this sense, I intend to answer the following questions: Do the students achieve their desired objective of encountering 'cultural differences' in their host country? If they do, how do the students evaluate and position themselves towards this 'difference'?

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[19] Dervin (2011: 45) adopts a critical and 'liquid' stance towards intercultural discourses, by putting into question those "discourses of unicity about the Other that result from Othering". Instead, Dervin suggests, we should avoid essentializing culture and, thus, "transform[ing] preconceived ideas and unconcing claims about the other" (ibid, 2011: 38).

Are the participants compelled to change any aspect of their identity in order to adapt to a 'new' and/or 'different' milieu they have entered? If they do not, does the Erasmus experience change their prejudiced images of Self and Other, which are "built on the 'us-them' discourses which are deep in the global position and politics[20] that we are brought up with" (Holliday, 2013: 30)?

6.3.1. (Re)Constructing Discourses of Difference and Sameness

In the foregoing pages, I have commented on the students' initial discourses of Othering, through which they expressed their expectation of encountering people from different nationalities and, thus, from different 'cultures', to which they attributed a set of qualities. Othering and stereotyping are considered as dynamic "form[s] of social representation" (Dervin, 2012: 187), which allow the participants in this study not only to account for their image of the Other, but also to claim what their stance is and, ultimately, their identities. This is what Dervin (2012: 187) asserts by stating that "Othering is not just about the other but also about the self". In addition, and this goes in line with the conceptual framework of the current study, Jovchelovitch (2007: 11) conceives "the reality of the human world [as being] in its entirety made of representation: in fact there is no sense of reality for our human world without the work of representation". Bearing this in mind, the analysis of the data presented in this section, does not intend to reveal what reality the students encounter abroad, but, rather, it aims at exploring how the study-abroad experience affect their [discursive] *construction* of the reality they are living and, ultimately, their visions of their Self and of the Other. 'Culture' and 'identity' are, thus, regarded as nothing but "the product[s] of discourses and relationships" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006: 482), which emerge from "the interrelations between self, other and the object-world" (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 11). These discursive products, as will be seen in this section, are not stable but flexible and constantly (re)negotiated and (re)constructed. In fact, the analysis of the data collected longitudinally in this study has thrown light into (a) the co-constructed, hybrid and unstable nature of Othering and/or stereotyping; and into (b) the ways in which participants (re)construct their own identities over time. This simply

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[20] For Adrian Holliday (2013:2), *global position and politics* concern the ways in which "we are influenced by the way we position ourselves and our society with regard to the rest of the world".

reinforces the fact that "language interacts with 'culture' in the [re]creation of identity" (Dervin, 2012: 190).

The analysis of the students' discourse regarding their living of foreignness *during* their stay abroad has proven valuable in the discovery of their evaluation, positioning and (re)construction of the 'Others' which, as will be shown in this section, appears to be very different from the one presented by the participants prior to their departure. Figure 27 below illustrates the impact that the stay is already having on the way students perceive 'cultural difference'.

Figure 27 Encountering Difference

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SÒNIA: do you think this is another world/ is this very different from Spain/ (*creus que això és un altre món/ és molt diferent això que Espanya/*)
MARINA: no\ (*no*)

Marina. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in the UK.

'for me Denmark compared with Catalonia is <u>not such a different country</u>. I easy get used to live here'.

'<u>nothing has surprised me</u> so much to say "I'm living in a completely different world"'.

Joan. First and fifth written experiential report, in Denmark.

SÒNIA: you said befo··re that you think you are different\ (*tu m'has dit abans·· que creieu que sou diferents/*)
ROGER: I think that it is disguised by the language\ the fact that (...) English compared to (...) to Spanish is very different\ then * well_ * it seems they are very different\ but <u>I think they are not so different\</u> *(jo crec que ho emmascara molt el tema de la llengua\ el fet de que (...) l'anglès comparat (...) amb el castellà és molt diferent\ llavors*això_ *sembla que siguin molt diferents\ però jo crec que no ho són tant\)*

Roger. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in the UK.

Encountering difference

'They are small differences\ I see it <u>very similar</u>\ because here_ I'm on the street and I see Barça shirts which are ours_ I see the HM store which we also have_ I see the Zara store_ (...) I see_ Nivea products and all this which I also use\ we dress the same way\ *(són diferències_però són petites\ ho veig molt semblant\ perquè aquí_vaig pel carrer i veig_samarretes del Barça que són nostres_ veig el HM que el tenim nosaltres també··_ veig el Zara_ (...) veig_productes de Nivea i tot això que també utilitzo jo\ (...) vestim igual\)*

Ariadna. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in Denmark.

'I do not live in a place very different from ours, since <u>Italy is very similar</u> to Spain in their thinking and see life.'
Josep M. Fifth written experiential report, in Italy.

SÒNIA: you said they are very different\ but you haven't experienced any culture shock\ (*dius són molt diferents\ però no has tingut cap xoc cultural*)
AMANDA: no·· no no\ of course not\ (...) you talk to a German_ you talk to a French_ you talk to a British a··nd and you see that <u>you are more or less the same\</u>instead you may talk to·· to a non-European a··nd and you will notice the difference\(*no·· no no\ està clar\ (...) parles amb un alemany_ parles amb un francès_ parles amb un britànic i·· i veus que mes o menys el fil és el mateix\ en canvi potser parlaràs amb·· amb una persona fora d'Europa i·· i notaràs més la diferència*)

Amanda. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in the UK.

'[Italy] <u>is very similar\</u> the only different thing * the schedules\' (*[Itàlia] és molt semblant\ l'únic que van diferent* els horaris*)
Verònica. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in Italy.

SÒNIA: què heu trebat semblant a Espanya/ (*what have you found similar to Spain/*)
PATRÍCIA: almost everything\ the only different thing is schedules\(*la majoria\ (...) l'únic que canvia és l'horari*)
Patrícia. Semi-structured interview while shadowing, in Italy.

The excerpts in figure 27 show that the study abroad experience is certainly having an impact as regards their initial view of the 'local culture'. Once abroad, the students seem to emphasize the 'cultural' similarities (rather than the differences) that they share with other internationals and with the locals, in spite of not having the same nationality. In this sense, it is highly interesting to see that the adjectives that they use to evaluate or conform judgements about the 'local culture' they are immersed in are very different from the ones they used prior to their departure. During the stay and, as can be observed in figure 27, the evaluative adjective and phrases that are repeated throughout the participants' discourse in order to evaluate and position themselves towards the reality they are constructing are 'similar', 'more or less the same' and 'not so different'. On some occasions, some participants even add other attitudinal markers such as the adverb 'very' (*very similar*), which acts as an intensifier through which the students reinforce what their stance is towards, in this case, the 'local culture' – this is dealt with in the following section.

6.3.1.1.   Constructing the 'local culture'

ARIADNA: I'm not going to Africa where·· they live in a tribe·· o··r something like that\ I mean_ we have the same things [in Denmark and in Spain]\ I'm not going to the middle of the Amazonia··\ I'm going to a coun& * to a place where I will have sho··ps_ there will be cars_ +uh···+ I will have a phone_ hot water_ (*no me'n vaig a Àfrica on·· viuen en una tribu·· o·· així\ vull dir tenim lo mateix\ no me'n vaig al mig de l'Amazònia··\ me'n vaig a un pa& *a un puesto que hi tindré les botigues··_ hi hauran cotxes_ +e···m+ tindré telèfon_ aigua calenta_*)

(*Semi-structured interview while shadowing,*
***with Ariadna - DK*)**

We have already seen that the majority of the participants have ended up not having much contact with the 'locals' and the consequences that this had for foreign language learning and use. Yet, they have certainly been immersed in a 'local' context where they have had to deal with the dynamics and characteristics of the host university, the weather, the local means of transport, the restaurants, the shops, the supermarkets, etc. The difference that they discursively construct

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about the 'local culture' includes two aspects: the meal times and the teaching methodology, which in the three contexts (UK, Denmark and Italy) is presented as somewhat different from the one in their home university.

As regards the stance object of 'meal times', table 18 below exemplifies the participants' stance towards this issue as something some participants express having no other choice but to adapt to. This is displayed through the "moment-by-moment choices speakers make that index their relationship to what they say (e.g., whether they are sure or unsure about it, happy or sad about it, surprised or not)" (Johnstone, 2007: 51).

Table 18 Evaluating the stance object of 'meal times'

Object of stance	Evaluative Stance	
The meal times	'it's <u>different</u>\ but I lived the same life (...) as I do here\' [Amanda (UK), narrative interview]	(*és diferent\ però jo feia la meva vida (...) igual que aquí*)
	'<u>the most different</u> thing\ (...) but [I didn't adapt to this] because * of course_ * I mean_ since I was living in my own flat (...) I followed the same schedules [as in Lleida\]' [Marina (UK), narrative interview]	(*era lo més diferent\ (...) però [no em vaig adaptar] perquè * clar_ * o sigui_ a l'estar jo a casa meva (...) continuava fent els mateixos horaris que feia [a Lleida]*)
	'[adapting to the meal times in Denmark] was <u>difficult</u> for me\ it was <u>a big culture shock</u>\ and I··· honestly_ * I didn't get used to it\ I didn't get used to it and I didn't have the intention to do so either\' [Mònica (DK), interview while]	(*se'm va fer difícil\ (...) va ser un xoc bastant bèstia\ i jo··· la veritat_ * no m'hi vaig acostumar\ no m'hi vaig acostumar i tampoc en tenia intenció*)
	'I <u>had to adapt</u> to the meal times\ (...) I did try to adapt to the meal times\' [Joan (DK), narrative interview]	(*em vaig haver d'adaptar\ (...) als horaris sí que vaig intentar adaptar-me*)
	'<u>the only</u> thing that is <u>different</u>\ but the other things are more or less the same\' [Verònica (IT), interview while]	(*l'únic que tenen diferent però les altres coses més o menys són iguals*)
	'<u>the only</u> thing that is <u>different</u>' [Patrícia (IT), interview while] 'we study a bit in the library before having lunch at 12 am (this was <u>really difficult</u> first because we weren't hungry at this time but now we are in the habit).'	(*l'únic que canvia*)

	[Patrícia (IT), 3rd written experiential report]	
	'it is <u>different</u>\there they have lunch at one' [Josep M. (IT), interview while]	(*és diferent\ allí dinen a la una*)

The quotes appearing in table 18 above include various displays of the students' evaluative stances towards 'meal times', one of the cultural differences that they acknowledge. These are made explicit through the use of different lexical markers, such as the evaluative adjectives 'different' – Mònica even intensifies her stance towards this by categorizing it as 'a big culture shock' – and 'difficult', an adjective that indexes the nature of the stancetakers' position with respect to, in this case, a rather affective state towards the stance object (meal times). On the one hand, there are two students who report having adapted to this 'cultural difference', in spite of it being difficult at the beginning of the stay. Indeed, 'adaptation' and/or 'integration' are two words which are repeated in the students' discourse when making reference to the new and different cultural practices that they have discovered abroad. Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 205-206) conceives adaptation as "impl[ying] the notion of change (...) adjustment, becoming used to" or as the "capacity (...) to transform strangeness in a new environment into familiarity". It does not, however, imply the fact of "adopting 'a native culture' or exchanging national affiliations (...). Again in Murphy-Lejeune's words, it is more a question of feeling 'comfortable' [or 'at home'] to the extent that the student would consider the possibility of living there for a while, if they so wished" (ibid, 2002: 209).

Patrícia's (IT) successful adaptation to meal times is actually reflected in her third written experiential report, where she describes what a typical day abroad is like for her, and where she contends that 'now we are in the habit' of eating at 12pm. Similarly, in the narrative interview, Joan (DK) recalls that he *had to* adapt to meal times because he was doing a lot of group work with other Erasmus students who also ate two hours earlier than he would do in his home country. This is illustrated in the following excerpt, where Joan comments on his not being able to follow the 'normal schedule' (lines 17-18):

Excerpt 76 '{(@) I had no other choice\}'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Joan – DK*)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	SÒNIA:	and you have said that * I had to adapt quickly\ right/ +uh·+ did you really had to adapt to something/ when you say you adapt to something it normally means that you found something that is different from what you are used to\ right/	*i m'has dit em vaig que * em vaig adaptar bastant ràpid\ no/ +em·+ realment et vas haver d'adaptar a alguna cosa/ quan dius que t'adaptes normalment és perquè· és diferent al que tu estàs acostumat\ no/*
9 10	JOAN:	to the meal times\ yes\ mostly\the meal times and the food a little bit\	*a l'horari\ sí\ més que res\ l'horari i el menjar una mica*
11 12 13 14	SÒNIA:	well_ I remembe·r you ate those dressings_ * you tried everything\ you adapted to this difference\ right/	*bueno_ tu menjaves aquelles salses me'n recordo·_ * tu vas provar de tot\ tu et vas deixar mullar\ no/ per aquesta diferència/*
15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23	JOAN:	yes\ yes\ yes\ (...) I did try to adapt to the meal times\ yes\ well_ I maybe followed the normal schedule one day\ you know/ but I did * because obviously_ my_ my colleagues with whom I was doing my project followed this schedule of eating lunch at twelve_ and dinner at half past six or seven\	*sí\ sí\ sí\ (...) als horaris sí que vaig intentar adaptar-me\ sí\ a veure_ potser algun dia feia l'horari normal\ saps/ però sí que· *perquè clar_ els meus_ els meus companys de projecte_ feien horari de dinar a les dotze_ i sopar a les sis i mitja o a les set*
24	SÒNIA:	and you also did it/	*i tu també ho feies/*
25 26	JOAN:	of course\ {(@) <u>I had no other choice</u>\}	*clar\ {(@) jo no tenia cap més altra opció\}*

In the excerpt above, Joan acknowledges the different cultural practices of 'eating lunch at twelve_ and dinner at half past six or seven\' (lines, 22-23), which are depicted as far from being the 'normal schedule' (line 17-18) he would follow in his home country. Joan's laughter token (lines 25-26) could be interpreted as a form of stance by which he is positioning himself towards my inquiry about his adaptation to the different meal times in Denmark (line 24), as someone who somehow sees this as inevitable and therefore as having 'no other choice' (lines 25-26).

On the other hand, though, the majority of the participants in this study reported *not* having adapted to the meal times in their respective host countries in spite of categorizing them as 'different'. This is reflected in their words appearing

in table 18, such as 'I lived the same life (...) as I do here\' (Amanda, UK); 'I didn't get used to it' (Mònica, DK); or 'there they have lunch at one' (Josep M., IT). It is interestin to see how Josep M. displays his positioning as someone who is *not* changing his eating habits abroad through the use of the third-person pronoun ('they') by which he is overtly excluding himself from this habit. The use of the expressions 'here' and 'there' by the participants reinforce these contrasts.

In the semi-structured interview during her stay, Mònica underlines that she – and her Catalan flatmate – are doing 'everything like us [Catalans]' (*tot com nosaltres*) in Denmark, and that they are actually finding it difficult to integrate both into the 'Erasmus community' and into the 'Danish community' (see excerpt 77 below).

Excerpt 77: 'we don't see that everything is normal\'
(***Taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Mònica and her Catalan flatmate***)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	MÒNICA:	we haven't had the intention of_ (...) of integrating more\ (...) it's not because· we are here together and because of tha··t we say no_ no_ we follow our schedule··_ but because this rhythm o·f_ o··f +uh···+ maybe of not doing things together_ of not integrating so much wi··th_ * I mean_ for instance all this group of people who have now left for a trip_	*tampoc ens ha donat la gana_ (...) d'integrar-nos més\ (...) no és qüestió de que· estiguem les dos i que per això·· diem no_ no_ nosaltres fem el nostre horari··_ sinó perquè· aquest ritme de·_ de·· +mm··+ de potser de no fer coses junts_ de no integrar-nos ta·nt amb··_*o sigui_ per exemple tot aquest grupet que ara se'n van anar de viatge_*
13	SÒNIA:	+mhm\+	*+mhm\+*
14 15 16 17 18 19	MÒNICA:	they have the same schedules\ for them_ it is not integration\ I don't know if_ if they would tell you they have integrated either\ because they do not find it weird\ I mean_	*ells fan els mateixos horaris\per ells no és integració\ és que no sé si_ si us dirien integració tampoc\perquè ells no ho troben raro\ o sigui_*
20 21	RESEARCHER:	but this group that left for a trip are Erasmus/	*però aquest grupet que van anar de viatge són Erasmus*
22	MÒNICA:	yes\	*sí*
23	FLATMATE:	Erasmus and Danish\	*Erasmus i danesos*
24 25 26	MÒNICA:	but the thing is that they all do the sa& * I think they are all the same\ the only ones who are	*però es que tots fan lo ma& * es que trobo que són tots iguals\que els únics diferents_*

27		different_ I repeat_ are [us] the	*torno a dir som_els espanyols_*
28		Spanish_ the Italians and the	*els italians i els portuguesos*
29		Portuguese\ +uh··+ <u>for them</u>	*+eh+ per ells és tot normal\ no*
30		<u>everything is normal\ I don't</u>	*sé_ trobo que_ veuen que tot és*
31		<u>know I think that they see that</u>	*normal\ i nosaltres no veiem*
32		<u>everything is normal\ and we</u>	*que tot és normal*
33		<u>don't see that everything is</u>	
34		<u>normal\</u>	
35	FLATMATE:	The we··ather_ * everything\	*el te··mps_ *tot\ tot\ tot\ ho*
36		everything\ everything\ they see	*veuen tot normal\ sí*
37		that everything is normal\ yes\	
38	MÒNICA:	for instance_ (...) we say_ +uh··+	*per exemple_ (...) diem_ +eh··+*
39		what a drag_ it doesn't stop	*quin rotllo de te··mps_ no para*
40		raini·ng\ and they say_ we are	*de ploure·\ i elles diuen_ ja hi*
41		already used to it because in	*estem acostumades nosaltres*
42		Denmark it's the same\	*perquè· a Alemanya és igual*

In this excerpt, Mònica explains the reason why adapting to the new sociocultural milieu appears to be more complicated for those members belonging to the category of 'Spanish Erasmus student' (a category to which they belong), 'Italian Erasmus student' and 'Portuguese Erasmus student', for whom things in Denmark (such as the rainy weather and meal times) are not 'normal' (lines 33-34). However, she establishes an 'us vs. them' distinction and states that this appears to be the contrary for the rest of internationals, who are 'all the same' (lines 25-26) and who are not compelled to adapt (lines 15-16) or change certain practices because they 'don't find it weird' (lines 18-19) and 'see that everything is normal' (lines 31-32). Indeed, the use of the pronouns 'they' and 'we' function as grammatical devices that "assume the role of identity markers, connoting proximity [with those we have a sense of sharing things] and distance [with those we feel we have different beliefs or practices]" (Duszak, 2002: 6). This supports Scheibman's (2007: 127) claim that the pronoun 'they' is "commonly used to evaluate groups that participants do not [feel they] belong to, and often these assessments express disapproval". It is important to note, though, that Mònica seems to now realize that the sense of 'not belonging' may not only derive from linguistic differences (from one speaking a different language) or nationality. In this excerpt, she is somehow grouping herself into an 'us' by which she is overtly expressing her sense of sharing various aspects with Italians and Portuguese, in spite of having different nationalities and speaking different languages. Anna

Duszak (2002: 1), who examines the role language plays in communicating one's sense of belonging or non-belonging, makes this point very clear when she says that,

> I may consider you different because I speak Polish and you speak French. But I may also consider you different because I am a woman and you are a man, I am a liberal and you are conservative, I am a linguist and you are a molecular biologist. Because of any of these differences I may tend to believe that we cannot communicate (well). When speaking of using a language we go beyond the simple access to the code, and look into the human abilities to engage in reciprocal patterns of communication.

The other difference that most students highlight in their discourse, apart from 'meal times', has to do with the teaching methodology they have found in their host university. This is another stance object they evaluate as 'different', 'very different' and as 'not the same' (see table 19 below).

Table 19 Evaluating the stance object of 'teaching methodology'

Object of stance	Evaluative Stance	
'teaching methodology'	'the teaching system here is <u>very different</u> from the one in Spain\ (...) here·_ (...) we are few students in class and the teacher_ makes students participate\ [Marina (UK), interview while]	(*és molt diferent el sistema de com s'ensenya a Espanya i aquí\ (...) aquí-_ (...) les classes_ hi som súper pocs alumnes i el professor_ fa participar els alumnes*)
	'they have a <u>different</u> working methodology\ (...) they do a lot of group work (...) and at the end the exam is normally an oral exam\'	(*allí tenen una altra metodologia de treball (...) fan molt treballs en grup (...) i al final l'examen és normalment un examen oral*)
	'there was a lot of communication [between the student and the teacher]_ which <u>doesn't happen here</u>\ (...) yes [I	(*hi havia molt diàleg [entre alumne i profe]_ cosa que aquí no hi ha\ (...) sí [em va agradar\]*)

liked it\]' [Joan (DK), narrative interview]	
'[what is <u>different</u> is that] in Law all the exams are oral' [Josep M. (IT), interview while]	(*[el diferent és que] amb Dret tots [els exàmens] són orals*)
'the education system in Denmark is * well_ I think it is <u>very different</u>\ I mean that_ the teachers are very close_ a··nd if you need anything * I mean_ they don't * they aren't distant but the opposite\ and I found it <u>very positive</u>\ I mean_ * very pleasant\' [Ariadna (DK), interview while] 'When we finish the break the teacher asks us to do work with teams (see picture 10), here always they ask students to do team work, and the classes are more practical than in Lleida, we do a little bit of theory, and after we do some exercise, I really like that system.' [Ariadna (DK), 3rd written experiential report]	(*el sistema educatiu d'allà Dinamarca és * bueno_ jo trobo que és molt diferent\ vull dir que_els professors són molt de tu a tu_ i·· qualsevol cosa que necessites * vull dir_ no· * no estan amb una distància sinó el contrari\ i ho vaig trobar molt positiu\ vull dir_ * molt agradables*)
'Anyway, as you can see in the picture we go outside to so some activities. Is <u>not the same</u> as my home university, where we do the lessons in a class all in front of the teacher (usually). In Denmark we never are in front of the teacher. We are in groups, all together in a circle, etc.' [Mònica (DK), 3rd written experiential report]	

As the excerpts above show, even though they have had to adapt to things they do not usually do in their home university (such as doing a lot of group work, taking oral – not written – exams, having a close relationship with the teachers, or

engaging in more practical activities in class), most of them seem to display a positive stance towards this through the use of the affective verb 'like' (as in 'I liked it'; or 'I really like that system') and through the use of evaluative adjectives such as 'very positive' and/or 'very pleasant'. To illustrate this, the following excerpt, which is taken from the narrative interview with Joan (DK), illustrates Joan's alignment with my evaluation of the class environment, from what I observed during the shadowing period, as a very relaxed one, where there was a lot of dialogue between the teacher and the students.

Excerpt 78 Displaying a positive stance towards difference
(*Taken from the narrative interview, with Joan - DK*)

1	SÒNIA:	I saw a very relaxed atmosphere	*jo vaig veure un ambient bastant*
2		in class\ remember that I came	*relaxat a classe\ recordes que*
3		with that teache··r and you were	*vaig venir amb aquell professo··r*
4		ery rela·xed_ there was a lot of	*i estaveu molt relaxa·ts_ hi havia*
5		dialogue\ right/ between the	*molt diàleg\ no/ entre alumne i*
6		student and the teacher\	*profe*
8	JOAN:	yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ yes\ <u>there</u>	*sí\ sí\ sí\ sí\ sí sí sí\ sí\ hi havia*
9		<u>was a lot of dialogue\ which</u>	*molt diàleg\ cosa que aquí no hi*
10		<u>doesn't happen here\</u>	*ha*
11	SÒNIA:	it is a difference you had to adapt	*és una diferència que et va fer*
12		to_ but it is a differen& * a	*que t'haguessis d'adaptar_ però*
13		difference that you liked\ didn't	*és una diferen& * una diferència*
14		you/	*que a tu et va agradar\ no/*
15	JOAN:	yes\ yes_ yes\	*sí\ sí_ sí*

Through my tag question in line 5 ('right/'), I am somehow eliciting Joan's alignment with my previous evaluation of the object of stance which, in this case, is the class atmosphere. As Du Bois (2007: 144) points out, "more commonly, speakers show alignment by stance markers like *yes* or *no*" – although there are other linguistic and non-linguistic mechanisms that index some degree of alignment", such as a nod or a headshake; and the expression 'I agree'. In this case, we see that Joan's alignment with my assertion in lines 12-13 ('it is a difference that you liked') is explicitly displayed through the repeated use of the particle 'yes' (line 15). Mònica also displays her stance towards the different methodology she

has found in Denmark, in her third written experiential report where she describes what a typical day abroad is like for her (see excerpt 79 below).

Excerpt 79 'All the days at university are different'
(*Excerpt Taken from the third written experiential report, by Mònica –DK*)

1	All the days at university are different; we start at different times,
2	sometimes at 8 o'clock, sometimes at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and so
3	on. I couldn't imagine that it was like this!! (…) As you can see in the
4	picture we go outside to do some activities. Is not the same as my home
5	university, where we do the lessons in a class all in front of the teacher
6	(usually). In Denmark we never are in front of the teacher. We are in
7	groups, all together in a circle, etc. Sometimes I feel shy and nervous
8	when I have to do reflexions[21] in front of the group. In some subjects I go
9	to class thinking that I won't know how to do.

The excerpt above shows an instance where Mònica accounts for the *different* practices she has found within her university in Denmark. First, we can see how she displays an affective stance towards the fact of not always starting university at the same time: this is something she did not expect to be that different (line 3). The exclamation marks in line 3 also function as stance markers and actually reinforce Mònica's affective stance towards this difference she did not expect to encounter. Secondly, she comments on the fact that students do some class activities outside the classroom – this can be seen in picture 4 below, which she included in her written experiential report and in which we can see some of her classmates working with their laptops outside the classroom. Thirdly, Mònica evaluates the classroom layout as being 'not the same' (line 4) as in her home university, where students would face the teachers desk. Instead, and this is something I could also observe during my shadowing visit, desks or chairs were normally arranged in a circle or half circle (see picture 5) and this promoted a sense of community among the students and encouraged them to participate more.

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[21] By the term 'reflexions', Mònica makes reference to the many occasions on which the teachers normally asked the students to share with the rest of their classmates what they thought about that particular lesson; whether they enjoyed it or not or whether there was something they disliked about it or did not understand.

This participative and active role on the part of students is something Mònica reports not being used to and towards which she displays an affective stance by characterizing herself as *feeling* 'shy and nervous'. Still, in the semi-structured interview during the shadowing period, she contends that she expects this to have a positive impact on herself in relation to the fact of doing oral presentations: 'when we come back to Lleida_ we will not be scared of doing oral presentations\ and I love this\' (*quan· tornem a Lleida_ ja serà com que no ens farà res fer presentacions\ i a mi això m'encanta*).

Picture 4 Mònica's classmates working with their laptops outside the classroom
(*Photo included in Mònica's third written experiential report*)

Picture 5 Mònica's classroom layout in Denmark
(*Photo included in Mònica's third written experiential report*)

Apart from describing and evaluating mainly two 'cultural practices' or objects of stance ('meal times' and 'teaching methodology') as different or as not part of their daily life in their home country, some of them also formulate some categorizations of the 'locals' or the host residents (see table 20 below). It is worth noting, though, that these categorizations do not result from interactions with the people living there but from the participants' observations and, thus, from their interpretations of what they normally do and/or of the way they dress.

Table 20 Categorization of 'the locals'

Category	Category-Bound Predicate	Category-Bound Activity
'the British'		'when they get to university_ they say I leave the··_ the city_ (...) during the four years at university they do no·t_ +uh·+ they do not live at home\' (*quan arriben a la universitat_ diuen jo marxo de·· de la ciutat_ (...) durant els 4 anys de· d'universitat ells ja no· +mm·+ ja no viuen a casa*) (Marina, UK)
		'when· they start university they want to leave home and they just go home to·· ask for money\ (*quan· comencen la universitat se'n volen anar de casa i que a casa només hi van a·· buscar diners*) (Amanda, UK)
'the Danish'	'very nationalist' (*molt nacionalistes*) (Ariadna, DK)	'they all have a flag pole' (*[tots tenen] el pal per la bandera*) (Ariadna, DK)
		'they are more civilised' (*[tenen] més civisme*) (Ariadna, DK)
	'more advanced' (*més avançats*) (Ariadna, DK)	'the only thing that surprises me is that the girls dress super elegantly and wear trainers\ (...) they wear a * they normally wear a tracksuit' (*l'únic que em sorprèn és que les noies van súper mudades i amb quets\ (...) van amb* van molt amb xandall'*) (Ariadna, DK)
		'they normally give a hug [when they greet someone]' (*donen abraçades [quan saluden a algú]*) (Ariadna, DK)
		'when they go out they wear trainers\ always\ they wear a dress_ they are very well-dressed and wear make up_ with their dress and trainers\ all of them\ right/ (*quan surten van amb bambes\ sempre\ van amb vestit_ van molt arreglades i molt pintades i molt ben pentinades_ amb el seu vestit i amb bamba\ totes eh/*) (Mònica, DK)
'the Italians'	'well-dressed' (*més presumits*) (Josep M., IT)	

As evidenced in the quotes presented in the table above, Marina (UK) and Amanda (UK) seem to offer a very similar categorization of the British as becoming more independent from their parents when they start university. This is also illustrated in excerpt 80 below in which Marina presents very different and even opposite categorizations of British and Spanish as regards their willingness to live alone during university years.

Excerpt 80 'it is much_ much better if we can live with our parents\'
(***Taken from the narrative interview, with Marina***)

1 2	SÒNIA:	has this stay changed you in any aspect/	*t'ha canviat en algun aspecte aquesta estada/*

3	MARINA:	well_ I think tha·t +uh·+_ * I don't know\ tha·t_ you become independent\ (...) the difference between the UK and Spain is tha·t_ there when they get to university_ they say I leave the··_ the city_ (...) and during the four years a·t university_ they do no·t_ +uh·+ they do not live at home\' however_ here_	bueno_ jo crec que· +mm·+_ * no sé\ que_ t'independitzes\ (...) la diferència que hi ha entre Regne Unit i Espanya és que·_allí en quan arriben a la universitat_diuen jo marxo de·· de la ciutat_ (...) i durant quatre anys_ o sigui durant els 4 anys de· d'universitat_ ells ja no· +mm·+ ja no viuen a casa\ i en canvi_ aquí_
13	SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	+mhm+\
14	MARINA:	it is the very opposite\ it is much _ much better if we can live with our parents\ and we go to the university that we have· in the city_ and everything is more comfortable\	és totalment oposat\ mentre puguem viure amb els pares_pues millor que millor\ i anem a la universitat que tenim· a la ciutat_ i tot molt més còmode\

For some of the participants in this study, living away from home and from their parents – as is the case of Marina (UK) and Amanda (UK), for instance – seems to be a shock, given that it is the first time that they have had to overcome their fears and solve problems on their own, without the help of their parents and by being immersed in situations where 'everything is [not that] comfortable' (line 18). This is why Marina constructs this as a possible impact of her study abroad experience on her sense of self.

With regards to those participants who went to Denmark, Ariadna has observed that most houses have a flag pole and this is why she uses the predicate 'nationalist' to categorize Danish people. Another aspect that has surprised her – and this is why she also categorizes the Danish people as 'more civilised' – is that 'there aren't people sleeping on the street (*no hi ha··_gent dormint al carrer*) and that people take care of the environment because, for instance, if 'you buy a drink can_ (...) they give you some money back when you bring the can back to the supermarket and they also give you coupons\' (*tu compres una llauna de·· de beure_i després quan tornes la botella et tornen diners i et donen vales*). It is also interesting to see how Ariadna (DK) and Mònica (DK) both treat the activity of 'wearing trainers' as a defining feature of 'Danish women', which they have found different. On the one hand, notice Ariadna's "taking [of] an affective (...) position toward the person or matter being addressed" (Wu, 2004: 3) through the affective

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predicate 'surprise' when she says that this category-bound predicate of Danish women is 'the only thing that surprises me'. On the other hand, both generalise the described activity of 'wearing trainers' to those typical of 'Danish women'; yet, Mònica clearly highlights this generality through the use of *all* in 'all of them [wear trainers]'. On the other hand, those participants who went to Italy rarely produce categorizations of the locals, which appears to be coherent with their reports on their social networks and their almost inexistent contact with the host residents. Josep M. seems to be the only student who categorizes them as 'well-dressed'.

The analysis of this and the rest of categorizations about the locals that the students formulate during their stay denotes that the 'local' 'culture' is described from a position of an external observer (often from superficial and/or visual aspects, such as the way of dressing of certain people and/or the national flags on the balconies). This is obvious if we take into account that the students' contact with the host residents was anecdotal, if not inexistent. It is not the case, though, of the two aspects that seem to have had an impact on the participants' functioning abroad: the meal times and the teaching methodology. On the one hand and, with regards to the former, we have seen a generally negative evaluation displayed by the students. On the other hand, the students seem to have learnt about different teaching methodologies (e.g. students are more active; there is a lot of groupwork; teachers listen to students, etc.) at their host university, towards which they display a positive stance. This is, indeed, an aspect of the 'local' 'culture' which they seem to deem as beneficial for them. The following section will deal with the impact (if any) that the 'Erasmus culture' or the interactions between Spanish and non-Spanish Erasmus students have on their sense of self.

6.3.1.2.   Constructing 'the Erasmus culture'

SÒNIA: before you said that_ I am with people from all over the world here\ (...) would you say you are really different/ (*abans tu has dit_ aquí estic amb gent de tot el món\ (...) tu diries que sou molt diferents realment/*)

MARINA: we are not so different\ I mean_ as you meet people you realize tha·t_ that you have many similarities with them\ I mean_ we really have stereotypes that are not as we think\ (*no som tan diferents\ o sigui_ vas veient_ conforme vas coneixent a gent que·_ que tens moltes semblances amb ells\ o sigui_ en veritat tenim uns estereotips que no són tal qual·· pensem*)

(*Semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Marina - UK*)

As has been shown, the participants in this study formed relationships mainly with (a) compatriots, a relationship which some of the participants presented as inevitable; and with (b) other international students or 'equal strangers' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 202), who had the same 'Erasmus status' (Bracke and Aguerre, 2015: 140) and who, like the participants of this study, had also moved from a familiar to an unfamiliar milieu, and who were, therefore, also concerned with "building a level of fitness that is necessary for their daily functioning" (Kim, 2012: 229). This finding resonates to some extent with the finding of scholars like Waters and Brooks (2011: 20) who highlight "the [common] separation and isolation of the international student community". In the interviews that were held with the participants in this study during their stay, I actually used the term 'bubble' to share with the participants my view of them as living in a sort of 'self-contained enclave' (Tsoukalas, 2008: 144) and their little contact with the host residents. However, this is – as some of the participants in this study claimed – also promoted by the host universities by not mixing 'local' and international students in the same classroom. Furthermore, as Tsoukalas (2008: 136) points out, Erasmus students "are [somewhat systematically] called by the same name, bundled together by administrative measures and often placed in the same living quarters". These are indeed other aspects that contribute to the

perception and, probably, treatment of these individuals as a segregated community.

The purpose of this section is to examine whether the students change or (re)construct their discourses of Othering in relation to the other internationals they have met abroad and whom, prior to departure, they categorized as 'different' "from their prior experiential, social, and historical frames of reference" (Plews, 2015: 281). As Dervin (2016: 72) suggests, "the most important aspect of interculturality is that it can only happen through interactions with another person, which has an influence on how we think, behave, perform, present ourselves and so on". The analysis of the data presented in this section indeed reinforces the idea of an unstable and dynamic nature of identity, as a construct that (a) is constantly changing as we acquire new experiences; and that (b) is socially constructed through discourse(s). Once abroad, the questions I aim to answer are: Do they still image the other international students "as alien and different to 'us' in such a way that 'they' are excluded from 'our' 'normal' (...) and 'civilised' group" (Holliday et al., 2004: 3)? What impact does the students' interaction with other Erasmus students have on their construction of their identity and their perceptions of 'cultural' differences?

The analysis of the students' report on their social networks abroad, and the interview and shadowing data shows that four participants in this study (Joan, DK; Ariadna, DK; Marina, UK; and Josep M., IT) did forge social links with other international (mostly European) students within and outside the university. However, for the other five participants (Patrícia, IT; Verònica, IT; Roger, UK; Amanda, UK; and Mònica, DK), the international group did *not* appear to be "the main interaction resource in the student experience" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 202). For this latter group, their interactions with other internationals took place mainly within the classroom and most of them reported socializing mostly with other compatriots. By way of illustration, the following excerpts show how Roger and Amanda state that they have not had much contact with people from other nationalities. On the one hand, during the shadowing period I could observe that Roger spent most of his free time in the library, given that his priority was to get

very good marks in the subjects he was taking, and that his interactions with other internationals were only taking place in the classes he attended (see excerpt 81 below).

Excerpt 81 Creating a social fabric: not a priority for Roger.
(*Excerpt taken from the NI, with Roger*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	you didn't end up socializing almost with anyone\	*no us vau acabar relacionant quasi amb ningú*
3	ROGER:	but it is_ it is our fault\	*però és_ és culpa nostra*
4 5 6	SÒNIA:	right\ you would say that it was your fault\ you could have changed that\	*d'acord\ tu diries que és per tu\ haguessis pogut canviar-ho això*
7 8 9 10	ROGER:	I_ I think I could have done +uh··+ something more and if I went there again_ I would do it differently\	*jo_ jo crec que hagués pogut fer +eh··+ algo més i si hi anés ara ho faria diferent*
11 12 13 14	SÒNIA:	I remember you being in the library all the time\ (...) your priority was not partying_ but_ you priority wa·s_ getting_	*jo et recordo tota l'estona a la biblioteca a tu\ (...) la prioritat teva no era festa_ sinó que·_ treure_*
15 16 17 18 19	ROGER:	you already_ already know that my& * you already know that this is my life\ I mean it depends on this\ it is the only * I mean_ * you know\	*ja_ ja saps que la me& * ja saps que la meva vida és així\ vull dir depèn d'això\ és l'únic * vull di·r_ * ja ho saps*

The poor social fabric that Roger and Amanda created during their study abroad experience is something they comment on at different moments (during and after the stay) and of which they finally take a negative evaluative stance – as for instance indicated through Roger's words in line 3 ('*it is our fault*') and in lines 9-10 ('*if I went there again_ I would do it differently*').

On the other hand, even though Amanda had had a first experience abroad through a 15-day-trip organised by her school, the Erasmus is her first experience of adaptation to a different milieu in which she finds herself physically *alone.* In fact, in the post-focus group she tells us that 'I had never left home (…) I couldn't stop thinking what have I done/' (*no havia sortit mai de casa (…) jo només pensava què he fet/*) and displays a rather negative affective stance by expressing her suffering for not being able to get used to distance from her loved ones and for

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"cutting the umbilical cord, breaking away from family warmth, facing new life conditions alone [which] represent[ed] so many steps to engage in which test[ed] [her] ability to survive abroad" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 97) (see excerpt 82).

Excerpt 82 Forging social links with other internationals
(*Excerpt taken from the post-focus group with Roger and Amanda*)

1 2 3	RESEARCHER:	then_ you had contact with_ * could we say_ with people from other nationalities?	*llavors us vau fer_ * podríem dir_ amb gent d'altres nacionalitats/*
4	ROGER:	no\ very few\	*no\ molt poques*
5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	AMANDA:	no\ (...) he was probably very focused on the academic aspect of the stay_ and I wasn't so much\ (...) maybe· I_ * the time he spe& * spent thinking about getting an excellent mark_ I spent it thinking that I missed home_ or of wha··t I would be doing if I was at home_ or that I am missing what is happening there\	*no\ (...) potse··r ell va estar molt molt molt centrat en l'àmbit acadèmic_ i jo no tant\ (...) potse·r_ jo* ell el temps que ell pas& *passava pensant en treure un deu_ jo me'l passava pensant en què m'enyorava de casa_ o amb que·· què estaria fent ara si fos a casa_ o que m'estic perdent d'allà*
15 16	SÒNIA:	you wanted to come back at the beginning\	*tu volies tornar al principi*
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26	AMANDA:	the first days_ * if I had come back_ it would look as if I have surrendered\ everybody has got over it and I haven't\ and I thought_ * but I can't\ I thought_ I can't\ why/ everyone talks positively about Erasmus\ I don't know of any negative experience_ I thought\ let's see if I will be the first one\	*jo els primers dies_ * si hagués tornat_ hagués sigut com t'has rendit\ (...) tothom ho ha superat i jo no/ i jo pensava_ * però jo no puc\ pensava_ jo no puc\ per què/ (...) de l'Erasmus tothom en parla bé\ jo no conec cap experiència negativa_ pensava\ a veure si seré jo la primera*

Murphy-Lejeune (2002: 37) claims that the narratives of both migrants and student travellers may "present common features", such as the fact that "the role of the exile is to be forever homesick" (ibid, 2002: 37). Indeed, excerpt 82 above seems to corroborate that this is the case of Amanda, whose thoughts often revolve around her feelings of nostalgia (lines 10-14) – the verb 'miss' (line 11) clearly indexes Amanda's affective stance towards her 'home', which is where her family and friends are. This feeling of nostalgia and solitude seems to grow as a result of not having forged many personal contacts and this is, ultimately, what Murphy-

Lejeune (2002: 203) suggests when she says that "home is where you have relationships" and that "affiliation to places becomes relative and ends up transmuted from places to faces".

Although some of the participants in this study had more contact with other international students than others, we can see that the students' evaluation of these 'others' (of non-Spanish Erasmus students) – based on either their interaction with them or on the mere observation of them resulting from the sharing of the same classroom space – is somewhat different from the one they displayed prior to departure. During and after their SA experience, when asked about whether their contact with other internationals had finally involved their adaptation to and/or their learning about different 'cultures', most of them display a "sense of togetherness" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 138) through utterances such as 'at the end you realize that we are all young people·· and we are all looking for the same\ having fun and that's it\' (*al final te dones compte de que tots som gent jove·· i tots busquem el mateix\ passar-t'ho bé i ja està*) (Josep M., IT); or 'I think we aren't so different because‿ at the end of the day‿ +uh··+ we are a·ll‿ the same age‿ (...) I don't know\ we were all comfortable‿ we didn't encounter so much difference\' (*jo crec que no hi ha tanta diferència perquè‿ al cap i a la fi‿ +em··+ som tots·‿ de la mateixa edat‿ (...) no sé\ estàvem molt a gust‿ no trobàvem tanta diferència··*) (Marina, UK). The students' constant use of the pronoun 'we' underlines the broadening and inclusive nature of their utterances, by suggesting that they are all members of the same category ('Erasmus student') who, in spite of not sharing the same nationality and/or language, would share many category-bound features (such as their age and motivations as evidenced in Josep Miquel's utterance 'we are all looking for the same things'). This goes in line with Papatsiba's (2006: 119) work on the study abroad experience of French Erasmus students for whom "encountered cultural differences (...) finally became less important in their eyes, because of the emergence of similarities linked to age and student status, between initially [perceived] culturally different partners". There seems to be indeed a "transition from the phase of strangeness towards a feeling of familiarity" (ibid, 2006: 119); yet, some of them do acknowledge some perceived

'small' differences between them and the rest of international students, as summarized in the following table.

Table 21 Perceived differences among international students

Category	Category-bound features		Evaluative stance / Positioning
	Category-bound predicate	**Category-bound activity**	
'the German' (*els alemans*)	'cold' (*freds*) Patrícia, while - IT		
'the Dutch' (*els holandesos*)		'give three kisses' (*donen tres petons*) Roger, while – UK 'give three kisses' (*donen tres petons*) Amanda, while – UK	'I have changed this because·· since I like giving kisses_ <u>three is better</u> than two\' (*jo m'he passat al seu perquè·· com que a mi donar petons ja m'agrada pues tres millor que dos*) Amanda, while – UK
'Brazilians and the Spanish'		'give two kisses [when greeting someone]' (*donen dos petons*) Marina, while – UK	
'people from northern Europe'	'not used to give two kisses' (*no estan acostumats a donar dos petons*) Marina, while - UK		'now when they introduce you to someone_ you eithe···r say {(ENG) hi_ I'm Marina} or +uh·+ you shake hands\' (*ara quan et presenten amb algú_ o··· fas un {(ENG) hi_ I'm Marina\} o +eh·+ dones la mà*) Marina, while - UK
'all the [international] students'		'eat inside the class, during we are doing lessons' Mònica, written experiential report - DK	'I didn't do it till now. But now I usually eat my lunch in the class or maybe an apple, etc.' Mònica, written experiential report - DK

As evidenced in the table above, some students mention the way of greeting of the students from Northern Europe they have met abroad for whom, giving two kisses is presented as not being a category-bound activity (Marina, DK) and who are, thus, perceived and categorized as 'cold' (Patrícia, IT). In fact, as illustrated in

the following excerpt, Marina was asked to do an assignment on non-verbal communication, in which she stressed the differences she had perceived among other international students as regards greetings.

Excerpt 83 'personal space_ depends very much_ on the··_ on the cultu·re\'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview, with Marina –UK*)

1	MARINA:	we did an activity o··n {(ENG) body	*vaig fer un treball de·· {(ENG) body*
2		language} because we were	*language_} perquè precisament ens*
3		precisely very interested in it	*interessava molt perquè * clar_ ens*
4		because * of course_ since we	*vam ajuntar_ que érem brasileres i*
5		were···_ * well_ +uh+ we got	*espanyoles_ dos i dos\ vale/ i*
6		together_ two Brazilian girls and	*llavors quan vam arribar aquí_*
7		two Spanish girls\ right/ and then	*+mm··+ * bueno_ ens va xocar que*
8		when we got here_ +uh··+ * well_ we	*nosaltres anàvem directament a*
9		were shocked that we would	*donar dos petons i tothom es*
10		directly give two kisses and that	*quedava molt xocat\ vale/ (...) i et*
11		everybody seemed very shocked\	*donaven la mà\ sobretot és els*
12		right/ (...) and they shook hands\	*de··ls països de·· del nord_ perquè*
13		mainly those fro··m the Northern	*no estan acostumats a això\i de fet_*
14		countries_ because they are not used	*el· treball que vam fer_+eh··+ els hi*
15		to this\ and in fact_ we made them	*vam fer fer com una mena*
16		do a kind of activity_ where we told	*d'activitat_ què els hi vam dir_*
17		them_ first of all we need you to_ to	*primer de tot us necessitem_ que us*
18		sit a···t the back of the class\ okay/	*{(sic) fiqueu} +eh··+ sentats_ a···l*
19		and it turned out that_ there was	*final de la classe\ vale/ i va resultar*
20		one from Norway and one from	*que_ hi havia un de noruega i un*
21		Germany_ and both of them sat one	*d'Alemanya_ i ells dos es van sentar*
22		next to the other_ leaving a lot of	*l'un a l'altre al costat_ amb un·· bon*
23		space\ and there were two Spanish	*espai\ i dos espanyols que hi havia*
24		who sat super close to each other	*es van asseure súper a prop\i els hi*
25		and we said to them_ look_ +uh··+	*vam dir_ pues mira_ +eh··+ amb*
26		with this exercise the only thing we	*aquest exercici l'únic que us volíem*
27		wanted to show you is_ tha··t	*fer veure era_ que·· l'espai*
28		<u>personal space_ depends very much_</u>	*personal_ depèn molt_ de la··_ de la*
29		<u>on the·· on the cultu·re\</u>	*cultu·ra*

The affective stance predicate 'shocked', in line 9, indexes Marina's evaluation and position towards the different way(s) of greetings and towards the personal space her Norwegian and German classmates required, which she sees as being determined by (national) 'culture' (lines 28-29). In spite of only having had contact with one German and one Norwegian student – as she mentions on another occasion in the semi-structured interview – she seems to assume that shaking hands (instead of kissing) and 'leaving a lot of space' (lines 22-23) are two category-bound activities that define *all* the members of the category 'German' or

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'Norwegian'. Indeed, Marina's words generally present 'the other' as "imprisoned in the straitjackets of a homogenized 'diversity'" (Dervin, 2016: 28) and, thus, somehow imply that diversity means 'oneness' (ibid, 2016: 28) and not multiplicity. Marina's solid and generalizing vision of 'culture' is indeed evidenced in her project on (inter)cultural non-verbal communication, which I asked her to send to me and which ended with a section on "tips to travel" that Marina and her colleagues wanted to give as Erasmus students who have 'faced some problems in body language' during their study abroad experience (see excerpt 84 below):

Excerpt 84 'Tips to travel'
(***Excerpt taken from Marina's assignment on (inter)cultural non-verbal communication***)

TIPS FOR COMING TO THE UK

Just as a reinforcement, **keep your distance** the British don't like standing or talking too close to someone; if they think you already are a good friend, they will sub-consciously stand closer (and believe me, it's never that close). In doubt, **never hug people**. If they genuinely like you, **they will hug you first** when greeting or saying goodbye.

TIPS FOR TRAVELLING TO SPAIN

Spaniards normally greet each other **kissing cheeks**. Take care, because men don't kiss each other, they usually **shake hands**.

TIPS FOR TRAVELLING TO BRAZIL

Observe that while doing this, you should not kiss on the cheeks (like in Russia) but actually only touch cheeks and **make a kissing sound while kissing the air**, placing your lips on a strangers cheek is **aclear sign of sexual interest**!

In excerpt 84 above, we can see how the activities of 'standing or talking too close to someone', 'hugging people', 'kissing cheeks' and 'shaking hands' are being discussed and presented as being related to membership categories defined by the nation-state: the British, the Spanish and Brazilians. In this sense, the students produce categorical statements such as 'the British don't like talking too close to someone' or '[Spanish] men don't kiss each other' and, thus, present " 'grammars of culture' (do's and don'ts), [while] concentrat[ing] on cultural difference, and confront[ing] cultures and civilizations" (Dervin, 2016: 72). Indeed, the use of the imperative form of the verbs in phrases like '<u>keep</u> your distance', '<u>never hug</u> people' or '<u>take care</u> because men don't kiss each other' do not favour "a more

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rewarding intellectual and relational exercise" (Dervin, 2016: 35) than would an identification of similarities among the people you are interacting with, in spite of them not sharing the same passport.

Apart from the different ways of greeting that some of the participants have perceived and that they attribute to a specific 'culture' defined by the nation-state, Mònica also treats the activity of 'eating in class' as a category-bound feature of all students in Denmark, no matter their nationality of origin, which she evaluates as 'unusual' in Spain (see excerpt 8 below):

Excerpt 85 Eating in class: an 'unusual' practice in Spain
(*Excerpt taken from the third experiential report, written by Mònica*)

```
1 │ Another thing that is unusual in Spain is that here all the pupils can eat
2 │ inside the class, during we are doing lessons. I didn't do it till now. But
3 │ now I usually eat my lunch in the class or maybe an apple, etc. Even
4 │ some of the students go to the canteen, buy their lunch and go upstairs
5 │ with the plate and eat there!! AMAZING!!
```

Mònica was not used to eating inside the class but, while abroad, this is a practice she has changed, as evidenced in line 3 where she says that 'now I usually eat my lunch in the class or maybe an apple'. In fact, in the semi-structured interview during her stay, Mònica and her Catalan flatmate even express their worry about going back to Lleida with this new habit, where eating in class is not normally allowed: 'when we get back to Lleida we'll have a problem (...) maybe you eat a sandwich and the teacher will tell you_ listen_ why are you eating in class/' (*quan arribarem a Lleida tindrem un problema (...) potser et treuràs el bocata i el professor et dirà_ escolta_ què fots menjant a classe/*). The student's affective stance towards this difference she has encountered in Denmark is clearly reinforced through the adjective 'amazing' (line 5), which she writes in capital letters, and through the final exclamation marks.

It is also interesting to note that during the stay two students highlight the 'cultural' differences, not among the internationals they have met, but among compatriots with whom they share the same nationality, which is something none of them expected before departure.

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Excerpt 86 'I don't identify with this posse at all\'
(***Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Joan –DK***)

1	JOAN:	where I find differences is {(@)	*jo lo que trobo diferèncis és {(@)*
2		between Catalans and Spaniards\}	*entre els catalans i els espanyols\} i es*
3		and they are evident\ I see them * at	*veuen\ jo els veig * al principi amb el*
4		the beginning when we went to	*Ramón que anàvem a Dinamarca_*
5		Denmark with Ramón_ we found	*trobàvem més semblances amb*
6		more similarities between us [(@)	*nosaltres {(@) amb els danesos que*
7		and the Danish than with the	*amb els espanyols\} (…) no sé\ els*
8		Spaniards\} (…) I don't know\ the	*esp& * jo els * clar_ aquí hi ha molts*
9		Spa& * I * of course_ there are a lot	*espanyols del sud\ vale/ jo quan vam*
10		of students from southern Spain\	*anar a Dinamarca amb el Ramón un*
11		right/ when we went out in	*dia de festa_ és que els veiem allí a*
12		Denmark with Ramón_ we looked at	*l'estació_ ens miràvem i dèiem_ +bua+*
13		each other and said_ +wow+ <u>I don't</u>	*és que no em sento gens identificat*
14		<u>identify with this posse at all</u>\	*amb aquesta pandilla\ {(SPA) eh niño_*
15		{(SPA) hey chap_ what's up/}	*qué haces/} escandaloso··s*
		boisterou··s\	

During his stay, Joan (DK) does not categorize the other non-Spanish exchange students he has met abroad as different; instead, he uses this evaluative adjective to refer to Spanish (non-Catalan) Erasmus students, to whom he refers as 'the posse' (line 14). According to Joan, the category-bound predicate 'boisterous' (line 15) is the feature that distinguishes Spanish from Catalan Erasmus students, in spite of sharing the same passport. The SA experience has somehow allowed Joan to realize that cultural homogeneity may not always be defined by the nation-state, given that he does not 'identify with this posse at all' and that there are *diverse diversities* (Dervin, 2016: 80), even among the people who have the same nationality. In fact, similary to Joan, Verònica, who mostly interacted with other compatriots, claims to be learning about different 'cultural' aspects from other Spanish Erasmus students (line 4, excerpt 87 below).

Excerpt 87 'I'm learning a lot about Spain'
(***Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Verònica –IT***)

1	RESEARCHER:	and within the Spanish group you	*i dintre de··ls espanyols no has*
2		haven't found {(@) cultural	*trobat {(@) diversitats*
3		diversities also/}	*culturals també/}*
4	VERÒNICA:	<u>I'm learning a lot about Spain</u>	*si d'Espanya estic aprenen··t de*
5		because * of course_ because··	*tot perquè *clar_ perquè·· hi ha*
6		there are a lot of people from the	

7		south and a lot of people from the	*molta gent del sud i molta gent*
8		Canary Islands_ a··nd_ *well_ they	*de Canàries_ i·· *bueno*
9		explain about their things_ their	*expliquen moltes coses seves_*
10		way of speaking and everything	*la manera de parlar i tot i **
11		and *well_ this is a little bit funny\	*mira_ és una mica divertit*
12		the curious thing is that the ones	*això\ lo curiós és que els*
13		from the Canary Islands and the	*canaris van tots junts i els del*
14		the ones from the south go	*sud també·· (...) però els del*
15		together (...) but the ones from the	*nord també han format allà un*
16		north have also formed a group of	*grupet dels del nord_ que*
17		people from the north_ who also	*també van junts*
18		go together\	
19	SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*+mhm+*
20	VERÒNICA:	and I find myself there in the	*i jo que estic allà al mig*
21		middle\	*pululant*

During this interview, Verònica claims that she feels 'more Catalan' (*em sento més catalana*) – and, thus, less Spanish - due to the cultural differences she has perceived among the Spaniards from the south and from the north – Verònica realized that there were even cultural differences between these two groups, which separated themselves (lines 12-18). In this excerpt, Verònica is discursively creating a boundary between Spanish and Catalan Erasmus students, the former having 'their [different] way of speaking' (lines 9-10) and 'their things' (line 9). Her utterance in lines 20-21 'I find myself there in the middle\' shows her feeling of non-belonging to any of the two Spanish groups and, thus, her positioning as someone with different 'cultural' features and with a strong sense of belonging to the category '*Catalan* Erasmus student'.

To conclude, this section has been concerned primarily with the students' ongoing (re)construction of their identity and their perceptions of 'cultural' differences, by reference to other Erasmus students. Prior to departure, the students expressed their desire to live an adventure characterised by encountering 'cultural' differences and, thus, created boundaries between 'sameness' and 'difference' or between 'us' and 'them', based on prejudices mainly about non-compatriots. During the stay, we see how this initial feeling of detachment from the host residents and non-Spanish Erasmus students blurs and is eclipsed by a feeling of 'togetherness' and 'sameness' based on shared category-bound features of Erasmus students, such as the fact of being the same age and/or the sharing of

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activities (e.g. going to university and/or partying). In relation to those participants who interacted with non-compatriots, 'cultural' differences do *not* disappear but are presented as 'small differences' (*petites diferències*, Ariadna – DK). Indeed, during the stay we can see how "proximity [among other internationals] surreptitiously gains the upper hand" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 131). However, for the participants who interacted with Spanish [non-Catalan] Erasmus students the shock comes from discovering and perceiving a feeling of detachment from this group, in spite of their co-nationality. What was perceived and, thus, evaluated as sameness prior to departure, is transformed into 'difference' during their stay. Boundaries are, thus, constructed within the same nation-state.

All in all, the students' transnational experience does not seem to generate a vision of 'culture' as something fluid and/or relative, while "placing instability at the centre of any intercultural activity: instability of identifications, instability of discourses of culture, instability of power relations, instability of feelings towards each other, and so on" (Dervin, 2016: 82). Instead, the students' discourses are still essentialist and show a rather solid vision of 'culture', still linked to a given nationality, institutionalized groups or pre-established 'labels'. In other words, these would be what Piller (2011) calls "discourses of banal nationalism", based on an uncritical conflation of 'culture' with 'nation', through which the students in this study homogenize people in a specific country as doing things in the same way ('*all* Spanish are boisterous'; '*all* the Danish women wear trainers'; '*all* the Germans are cold'; 'the British don't like talking too close to someone'). As Piller (2011) suggests this type of discourses which present a "one-to-one mapping of culture onto nation onto language [is] factually wrong", because they "present national belonging as overriding any other aspects of identity, and, consequently, they render other aspects of identity invisible"[22]. In this sense, it could be claimed that,

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[22] As Piller (2011: 59) suggests in her recent book on Intercultural Communication, there are other facets of identity – not necessarily the nationality - which may explain the diversity that we might encounter at a particular place and time. Indeed, we can definitely talk about 'different cultural practices' of certain people (their different habits, different ways of doing and thinking) but we should always take into account that this diversity does not lie on the nationality of a person, but on other aspects of identity such as "class, gender, ethnicity, regional background, personal traits or any other individuating aspects of their being".

although most of the students transform difference into familiarity (and even familiarity into difference, as regards their compatriots) and although their "interest in other people's differences [seems to] wane" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 211), they do not seem to adopt the view that "everybody is diverse *regardless* of their origins, skin color, social background, and so on" (*emphasis added*, Dervin, 2016: 80).

A hypothesis that may explain the students' unconscious essentialism is somehow suggested by Joan (DK), who claims that actual intercultural communication and learning can only be reached, not by occasional interactions with the (supposedly) 'different' 'other' within university, but by a cohabitation with them (see excerpt 88 below).

Excerpt 88 Occasional interactions at university vs. the living with a 'culturally' different 'Other'
(*Excerpt taken from the semi-structured interview while shadowing, with Joan –DK*)

1	JOAN:	it is very different_ * <u>you can have an</u>	*és molt diferent_ * sí que pots tenir*
2		<u>intercultural contact [within</u>	*un contacte intercultural [a la*
3		<u>university] but you don't live with</u>	*universitat] però no convius amb la*
4		<u>that person</u>\ we do a project_ we meet	*persona\ pues fem un treball_ ens*
5		at uni_ but afterwards everybody lives	*trobem a la uni_ però després*
6		the life they want at their home\ you	*cadascú a casa seva porta la vida*
7		know/ but I think that_ where	*que vol\ saps/ però jo crec que_ on*
8		intercultural exchange takes place is_	*fas més intercanvi cultural és_ si*
9		if you have a flatmate from another	*tens un company de pis d'un altre*
10		country_ with whom you live at the	*país_ de viure-hi a casa\ que és*
11		same house\ it is there where you	*realment allí on veus lo·· * com * la*
12		really see the·· * how * their way of	*manera de fer les coses que venen*
13		doing things\ (...) if they cook with_	*d'ells\ (...) si cuinen amb_ amb*
14		with butter instead of oil_ * things like	*mantequilla enlloc de amb oli_ **
15		that\ I don't know\	*coses d'aquestes\ no sé*

Finally, homesickness seems to be more present in the discourse of those participants who did not manage to create a wide and motley social fabric, which evidences the important role the social dimension of the stay plays "in determining how a person interprets and responds to their environment" (Pearson-Evans, 2006: 42). In the present study, the construct of 'home' seems to be defined by the

social fabric of the students and not necessarily by geographical, linguistic and/or 'cultural' spaces. In this respect, it is essential to note that the Erasmus programme is "perceived as a social experience rather than exclusively an academic one" (Krupnik and Krzaklewska, 2013: 212) and, in fact, as we will see in the following chapter, it is mainly the students' success in forging social links with different and not-so-different 'others' that influences the overall impact of the study abroad experience on their sense of self.

Chapter 7. After the Stay: The Students' Final Evaluation of the Impact of the Erasmus Experience on their Sense of Self

'Erasmus has ended. And this implies that I have to <u>say goodbye to people</u> that had become essential in my stay in Wales. It seemed like yesterday that I wrote: the countdown begins and now I was back at home. (...) Today, this experience has made a place in my backpack. I'm still Amanda, but my eyes see more now than before.'

(*Excerpt taken from the fifth experiential report, written by Amanda (UK), upon her arrival*)

The present study has adopted a lens that helps approach the students' voices on what actually happens abroad and the effects that this may have on their sense of self, on their attitudes towards languages, and on their perceptions of 'cultural' differences *over time*. First, we have seen that the students' discourse prior to departure showed a clear alignment with the institutional discourse of the University of Lleida on the benefits that a study abroad experience presumably entailed: namely, the learning of a foreign language and the encounter with 'cultural difference'. During the stay, we have seen some evidences of change as regards the students' initial discourses (e.g. their questioning of the ease of language learning abroad, and the reported difficulties of interacting with the 'culturally different' other). The mission of the present chapter, which centres on the analysis of the students' discourse *upon their return* to their 'at-home' context, is to place special emphasis on their elicited final evaluation of their Erasmus experience and on the impact that this has had on their (re)construction of their identities. The following figure is an attempt to summarise the idea that the study abroad experience for most students has resulted in more or less significant changes in their perception of their 'self'.

Figure 28 The students' discursive construction of the impact of the Erasmus experience on their sense of self

VERÒNICA (IT): 'In sum I personally think it hasn't made me change in any aspect' (*En resum penso que a mi personalment no m'ha canviat amb cap aspecte*)
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

PATRÍCIA (IT): 'it is a very exiting experience that have changed me in many aspects.'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

JOSEP M. (IT): 'I think there has not been a dramatic change in personality'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

MARINA (UK): 'When I compare myself to some few months ago I must recognize I have changed loads of aspects.'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

ARIADNA (DK): 'After this period of time, I have to say that I think that some aspects of myself have been reinforced'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

AMANDA (UK): 'I... I'm not the same. I look myself in the mirror and I say to myself that the thing that has changed is me.'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

MÒNICA (DK): 'I feel that something in me has changed'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

ROGER (UK): 'I am not the same person that took that plane on September 18th 2013. And I am glad to say that.'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

CONSTRUCTION OF THE IMPACT OF THE ERASMUS EXPERIENCE ON THE SELF

JOAN (DK): 'I do think I haven't changed a lot (...) for me it's more a physical journey than psychological.'
(Taken from the fifth written experiential report)

The excerpts presented in figure 28 above are taken from the fifth experiential report which the students wrote upon return and where they were asked to reflect upon the impact (if any) that they thought the stay had had on their sense of who they are. It is interesting to see how the students' discourse evidences a general feeling of being a different person from the one that had taken a plane to study abroad some months ago. On the one hand, some students define themselves as 'not the same' (Amanda, UK; Roger, UK) and as having 'changed loads of aspects' (Marina, UK; Patrícia, IT). On the other hand, however, there are three participants (Verònica, IT; Josep M., IT; Joan, DK) who report *not* feeling a different person and who, thus, describe the experience as not having had a major impact on their identities. The following sections will be devoted to the analysis of the students' discourse once back on home soil with the aim of gaining a first-hand in-depth picture of (a) the nature of the impact of the Erasmus experience on the students' construction of their self and (b) the contextual and individual factors that, according to them, have influenced these changes. In sum, we will see that,

when asked about what they thought they had gained from their sojourn, the students underlined three main aspects as important outcomes of the mobility period. First, section 7.1 will focus on their self-perceived improvement in a given (foreign) language (generally, English) and also their attitudes towards L2 learning in general. For instance, those students who went to Italy came back with the belief that English is (not) always enough and that it is, therefore, of paramount importance to learn the language of the host country whenever it is not an English-speaking one. Section 7.2 we will see how the social networks they established abroad had an impact on their perceptions of 'cultural difference' and thus on their sense of self; at this stage the students would categorize themselves as being more 'open-minded' and as having less fear of travelling abroad. Finally, section 7.3 will present the meaning that some students attached to the Erasmus experience as a rite of passage from youth to adulthood, as a maturing process, and/or as "an experience of autonomy", in Murphy-Lejeune's (2002: 251) words, by which they have learnt to become independent adults who are now able to live alone in an unfamiliar context and engage in everyday tasks such as doing the laundry, cooking and/or going to the supermarket. This finding resonates to some extent with Mihai Paunescu's (2008) findings. In his study on Romanian, Polish and Bulgarian students' opinions about the added value of their mobility experiences, he contends that the students, similarly to the participants in this study, "tend to see the personal development, overall cultural experience and the foreign language acquired as the most positive aspects of their mobility experience" (Paunescu, 2008: 196). As will be dealt with in this chapter, despite the fact that personal development did not appear as an emergent theme in the students' discourse prior to departure, the personal dimension of the stay seems to certainly prevail over the linguistic and cultural dimensions.

7.1. Constructing the Impact of the Erasmus Experience (I): the linguistic dimension

> Self-construction in the foreign society is, in fact, a carefully orchestrated spectacle. As in any performance, the actor plays to an audience. The spectators express mixed reactions – some playing the critic, displaying frowns, laughter, and, at times, outright insults, while others act as the undying fans, proud of the actor and ready to support all offerings. (...) Yet the greatest critic is the individual performer, who observes himself or herself from all angles and ultimately decides whether the performance has been a success.
>
> Valerie Pellegrino Aveni (2005: 54). *Study abroad and second language use: Constructing the self*. Cambridge University Press.

The aim of this section is to see whether the study abroad experience has had an impact on the students' linguistic *self-concept* or on the ways "participants perceive [and, thus, construct] themselves as second language learners and users (their reflexive identities)" (Benson et al., 2013: 80). We have already dealt with the role language (learning) played in the students' motivation to study abroad and how their perceived language proficiency influenced their experience abroad and, ultimately, as we will see in this section, their evaluation of their exchange.

As has been already shown, prior to departure, the students projected their imagined identity as Erasmus-students-to-be who would come back having improved their foreign language skills as a result of studying abroad. Once abroad, however, as has already been mentioned, the majority of students express their surprise at their inability to *use* what they realized was *the* common language within the "cocoon communities with other foreign students" (Penz, 2015: 64) – English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins, 2014; Seidlhofer 2011) – in spite of having been required to have a language certificate by their home university. We have seen how most students identified and constructed themselves as language learners who have been *studying* – not necessarily using – English for many years in their home countries, and how, in spite of this, for some of them English has become an obstacle for establishing interpersonal relationships abroad with whom

they did not share the same L1. This seems to corroborate Hermine Penz's (2015: 64) claim that "the ability to build relationships in intercultural contact situations is once again highly influenced by students' linguistic competence". Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2003) presents language as a crucial element in the students' experiences abroad since it enables them, among other things, to establish intercultural contacts:

> The role of language is man[i]fold. It acts as a core motivation in the decision to go and corresponds to a desire for a live relationship with the language and with otherness. It is the key to intercultural contacts and its mastery represents a crucial element, particularly at the beginning when communication is tiresome and difficult. Strangers with insufficient language skills are left outside, marginalised longer than others. In the end, gaining a new linguistic territory may induce an expanded identity, a feeling of self-elation described as 'jubilant' by those who can play with different linguistic identities. (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003: 104)

We have also observed a clear case of self-conception as language learners, rather than users, in Verònica (IT), Patrícia (IT), Ariadna (DK) and Amanda's (UK) comments on the many years they had been studying English at school and their affective stance they displayed towards this through utterances such as 'I was blocked\' (Ariadna, DK), 'it is a huge feeling of impotence' (Patrícia, IT) and/or 'I thought I was prepared' (Amanda, UK). The students' negative evaluation of those very first days abroad due to their perceived poor L2 competence in English is coherent if we take into account that, as pointed out by Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2013), the Erasmus is primarily a social experience, in which social networking appears as one of the main important goals for students. This is also recognized by Pellegrino-Aveni (2005: 28), who reports that "those students studying abroad often look for ways in which to meet and communicate with others in order to broaden their social circles outside of their compatriot study groups", and because the interaction with other internationals and/or the host residents "leads [them] to spontaneous L2 use" (ibid, 2005: 28). As we have seen in chapter 5, meeting non-

compatriots and learning foreign languages were two category-bound activities that the participants in this study initially expected to engage in while abroad. This state of frustration that marked the participants' beginning of their Erasmus experience has been tackled by other scholars (e.g. Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Benson et al., 2013; Harder, 1980; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). Harder (1980: 268), for instance, describes the learner as a "coarse and primitive character from an interaction point of view" and as:

> (…) not understanding jokes and therefore having the choice between sitting tight or being the simpleton who asks for the explanation while the others move uneasily on their chairs; of having so little redundancy that one requires repetition even of utterances the linguistic items of which one is familiar with, thus assuming the unenviable status of the deaf person in conversations; of saying 'yes' where one would have liked to say 'you can't win them all' or 'phew'; reduction is thus far from being a matter of saying quantitatively less (ibid, 1980: 268).

Although Harder's words above do not necessarily apply to all exchange students, they do describe the situation of the majority of the participants of this study, whose identity and socialization were initially hampered by their poor self-perceived competence in English. Indeed, improving their English was part of the imagined self the participants envisioned and, as will be discussed in this section, this seems to be accomplished by a sense of having lost their 'fear' about communicating with people who speak a different language. It is towards the end of their sojourn and, mostly, once in home soil, that the students who went to Denmark and to the UK construct their selves as having gained more confidence when using English and less concerned about making 'grammatical' mistakes. In this sense, it could be claimed that "self-concept and identity developed as a result of taking part in study abroad" (Benson et al., 2013: 88), probably because of what for some of them was the first time in which they perceived themselves not only as learners but as also users of English who have had to "regularly use the language to communicate with others in speech or writing" (ibid, 2013: 80). The students'

evolution or change of their linguistic self-concept is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 29 Evolution of the students' linguistic self-concept as a result of study abroad

	(During the stay)	(After the stay)
Marina (UK)	'you would like to say a lot of things but **you don't know how**\' *(t'agradaria dir moltes coses però no saps com\ )*	'**now I just speak without thinking** about_ whether I'm saying it correctly or not\' *(ara ja simplement parlo sense pensar el_ si ho dic bé o si no\ )*
Amanda (UK)	'**I can't be who I really am** with them because I don't have enough fluency' *(no puc ser com sóc realment amb elles perquè no tinc suficient fluïdesa\ )*	'now **I am really not scared** of speaking. *(ara realment no em fa por parlar\ )*
Roger (UK)	-	'I think I had a good level but_ but now I think **it is much better**' *(jo crec que tenia un bon nivell però_ però ara jo crec que el tinc molt millor\ )*
Ariadna (DK)	'I should have gone··· **done a little bit of speaking** before coming here' *(hagués tingut d'anar··· a fer una mica de speaking abans de venir)*	'**it had a positive impacte** on the language' *(impacte positiu amb llengua)*
Mònica (DK)	'**I can't explain what I would like to say.**'	'I **have lost my fear** of speaking in English' *(he perdut la por de parlar en anglès)*
Joan (DK)	-	'**it made me lose the fear** of using English\ *(a perdre més la por en anglès\ )*
Verònica (IT)	'**my English is not enough**\' *(el meu anglès no és suficient\ )*	'I speak Spanish better' *(parlo millor el castellà)*
Patrícia (IT)	'I understand it but I can't_ **I can't say what I want**\' *(l'entenc però no_ no li puc dir el que vull\ )*	'now I want to learn more Italian' *(ara vull aprendre més l'italià)*

Figure 29 above shows the evolution of the students' discourse as regards their perception of themselves, mainly as English users in the study-abroad context. In the left-hand column, we see excerpts that make reference to the students' difficulties in order to express themselves in English, which they had to face during the exchange. The right-hand column, however, shows the excerpts taken from the narrative interview that followed the students' return from the study abroad-experience. At the beginning of the stay, the students displayed a negative affective stance towards their inability to fully be themselves in and through this foreign language. This stance can be seen in the ways in which they

evaluated their English competence as 'not enough' (Verònica, IT) and/or in their use of the negative form of the modal (*can't*) as in 'I can't say what I want' (Patrícia, IT) or 'I can't be who I really am' (Amanda, UK), which emphasizes this "initial trying period of linguistic fatigue" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 120). Once back, the students' were asked about whether they felt their English had improved. As evidenced in the excerpts presented in figure 29, the linguistic self-concept of those students who went to the UK and Denmark – not of those who went to Italy – appears to have changed, in terms of their self-confidence ('now I just speak without thinking' – Marina, UK). Interestingly, though, these participants do not seem to come back displaying an epistemic stance towards the perception of themselves as language learners but rather an affective stance by which they are now positioning themselves as someone who is no longer 'scared' or who has 'lost his fear' of communicating with others in English. This is illustrated in Marina's evaluation of the impact of the SA on her language competence once she was back in Lleida (see excerpt 89 below). In this excerpt, taken from her narrative interview, she comments on her perceived improvement of L2 proficiency as a result of study abroad, which evidences the affective stance above referred to.

Excerpt 89 'now I just speak without thinking whether I'm saying it correctly_ or not\'

(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Marina – UK)

1 2 3 4 5 6	SÒNIA:	you have told me that you have changed\ right/ (...) what was Marina like at the beginning and what is Marina like now/ and in what_ in what has this new Marina changed/	*tu m'has dit que has canviat\ no/ (...) com era la Marina al principi i com és la Marina d'ara/i en què_ i en què ha canviat aquesta nova Marina/*
7 8 9 10 11 12	MARINA:	well honestly_ i·n in terms o··f English_ I was a person who found it very difficult to speak_ I felt embarrassed when people heard me make mistakes_ +uh·+ I was basically scared of speaking\	*doncs sincerament_ amb· amb l'aspecte de·· l'anglès_ jo era una persona que em costava moltíssim parlar_ em feia vergonya que els demès em sentissin fer errors_ +mm·+ em feia por bàsicament parlar*
13 14 15	SÒNIA:	it does not mean that you did not make mistakes but that you were probably more relaxed\	*no vol dir que no fessis errors sinó que estaves més relaxada potser*
16 17	MARINA:	yes\ exactly\ <u>now I just speak without thinking whether I'm saying</u>	*sí\ evidentment\ ara ja simplement parlo sense pensar si*

18	it correctly _ or not\ (...) the	*ho dic bé_ si no\ (...) l'important*
19	important thing is_ to be able to say	*és_ poder dir el que· el que vull*
20	wha·t I want to say_ without having	*dir_ i sense haver d'estar pensant*
21	to think about_ is this correct/	*en_ això serà correcte/*

It is interesting to see how Marina (UK), after her SA experience, presents a very different self (now being more confident with her ability to use English – lines 16-21) to the one prior to departure (not at all confident but 'scared' of using the language – lines 8-12). Similarly, in the narrative interview, Mònica (DK) contends that 'in four months I learnt more English than in three years here\' (*amb quatre mesos vaig aprendre més anglès que aquí amb tres anys*) and that 'I have lost the fear' (*he perdut la por*) of using English. Although Mònica displays an epistemic stance towards English, she does not specify the linguistic aspects she has learnt, and thus emphasizes her affective stance towards her newly developed ability to *use* this language.

For those students who went to Denmark and to the UK, the study abroad experience has helped them gain confidence to use the English language and, in the case of those who went to Denmark, it has also somehow reinforced their positive evaluation of this foreign language by suggesting that, similarly to the participants in Penz' (2015: 79) study, "English should be available in all areas of society, even in countries where it is neither a native language nor a language of administration". At this point, we need to recall how Ariadna (DK) and Mònica (DK) evaluated the absence of English in everyday life situations in Denmark, such as interactions with the host residents working at the residence or the reading of some menus in restaurants.

The story changes when we turn to those participants who went to Italy, for whom the study abroad experience has not helped them improve their English (e.g. Verònica, somewhat ironically, contends she feels that her oral skills in Spanish have improved). Instead, their sojourn has raised their awareness of the fact that English is not always enough and that, thus, it is important to learn the local language of the host country when it is not an English-speaking one (see excerpt 90 below).

Excerpt 90 'I found very few people who knew English\'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Patrícia – IT*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	any other change/ do you think it has had another impact on you/	*i algun altre canvi més/ algun altre impacte creus que ha tingut/*
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14	PATRÍCIA:	well_ also the fact of wanting to continue learning new languages\ because· I do think you need English to go everywhere but if you also know the local language * of course_ there are people * in Italy_ <u>I found very few people who knew English</u>\ it was like here in Spain where·_ there were people that did speak it but at the residence for instance {(@) not even the porters knew English\}	*home_ també això de vole·r_ continuar aprenent nous idiomes\ perquè· sí que l'anglès el trobo que el necessites per anar a tot arreu però si a part saps l'idioma local * clar_ hi ha gent * jo a Itàlia_ vaig trobar poca gent que en sapigués\ era com aquí a Espanya que·_ hi havia gent que sí però a la residència per exemple {(@) ni els porters en sabien*

Although Patrícia (IT) does acknowledge that English is an important tool to communicate around the world (lines 5-7), in her host country – which she compares to her home country – she claims that English is not present in everyday situations and that, in fact, 'knowing English' (line 10) is not a defining feature of the category 'Italians'. Therefore, for Patrícia (IT), the impact that the Erasmus experience has had on her *self* has to do with her interest in learning foreign languages – other than English (lines 3-5), even though "relationship-building among international students works mostly on the basis of English as a lingua franca" (Penz, 2015: 88). Nevertheless, Patrícia's (IT), and also Verònica's (IT), social networks were mainly formed by compatriots, with whom they 'felt at home' while abroad. It is for this reason that, instead of improving their English or Italian as a result of studying abroad, they construct themselves as having improved their Spanish (see excerpt 91).

Excerpt 91 'we felt at home with the Spanish students'
(*Excerpt taken from the post-focus group with Verònica, Patrícia and her Catalan flatmate Georgina - IT*)

1 2 3	SÒNIA:	in relation to the language_ could you have done something more o··r_	*amb el tema de llengua_ haguéssiu pogut fer alguna cosa més o··_*
4	VERÒNICA:	I haven't had the opportunity\	*jo no he tingut l'oportunitat*
5	PATRÍCIA:	we did\ it was just that at the end	*natres sí\ ha sigut més que natres*

6		we joined other Spanish students\	*al final vam anar amb espanyols*
7	GEORGINA:	it was out fault\	*va ser culpa nostra*
8 9 10 11	PATRÍCIA:	yes\ yes\ it was our fault\ <u>we felt at home with the Spanish students</u> _ and we met the Italians from time to time\	*sí\ sí\ va ser culpa nostra\ ens vam sentir més en família amb els espanyols_ i llavors amb els italians quedàvem de tant en tant*

As the excerpt above shows, Patrícia and Verònica socialized predominantly in Spanish. In the case of Verònica, she felt she did not have the opportunity to learn Italian because she was placed in a residence where most students were Spanish. Patrícia, however, holds responsibility for this by admitting that it was 'our fault' (*culpa nostra*) because their interactions with Italians were limited (lines 10-11), as opposed to those with other Spanish Erasmus students with whom they felt 'at home' (*en família*).

To sum up, the majority of the students who went to the UK and to Denmark seem to show an affective stance towards their ability to use English. They do this by stressing that the SA experience has allowed them to gain more confidence when using this language. However, we see two different attitudes towards the role English has or should have in general. On the one hand, some students display a negative evaluation whenever English is not present – even in contexts where it is not the local language. On the other hand, we see how those students who went to Italy, come back with the belief that English – even though it is one of the languages of instruction at the university – is not (always) enough and students should not always rely on this lingua franca but try to learn the local language of the host country. It is important to recall that Verònica (IT) and Patrícia (IT) reported that English – not Italian - was indeed the other international students' "best second language" (Shaw et al., 2009: 179). This corroborates the idea put forward by Shaw et al. (2009) with regard to the language use of exchange students in non-English speaking countries in Europe: "the students are likely to use English rather than the language of the host country as their medium" (ibid, 2009: 179).

The analysis of the students' discourse upon their arrival has shed light on the different and individual trajectories of each student. Despite the fact that the students share many aspects, comparing their different textualised Eramus stories has offered rich insights into the students' *subjectivities*[23] or identities. Following Jackson (2016), who also draw comparisons among narritivized accounts of different exchange students from Hong Kong about their experiences abroad, individual (apart from external) factors play a very important role when describing the impact of the stay on a student's foreign language and intercultural learning:

> Comparing Serena's developmental trajectory with those of her peers in the main study helps to understand how individual dimensions (e.g. personal characteristics and attributes, motives, language attitudes, depth of investment in sojourn learning) and external elements (e.g. host receptivity, access to CoP, degree of mutuality with hosts) can impact the L2 learning and intercultural development of international exchange students and lead to significant differences in their journeys. (Jackson, 2016: 14)

Indeed, it has been shown that not all the participants in this study construct the same linguistic impact that the Erasmus experience has had on their sense of self, and that this has been affected by internal and external cues; and, ultimately, by individual differences or "attributes that mark a person as a distinct and unique human being" (Dörnyei, 2009: 231). As will be shown in the following section, previous experience abroad acts as an individual difference that ultimately affects the students' discursive construction of the impact of the Erasmus experience as being related to a change in their perceptions of cultural difference.

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[23] The notion of *subjectivity*, as opposed to *objectivity* (Athanasiadou et al., 2006: 1) highlights the individual (and dynamic) nature of identity, which, in turn, "remain[s] subject to the complex discursive interplay" (Nayak and Kehily, 2006: 467).

7.2. Constructing the Impact of the Erasmus Experience (II): the students' perception of 'cultural difference'

> I also used to have lots of stereotypes about the cultures and I've seen they aren't always true. I've also changed my viewpoint of people in general. (...) I've become more open-minded and I made friends not only from all the UK but also from Brazil, China, Africa, USA and all of us have things in common.
>
> (*Excerpt taken from the fifth experiential report, written by Marina – UK*)

Prior to departure, the students expressed their expectation and desire to encounter a culturally different Other – a 'difference' they saw as being defined by the nation-state. During the stay, however, the students start to emphasize the similarities – not so much the differences – with other students from different countries that they have met abroad. In spite of this and, as has been pointed out in chapter 5, the majority of the participants in this study seem to still show a solid and generalizing understanding of 'culture' (Dervin, 2016). The excerpt appearing at the beginning of this section illustrates how a student's lack of previous experience or direct contact with people from other countries may be crystallized into pre-conceived images about them that emerge from stereotypes or from "'collective meta-attitudinal' discourses that lay boundaries between [national] groups" (Dervin, 2012: 186). For Marina (UK), although she still talks about 'national cultures' as the basic unit, the Erasmus has had an impact on herself as regards her discourses of Othering or her pre-conceived ideas about people coming from different countries. The following excerpt shows how, after having been in direct contact with them, this student's contends that 'all of us have things in common'.

Excerpt 92 'I come to the conclusion tha·t_ we are all humans'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Marina – UK*)

1	MARINA:	I was a person tha··t_ * well_ * I	*jo era una persona que··_ * bueno **
2		mean_ I will not say I was racist but I	*o sigui_ no diré que era racista*
3		was very narrow-minded\	*però la meva mentalitat era molt*

4	SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*més tancada* *+mhm+*
5 6	MARINA:	a··nd_ and *no way\ I have made friends from everywhere\	*i··_ i es que * no\ he fet amics de tot arreu*
7 8 9	SÒNIA:	by narrow-minded you mean you probably had some pre-conceived ideas about certain people/	*més tancada vols dir que tenies potser algunes idees preconcebudes de certes persones/*
10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20	MARINA:	yes\ stereotypes\ of course\ whi··ch_ * I mean_ * until you don't know the person you don't see tha·t_ that * I mean_ that <u>you are much more similar tha·n tha··n than you thought\</u> (...) I would have never imagined that I would have friends * the thing is that I have friends fro··m_ Africa_ I have a friend from Malawi and another fro·m_ from Gambia\	*sí\ estereotips\ clar\ que··_ * o sigui_ * i fins que no coneixes a la gent no ho veus que·_ que * o sigui_ que sou molt més semblants del que·_ del que··_ del que et pensaves\ (...) no hagués pensat mai que hagués tingut amics * és que tinc amics de··_d'Àfrica_ tinc una amiga de Malawi i una altra de·_ de Gàmbia*
21 22	SÒNIA: MARINA:	who you have met in Wales/ yes_yes_yes_yes\ I mean_ (...) <u>I come to the conclusion tha·t_ we are all humans</u> and tha·t * I mean_ it is a matter of adaptation\ because· * I don't know\ these girls cooked us some food fro·m_ from their country and I loved it\ when I got here to the UK * I mean_ I started to feel anger towa·rds_ towards Hindus_ because of their way of being and everything_ * well_ they are very chauvinist_ and yet I have a friend who is Hindu\ so_ * with whom I get on very_ very_ very_ very well_ and who is a totally different person from_ from those [Hindu] people who_ who I· * I mean_ that * well_ who I thought were like this\	*que els has conegut a Gal·les/* *sí_sí_sí_sí\ vull di·r_ (...) a la conclusió que arribo és que·_ som tots persones i que· * o sigui_ és adaptació\ perquè· * jo què sé\ aquestes noies ens cuinaven menjar del·_ del seu país i a mi m'encantava\ (...) quan vaig arribar a Regne Unit * o sigui_ vaig començar a agafar molta· ràbia a·ls_ als hindús_ de la manera que són i tot_ * pues són molt masclistes_ i en canvi tinc una amiga hindú\ o sigui_ * amb la que em porto molt_molt molt_molt bé_ i que és una persona totalment diferent a_ amb aquestes persones que_ que jo· * o sigui_ que * bueno que jo pensava que eren així*

The impact of the SA experience on Marina's sense of self is underlined by the change of verb tenses (she moves from using the past tense to using the present tense) and the way she categorizes her two different *selves*: the one prior to departure, which she presents as 'very narrow-minded' (line 3); and the *self* upon return, which she implicitly evaluates as open-minded or as enjoying 'cultural' diversity (line 28). Marina expresses her surprise (lines 15-16) at the fact that she has made friends with people from non-European countries about whom

she had formed stereotypes or pre-conceived ideas, and at the fact that 'you are much more similar tha·n_ tha··n_ than you thought' (lines 13-15). The interaction with other students from different countries has allowed her to position herself as now having learnt that, beyond national borders, 'we are all humans' (lines 23-24) and that we should know the person first before grouping him or her into a category, while suggesting that that person behaves and/or thinks the same way as would all the people with the same nationality. As another example, we can also see how before studying abroad Marina boxed Hindu people into the same national category and categorized them as 'very chauvinist' (lines 32-33). After the stay, she has realized that she should not use the same category-bound features to describe and generalize about the behavior and/or way of thinking of *all* Hindu people. Her new Hindu friend is presented as being 'totally different' and, therefore, as not matching what she admits was a preconceived idea of a cultural difference defined by the nation state: 'I thought [they] were like this' (line 39).

Something similar is reported by Roger (UK) and Amanda (UK) who assert that, prior to departure, they had an idealized vision of the 'British people' and of the UK as a country. Although their contact with 'the locals' was almost inexistent, the following excerpt shows how the SA abroad experience, similarly to Marina, has changed their pre-conceived ideas about the UK and the 'British people'. In this case, though, they do not seem to display a positive stance towards the host country and people:

Excerpt 93 'I had also idealized it\'
(*Excerpt taken from the post-focus group with Roger and Amanda – UK*)

1 2 3 4 5	ROGER:	<u>I was a little disappointed</u>\ before_ I_ I had an image about the UK and * oh my God\ the_ the knowledge centre_ (…) very_ very idealized probably a··nd well_	*a mi em va decebre una mica [Anglaterra]\ jo_ jo abans tenia la idea de UK i * Déu meu\ el_ el centre de coneixements_ (…) molt_ molt idealitzat potser i·· bueno_*
6 7	AMANDA:	yes_ <u>I had also idealized it</u>\ and they are not that perfect\	*sí_ jo també ho tenia molt idealitzat\ i no són tan perfectes*
8	ROGER:	the streets are so dirty\	*està tan brut el carrer*
9 10 11	AMANDA:	they are not so * I had an idea about them like·· very courteous and very perfect\ they are very	*no són tant * jo els imaginava·· allò molt correctes i molt*

12 13 14 15 16		perfect during the day_ but when they go out at night they don't have control\ (...) I didn't like the party there because of this_ because people lose control\	*perfectes\ sí que són molt perfectes durant el dia_ però quan surten no tenen control\(...) jo la festa no em va agradar per això_perquè la gent perd els papers*

Roger's negative stance towards the stance object (the UK) is displayed through the adjective 'disappointed' (line 1) which indexes his affect towards the country which, prior to departure, he asserts he had idealized (line 5). Amanda takes a clear convergent position to Roger's previous stance utterance by the stance marker 'yes' and by repeating the same stance utterance 'I had (also) idealized it' (line 6). While Roger displays a negative evaluation of the streets in the Welsh city where he is living as 'dirty' (line 8), Amanda ties the predicate 'not that perfect' (line 7) and the activity of 'losing control [when partying]' (line 16) as tied to the category 'British people'. The way Amanda generalizes about 'British people' reinforces once more that "the nation-state is still often regarded as the default signifier of cultural identification" (MacDonald and O'Regan, 2012: 553).

With regards to those students who went to Denmark and, similarly to Marina (UK), Mònica (DK) and Joan (DK) display a very positive stance towards the fact of interacting with students from different countries. On the one hand, Mònica contends that she is 'very happy about the Erasmus experience_ (...) for helping me be in contact with people from abroad_ respect_ respect other customs\' (*estic molt contenta de l'Erasmus (...) per ajudar-me a relacionar-me amb gent de fora_ a respectar_ respectar altres costums*). Although it was not initially easy for Mònica to socialize with the other exchange students – mainly due to her perceived poor English competence –, towards the end of the stay she felt more comfortable with the language and, finally, displays a positive stance towards the 'cultural' diversity she encountered abroad and for which she asserts that the stay has awaken her interest in travelling around the world and meeting 'different' people: 'I am willing to travel more_ to··_ to be in contact with people_ who do not necessarily have my customs\' (*tinc ganes de voler conèixer més món_ de vole··r_ de voler relacionar-me també amb gent_ que no necessàriament_ tenen els meus costums*).

On the other hand, Joan (DK) asserts that 'going abroad (…) and seeing other ways of_ o·f living_ new ways of thinking_ (…) opens your mind\' (*marxar a un país de fora (…) i veure altres maneres de_ de· viure_ noves maneres de pensar_ (…) t'obra la ment*). As we saw in the previous chapter, Joan did have contact with non-Spanish Erasmus students and, in fact, he reported doing a lot of group work mainly with two other exchange students (one from Romania and the other one from Germany). The following excerpt shows an instance where Joan (DK), once back, comments on his perceptions of the 'cultural differences' he found during his interactions with these two Erasmus students which, as he suggests, are somehow marked by their nationality.

Excerpt 94 'they have another sense of humour\'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Joan – DK*)

1 2 3	SÒNIA:	and has this Erasmus broken down any·· * any stereotypes that you had/	*i aquest Erasmus t'ha trencat algun·· * alguns estereotips que tu tenies/*
4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15	JOAN:	(…) well_ I think they [German people] have··_ in general_ I think they have a little bit o··f_ * because I also met a German girl in Serbia and more or less * they are similar\ they have another sense of humour\ (…) sometimes we made jokes_ the Romanian boy and I laughed and he didn't\ you know/ and sometimes he made jokes and the Romanian boy and I thought_ what/ you know/	*(…) bueno_ jo crec que tenen··[els alemanys]_en general_ crec que tenen una mica un··_* perquè jo també vaig conèixer una alemanya a Sèrbia i més o menys_ * són semblants\ tenen un altre· tipus de sentit de l'humor\ (…) a vegades fèiem broma_ el romanès i jo rèiem i ell no\ saps/ i a vegades feia broma ell i el romanès i jo pensàvem_ què/ saps/*
16	SÒNIA:	+@@@+	+@@@+
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27	JOAN:	so_ I have realized that with Romanians_ we have * Romanians and us have a lot of things in common\ I can assure you that\ not with the Germans but with Romanians_ yes\but it is true that_ with the Romanian boy_ we have the same * at least_ the same sense of humour\ I don't know if it was just him bu··t_ well_ their colleagues looked the same to me\	*o sigui_ jo m'he donat compte que amb els romanesos_ tenim * ens assemblem molt amb els romanesos\ això sí que t'ho puc dir\ amb els alemanys no gaire però amb els romanesos_ sí\ però t'ho dic de veritat_ amb el romanès_ és que tenim la mateixa * almenys el mateix sentit de l'humor\ no sé si és perquè era ell però··_ bueno_ els seus companys tenien la pinta de ser igual*

In the excerpt above, we see how Joan presents two opposite category-bound features of, on the one hand, German people, whom he describes as having a different sense of humour (lines 9-10); and, on the other hand, he groups Spanish and Romanian people into the same category-bound description as having a lot of things in common (lines 19-20) in spite of not sharing the same nationality. Despite the fact that Joan has also realized that he can share certain aspects with people from other countries, and despite the fact that he only interacted with *one* student from Romania during his stay, we see how he formulates generalizations about Germans, Romanians and even Spaniards as if their 'particular' sense of humour was marked by their very same nationality.

Ariadna (DK) differs from Joan in that she does not resort to essentialist comments, or with what James Paul Gee (2008: 29) calls "simplifications of reality". Instead she contends that, at the residence where she lived with Erasmus students from different countries, the 'country labels' were not made relevant in their daily interactions. This is illustrated in the following excerpt taken from the post-focus group session with other (Catalan) Erasmus students who, like Ariadna, had been abroad.

Excerpt 95 'later you didn't think in terms of country labels'
(Excerpt taken from the post-focus group with Ariadna - DK)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	ARIADNA:	when you are abroad_ they criticize you_ without knowing\ {(Spa) those from Spain are always taking a nap\} and I said to them_ I don't know anyone who takes {(Spa) a nap\} they really see us as lazy\ and this annoyed me\ they think people here don't work\ here they do work\	*quan estàs fora_ te critiquen_ sense saber\ {(Esp) estos de España siempre estan en la siesta\} i jo els hi deia_ jo no conec a ningú que faci {(Esp) siesta\} és que ens tenen per a per a vagos\ i a mi me fotia això\ és que es pensen que la gent aquí no treballa\ aquí si que treballen*
10	SÒNIA:	+mhm+\	*+mhm+*
11 12 13 14 15 16	ARIADNA:	I lived_ * we were twelve at home·_ * at the beginning it is true that you were the Belgian girl or whatever_ but <u>later you didn't think in terms of country labels</u> _ instead we were all_ * I don't know_ * you didn't	*jo que vivíem_ érem dotze a casa·_ *al principi sí que eres la belga o no sé què_ però després ja no ho veies co·m etiqueta de paí·s_ sinó que ja érem tots_ * no sé_ * no hi pensaves que aquesta era d'un*

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17		think that that girl was from	*altre lloc\ com que parlàvem tots*
18		another place\ since we spoke the	*la mateixa llengua que era*
19		same language which was English_	*l'anglès_ ja_ ja et veies com un··_*
20		you were already_ you were	*com un més\ vull dir_ (…) no_ no*
21		already seen as one more\ I mean_	*anaves per etiquetes de país\ sinó*
22		(…) you didn't_ you didn't think of	*tots iguals*
23		country labels\ but rather as all the	
24		same\	

In this excerpt, we can see how Ariadna – another Erasmus student from the University of Lleida – expresses her affective stance towards other exchange students' "pigeonholing [of] individuals into static identities related to national cultures" (Dervin, 2016: 78) and, specifically, towards their categorization and, thus, assumed knowledge about 'Spanish people', as 'always taking a nap' (lines 3-4), as not working (line 8) and, therefore, as being 'lazy' (line 7). Ariadna claims that these category-bound features do not describe all members of the category 'Spanish people' – of which she also constructs herself as a member – and she expresses her anger ('this annoyed me') at the generalizing nature of category-bound descriptions that are automatically tied to certain national categories 'without knowing' (line 2). Ariadna (DK), however, presents an evolution as regards the use of 'country labels' (line 15), which were made relevant in the initial interactions among the exchange students, but which eventually shifted to the background. Ariadna stresses the use of the English language as establishing a strong bond among the students with whom she lived and that each of them, regardless of their country of origin, were considered as 'one more' (line 21) and/or as being 'all the same' (lines 23-24).

In sum, while prior to departure the students who went to Denmark and the UK seemed to offer a predominantly essentialist view of 'culture', and emphasized differences over similarities in their discourse, a diverse picture emerges after the SA experience. Once back, students construct themselves as diversely positioned along the continuum essentialist-non-essentialist perspective. In this respect, we can conclude that the 'negotiation of cultural blocks and threads' (Holliday, 2016) has been differently performed by our students as a result of their transnational experiences. While some of them (like Amanda, UK; and Roger, UK) still rely on 'cultural blocks' to describe the people in their host country – making national

labels and generalisations valid –, other students show change in their description of the other and of the self. This latter group seems to have been "[l]ooking for cultural threads rather than blocks" (ibid, 2016: 3), and thus appear now as being more aware of, and sensitive to, similarities between themselves and other international students and/or host residents. However, even within this group there are differences. Some of them still make national categories relevant in their discourse (e.g. Mònica – DK), and seem to "focus on cultural blocks that, while acknowledging diversity, reinforce the notion of uncrossable cultural boundaries" (ibid, 2016: 1). For others national categories are reported to have lost weight, as is the case of Ariadna (DK). Taking this into account, it could be claimed that, for the first group of students (the most essentialist-like), the Erasmus may have been an epistemic experience, where they have "learnt" something about the 'host culture' (either coinciding with or challenging their pre-conceived ideas). Yet, for the other group (the less essentialist one) it may have been a more profound and transformative experience, with more affective implications, where the notions of self and of other have been renegotiated.

Finally, and with regards to those students who went to Italy, when asked to reflect upon the impact of their Erasmus experience upon return, two of them (Patrícia and Josep M.) emphasized the personal dimension of the stay by projecting their identities as having become independent adults. Once in their home country, they do mention that the stay has triggered their willingness to travel abroad; yet, they do not present it as having changed the ways in which they perceive and deal with cultural differences. This could be due to the fact that, as has been mentioned earlier, these students remained within the network of compatriots, which could somehow problematize one of the aims of the Erasmus programme, which is that of "apprehending Europe at the individual level and developing a sense of European belonging that may impact on the process of European integration" (Papatsiba, 2006: 121). In brief, the students who went to Italy do not seem to present their Erasmus experience as being a transformative one regarding the linguistic and intercultural dimensions of the stay. However, as the following section will appraise, they do assert that the stay had a strong impact

on the personal dimension; it is, in fact, based on this dimension that they express their overall (positive) evaluation of the Erasmus experience.

7.3. Constructing the Impact of the Erasmus Experience (III): A Rite of Passage from Youth to Adulthood.

> After this period of time, I have to say that I think that some aspects of myself have been reinforced, for example, now I take more care about the money and how I spend it, I have priorities (maybe I can't spend money on clothes because I need it for another thing), I'm more organized with my things and also cleaning (my room is in order and I clean it once per week, I do the laundry very often, so my wardrobe is also organized...) I am really proud of myself, because in Lleida my room is a mess, but it is just because I know that if I don't clean, my mum will do it, but here is different, and <u>I have seen that I can go to live alone</u>, because I'm able to do all the stuff without any problem.
>
> (*Excerpt taken from the fifth experiential report, written by Ariadna – DK*)

The excerpt starting this section illustrates the impact that the Erasmus stay has had on a student's identity, regarding her personal growth. For Ariadna, and this has also been pointed out by other scholars, the Erasmus is presented as "result[ing] in an important change at a personal level" (Paunescu, 2008: 201), "a time of being an adult" (Krzaklewska, 2013: 88) and/or as a "*rites de passage*, a ritual or event, which allows them to progress from one status in society (being an adolescent, a young person) to the next status (being an adult)" (ibid, 2013: 93). It is interesting to note how Ariadna, towards the end of her sojourn, describes the changes that she has perceived her *self* has undergone. These changes have to do, rather than with her linguistic and/or (inter)cultural development, with the fact that she seems to bring to the forefront the *personal* changes she has undergone as a result of living in a 'here' (the SA context) that is 'different' (from 'home'). The difference seems to rest on the fact of being alone without the parents' support

and, thus, of having to fend for themselves in, not just academic issues, but also domestic (e.g. 'cleaning', 'doing the laundry').

As tackled in chapter 5, prior to departure, the students expected their Erasmus stay to be a transformative experience, mainly as regards their foreign language learning and their encounter with a culturally different Other. They did make reference to the personal dimension of the stay through statements such as 'I think the stay will change me at a personal level' (Mònica, DK). Yet, they did not seem to be able to specify what they exactly meant by using the vague word 'personal'. It is towards the end of their sojourn and once back that most of the students emphasize the personal dimension of the stay over the linguistic and cultural. This personal dimension is presented as having to do with (a) their ability to be/live alone and to carry out domestic duties; and with (b) their maturity development, which is probably marked by their capacity to manage their emotions such as their fear of the unknown and/or of living new or difficult situations. In a similar vein, Murphy-Lejeune (2003: 106) identifies 'autonomy' and 'self-confidence' as two (non-academic) important outcomes of the study abroad experience, which "gained contrast with the anxiety and fear of the unknown [...] predominat[ing] in the introductory period". As has already been shown, it is, in fact, this fear of the unknown which may lead to the 'easy' recourse to social networks formed by co-nationals who speak the same language. Although Kenneth Cushner's (2009: 160) study focuses on student teachers' experiences overseas, the scholar similarly concludes that the SA experience resulted in a personal growth as regards the students' "increase in self-awareness, self-confidence, and esteem; increased adaptability, persistence, strength and risk-taking; [...] and stepping outside of one's traditional comfort zone [...]".

The purpose of the present section is not to dismiss the impact that a SA experience may have on the students' linguistic and cultural dimensions. However, although most participants in this study mentioned the linguistic and cultural dimensions of the stay abroad prior to departure, what stood out in most students' discourse *upon return* was their capacity to live and solve problems on their own, without the support of their parents, and to be responsible for domestic duties (such as going to the supermarket, cooking and/or doing the laundry). Indeed, the

SA experience is certainly presented as a transformative one at a personal level mainly for those students who, following Krzaklewska's (2013: 89) words, "study at universities in their home towns [and for whom] it is the first time they have lived away from their parents or family". This seems to be totally corroborated by Verònica's words, for whom the SA experience 'hasn't changed [her] in any aspect' (*no m'ha canviat en cap aspecte*) precisely because she had already been living alone for some years prior to her Erasmus. In the following excerpt, we can see how Verònica claims that 'the Erasmus has an impact on those who leave home for the first time' (*l'erasmus impacta més aquells que per primer cop marxen de casa*).

Excerpt 96 'the Erasmus has an impact on those who leave home for the first time.'
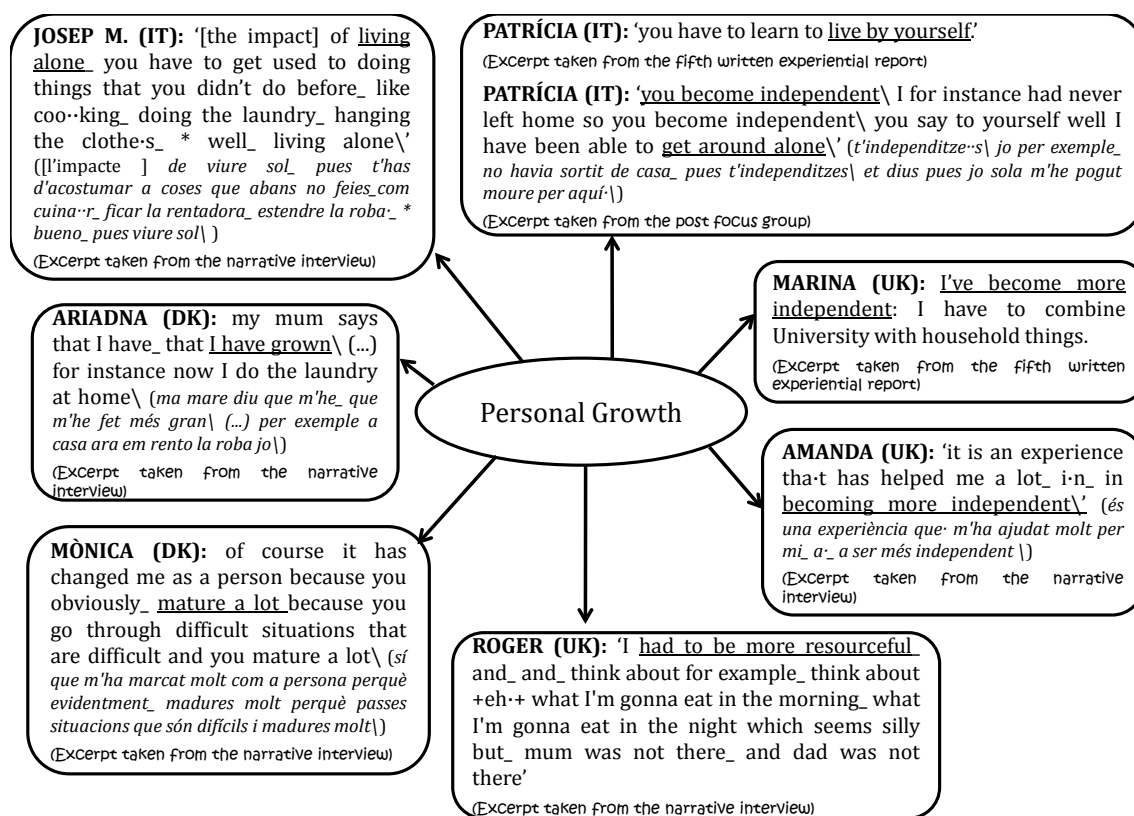(***Excerpt taken from the fifth experiential report, written by Verònica –IT***)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18	VERÒNICA:	As I have told you the Erasmus experience is very comparable to the one I had when I came to Lleida in my first year at University. I can say that it has been a similar situation, so I think that <u>the Erasmus has an impact on those who leave home for the first time.</u> (…) In sum I think that it hasn't personally changed me in any aspect, or I just don't feel or I am not aware of having changed, but it may have changed other people for whom it was <u>the first time you leave home, that you have responsibilities, that you have to take care of domestic tasks</u>, etc.	*Com ja he dit l'experiència erasmus se'm esta repetint en comparació quan vaig vindre a Lleida a primer de carrera. Puc dir que ha sigut una situació bastant semblant, per tan penso que l'erasmus impacta més aquells que per primer cop marxen de casa. (…) En resum penso que a mi personalment no m'ha canviat amb cap aspecte, o simplement jo no em noto canviada ni en sóc conscient, però potser a altre gent si que ha canviat desprès de fer un erasmus i ser el primer cop que marxes de casa, que tens responsabilitats, que has de fer els treballs domèstics, etc.*

For Verònica, the study abroad experience has *not* put into motion personal growth given that it was not her first experience of emancipation from her parents. Unlike those students 'for whom it was the first time [they] leave home' (line 14-16), for Verònica 'having responsibilities' (lines 16-17) and/or 'taking care of domestic tasks' (line 18) was not new and, therefore, the stay did not make her grow in this respect. Similarly, Joan (DK) is the other student who, in the fifth experiential report, also claimed that 'I do think I haven't changed a lot' because 'I guess I got used to being independent when I was at home [Spain]'. Joan's use of

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the subjective marker 'I guess' indexes or displays his "reasoning process" or his 'coming to [the] realization', or [to] 'drawing [the] conclusion'" (Kärkkäinen, 2007: 184) that the SA experience has not helped him become an independent adult; in fact, this is an evaluative adjective he would have already used to categorize his *self* prior to departure.

Except for Joan (DK) and Verònica (IT), the entry into adult life through study abroad is indeed experienced by most participants in this study who, as evidenced in the following figure, come back constructing themselves as being more 'independent', 'mature' and/or able to 'live by yourself'.

Figure 30 The students' perception of their personal growth, as a result of studying abroad

JOSEP M. (IT): '[the impact] of living alone_ you have to get used to doing things that you didn't do before_ like coo··king_ doing the laundry_ hanging the clothe·s_ * well_ living alone\' ([l'impacte] *de viure sol_ pues t'has d'acostumar a coses que abans no feies_com cuina··r_ ficar la rentadora_ estendre la roba·_ * bueno_ pues viure sol*)
(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview)

PATRÍCIA (IT): 'you have to learn to live by yourself.'
(Excerpt taken from the fifth written experiential report)
PATRÍCIA (IT): 'you become independent\ I for instance had never left home so you become independent\ you say to yourself well I have been able to get around alone\' (*t'independitze··s\ jo per exemple_ no havia sortit de casa_ pues t'independitzes\ et dius pues jo sola m'he pogut moure per aquí·*)
(Excerpt taken from the post focus group)

ARIADNA (DK): my mum says that I have_ that I have grown\ (...) for instance now I do the laundry at home\ (*ma mare diu que m'he_ que m'he fet més gran\ (...) per exemple a casa ara em rento la roba jo*)
(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview)

MARINA (UK): I've become more independent: I have to combine University with household things.
(Excerpt taken from the fifth written experiential report)

MÒNICA (DK): of course it has changed me as a person because you obviously_ mature a lot because you go through difficult situations that are difficult and you mature a lot\ (*sí que m'ha marcat molt com a persona perquè evidentment_ madures molt perquè passes situacions que són difícils i madures molt*)
(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview)

AMANDA (UK): 'it is an experience tha·t has helped me a lot_ i·n_ in becoming more independent\' (*és una experiència que· m'ha ajudat molt per mi_ a·_ a ser més independent *)
(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview)

Personal Growth

ROGER (UK): 'I had to be more resourceful and_ and_ think about for example_ think about +eh·+ what I'm gonna eat in the morning_ what I'm gonna eat in the night which seems silly but_ mum was not there_ and dad was not there'
(Excerpt taken from the narrative interview)

The quotes appearing in the figure above provide ample evidence of the students' self-categorization as 'more resourceful' and/or '(more) independent' mainly after having engaged in daily practices or 'household things' (Marina, UK), such as cooking and/or doing the laundry. Indeed, 'living alone' seems to be "the

greatest expression of independence, as well as a big step towards adulthood" (Krzaklewska, 2013: 89). It is interesting to see, though, how the you-generalising utterances produced by some participants (e.g. 'you go through difficult situations', 'you mature a lot', 'you become independent', 'you learnt to live by yourself') are "naturally broadening, or inclusive, in the sense that they typically index commonly held beliefs" (Scheibman, 2007: 112). *Generality* or "how relatively general or specific reference is to people, places, and times mentioned in the text" is in fact conceived as one of the three interrelated dimensions of stancetaking as suggested by Ruth A. Berman[24] (2005: 108).

The passage from youth to adulthood "implies not only freedom and independence, but also the need to face daily problems" (Krzaklewska, 2013: 89). In fact, we can see how some students evaluate this transition as being 'difficult' (e.g. Mònica, DK) – for some participants this is due to their initial perceived L2 competence and the consequent limited interactions with others; for others, this is due to the fact of having to look for or change accommodation and/or having to 'combine University with household things' (Marina, UK). Similarly, Roger displays a clear affective stance towards his Erasmus by evaluating it as comparable to 'military service' (see excerpt 97 below):

Excerpt 97 'first it was a little bit like_ like military service\'
(*Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Roger – UK*)

1 2 3 4	SÒNIA:	what impact would you say this experience has had on you/ what impact/ has it changed you in any aspect/	*quin impacte diries que ha tingut aquest Erasmus en tu/ quin impacte/ t'ha canviat en alguna cosa/*
5 6	ROGER:	<u>first it was a little bit like_ like military service</u>\ right/ I mean_	*primer va ser una mica com_ com la mili\ no/ vull dir_*
7 8 9	SÒNIA:	+wow+ {(@) la mili/} you're comparing the Erasmus with military service/	*+wow+ {(@) la mili/} em compares l'erasmus amb la mili/*
10 11	ROGER:	well_ * I mean_ <u>I have been a spoilt child all my life</u> and there_	*bueno * vull dir_ he estat tota la vida molt mimat i allí_ (...)_+mm··+*

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[24] Berman (2005: 107) conceives discourse stance as involving three interrelated dimensions which are: "*Orientation* (Sender, Text, Recipient), *Attitude* (Epistemic, Deontic, Affective), and *Generality* (of reference and quantification)".

12		(...) +uh··+ it made me_ it made	em_ em va fer utilitzar recursos_
13		me use resources_ +uh··+ * it	+mm··+ * em va fer_ actuar (...) en_
14		made me act (...) in_ in +uh··+ the	en l'àmbit +eh··+ social_ en l'àmbit
15		social domain_ to get contacts_ in	d'aconseguir contactes_ en l'àmbit
16		relation to the house for instance_	pel tema de la casa per exemple_
17		I mean_ +uh··+ it made me_ it	*vull dir_ +mm··+ em_ em va fe··r
18		made me become·· +uh··+ more	+eh·+ ser més {(ENG) resourceful/}
19		{(ENG) resourceful/} and	i després jo crec que·· +mm··+ em
20		afterwards I think that +uh··+ it	va espavilar en el sentit de que··_la
21		made me wake up in the sense	vida és dura xaval\ +eh·+ {(SPA)
22		tha··t_ life is hard lad\ +uh··+	cúrratelo} i· {(SPA) quien algo
23		{(SPA) fight for it} a·nd {(SPA) no	quiere algo le cuesta} que això en
24		pain no gain} wich I already	part ja ho sabia_ però·· però allí
25		knew_ bu··t_ there when * mainly	quan * sobretot al_ al fet de pensar_
26		when_ when thinking_ look_ <u>this</u>	mira_ això serà com quan· me'n
27		<u>will be like· when I go live alone_</u>	vagi sol a viure_ serà algo
28		<u>it will be something similar\</u> I will	similar\estaré sol\no tenir ningú a
29		be alone\ I will not have anyone	qui explicar-li ni les penes ni les
30		to explain neither the pains nor	alegries\ i t'espaviles\ i en aquest
31		the joys\ and you wake up\ and	sentit jo crec que em va anar bé\
32		in this sense I think it was	
33		positive for me\	

In the excerpt above, Roger (UK) reflects upon his past and present *self* in order to explain the personal change that he has undergone after the study abroad experience. While he categorizes the self prior to departure as 'spoilt' (line 11), he highlights that the stay has made him be more 'resourceful' in the sense that he had to deal with different situations on his own (e.g. meeting people, looking for accommodation and taking care of the housework) and, thus, realized that 'life is hard' (line 22). Later on in the narrative interview, Roger again highlights that 'it was a tough experience' mainly because he was not used to 'think[ing] about +uh·+ what I'm gonna eat in the morning_ what I'm gonna eat in the evening_ which seems silly but (…) mum was not there_ and dad was not there\'. In fact, we see how he finally concludes that studying abroad is similar to 'when I go live alone' (line 27).

In a similar vein, Amanda's words in excerpt 98 illustrate her own and also her mother's perception of her 'new' self as having 'grown up'.

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Excerpt 98 'my mum says that I have_ that I have grown up\'
(*Excerpt taken from the NI with Amanda, UK*)

1 2	SÒNIA:	would you say this experience really changed you/	*diries que realment aquesta experiència et va canviar/*
3 4 5	AMANDA:	there I had to do_ * for instance <u>now I wash my clothes\</u> you know/	*allí m'havia de fer les * per exemple a casa ara em rento la roba jo\ saps/*
6 7	SÒNIA:	so_ would you say the Erasmus has changed you in this respect/	*o sigui_que amb això t'ha canviat l'Erasmus diries/*
8 9 10 11 12	AMANDA:	<u>yes\ yes\ yes\ I have become super * very very organized\ ve·ry_ * you know/ like * I have grown up\ my mum says that I have_ that I have grown up\</u>	*sí\ sí\ sí\ m'he tornat súper_ * molt_ molt endreçada\ mo·lt_ * saps/ com que * m'he fet més gran\ ma mare diu que m'he_ que m'he fet més gran*

In the NI, Amanda relates the impact of her Erasmus experience to her growing up and to her now being also responsible for domestic duties (e.g. washing her clothes, line 4). What happened 'there' (line 3), in the study abroad context, has helped Amanda to 'now' (line 4) be a 'very_very organized' person (line 9). For Mònica, the Erasmus has clearly been a rite of passage from youth to adulthood; it has been a transformative experience which Amanda, and also her mother, recognize has helped her grow up as a person (lines 10-12).

The analysis presented in this section resonates to some extent with the findings of Tracy-Ventura et al. (2016). In their mixed-methods study on students' personality changes after a year abroad, they conclude that "the one personality factor that changed significantly after a 'year abroad' was Emotional Stability" (Tracy-Ventura et al., 2016: 120) and, similarly to the participants in this study, the students seem to highlight the aspects of "L2 use, overcoming difficult situations, living alone for the first time, and living in a large city [as] potential causes for change" (ibid, 2016: 120).

To conclude, apart from a linguistic and cultural experience, the Erasmus seems to be, for most participants in this study, a life lesson in which emotions certainly play a very important role. This is, in fact, corroborated by Mònica (DK) who, in the narrative interview, concludes that "emotions do play a very important

role in all this\" and that the fact of not being used to 'new' and/or 'different' things – two evaluative adjectives most students very often used at the beginning of their stay – made the students deal with emotions such as 'fear' – a word, together with the affective predicate 'scared', the students used to refer to their emotional state. Taking this into account, it could be claimed that the students' evaluation of the success of their Erasmus experiences is somehow based on their perception of their perceived personal evolution, namely with regards to their ability to deal with their emotions (e.g. fear) in the SA context which, for most of them, involves the fact of being alone and encountering (linguistic and cultural) difference. Despite the fact that this emotional journey that they live through the Erasmus experience makes the early stage abroad difficult, the majority of students end up feeling 'at home while abroad' and end up displaying a very positive stance towards the success of this experience. This success may be understood here as, following, Barbuto et al. (2015: 268), the "students' perceptions of personal growth, enjoyment and general success in their study abroad programs", also linked to their initial expectations and motivations for going abroad. Their overall evaluation of the stay is somehow reflected in the titles the students were asked to give to their elicited, storied Erasmus experiences (see figure 31 below).

Figure 31 The students' elicited title of their storied Erasmus experiences
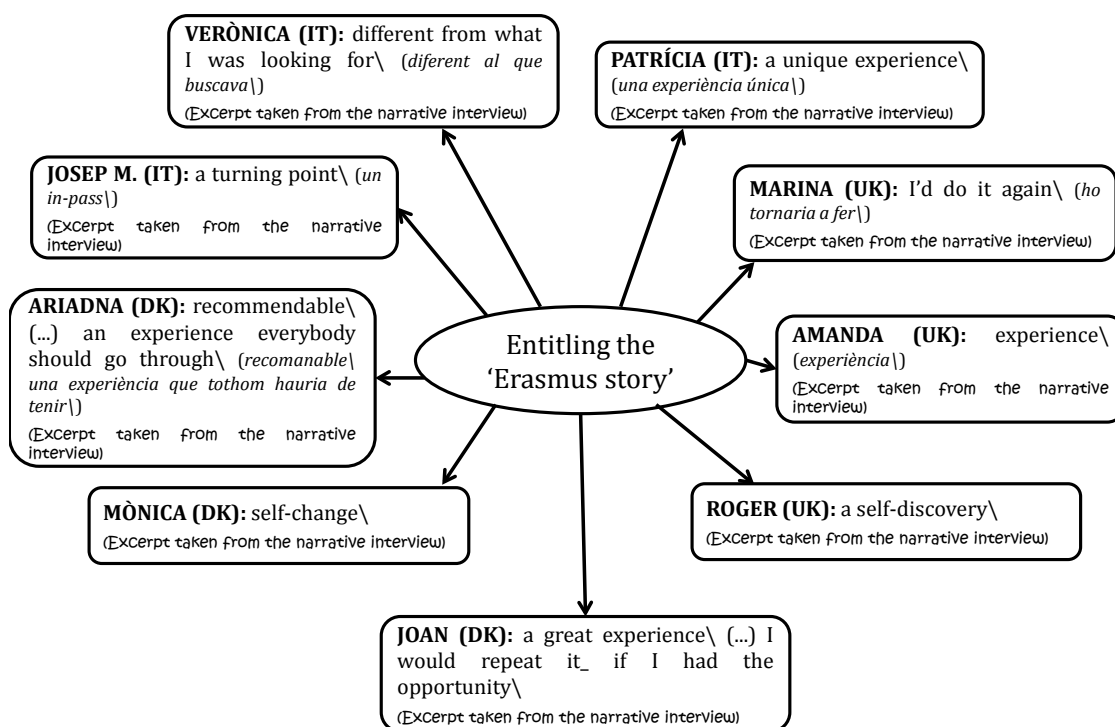
As illustrated by the figure above, there is only one student (Verònica) who implicitly displays a negative evaluation of her Erasmus experience through her title of her storied Erasmus experience: 'different from what I was looking for' (*diferent al que buscava*). Her final negative evaluation is obvious given that, as we have seen in chapter 6, she did not finally accomplish her main objective for going abroad, which was the learning of a foreign language, due to her inevitable link with compatriots. The following excerpt shows her (negative) affective stance towards her Erasmus by expressing her disappointment in choosing a country where having an English certificate is not required and where, therefore, there are a lot of Spaniards (whom, as was shown in a previous chapter) she categorizes as 'having no idea of English'.

Excerpt 99 'everybody goes to Italy because there is no English requirement\'
(***Excerpt taken from the narrative interview with Verònica - IT***)

1 │ VERÒNICA: │ and now that we are here_ let me │ *i ara que estem aquí t'ho dic\ jo*

2		tell you this\ if I could go back in	*ara si pogués tornar enrere_ faria*
3		time_ I would do an Erasmus_ but I	*un Erasmus_ però no el faria a*
4		wouldn't do it in Italy\ I would love	*Itàlia\ m'encantaria ana···r_ a*
5		to go···_ to places +uh·+ * with a	*llocs_ +mm·+ * amb més difícil*
6		more difficult access for us\	*accés per nosaltres\ a Itàlia va*
7		everybody goes to Italy because	*tothom perquè no hi ha nivell*
8		there is no English requirement\	*d'anglès*

Verònica's negative evaluation of the Erasmus contrasts with that of the rest of the students who (a) clearly display a very positive stance through evaluative adjectives such as 'great' (Joan, DK), 'recommendable' (Ariadna, DK), 'unique' (Patrícia, IT); or phrases such as 'I'd do it again' (Marina, UK) or 'I would repeat it if I had the opportunity' (Joan, DK); and who (b) show that it has been a transformative experience that changed their sense of self (e.g. 'self-change' – Mònica, DK; 'a self-discovery' – Roger, UK). An international experience that, for most of them, has been "a catalyst for increased maturity" (Dwyer and Peters, 2004: 56).

Summary

This chapter has tackled the analysis of the students' discourse *after* their Erasmus SA with reference to the impact that this experience has had on their sense of self. Although the students present different stances regarding their perception of change (from 'it hasn't made me change' to 'I'm not the same person'), certain modification of their initial discourses has been made evident here. On the one hand, instead of showing an epistemic stance towards their learning of a foreign language, those students who went to the UK and Denmark displayed an affective stance towards their ability to use English. Upon return, the students highlighted their empowerment as foreign-language-user an as a result of studying abroad. In Italy, students would have prioritized feeling "at home", and thus using their L1 (Spanish or Catalan) with compatriot Erasmus students. These languages – instead of English or Italian – also turned out to be more useful in their few interactions with 'the locals'. On the other hand, despite the fact that the 'locals' were inexistent in the students' networks abroad, and that the participants

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appeared to be confined to the 'Erasmus bubble', the interaction with other internationals ultimately altered the mindset regarding 'cultural difference' of mainly those students who went to Denmark and to the UK. These students would now focus more on those commonalities that they share with other Erasmus students and less on differences; which may in turn reduce their fear towards the 'different other' and thus stir their eagerness to travel. This clearly evidences the change and, thus, the impact of the study abroad experience on the students' discourse.

Interestingly enough, upon return, a new theme emerges from the students' discourse in the form of a specially significant aftermath of the Erasmus: personal growth. Almost as a rite of passage from youth to adulthood, the SA seems to have been a turning point for those students who had always lived with their parents. After the Erasmus, they characterize themselves as more 'mature', 'resourceful' or 'independent'; and this is presented by some of them as the most significant outcome of their days abroad. The chapter has concluded with the students' overall stance towards their Erasmus experience which, in spite of the struggles, the regrets and the diversity of experiences the participants underwent abroad, appears to be positive. It is, after all, an experience most of them agreed they would recommend.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis has presented a qualitative case-study of nine Catalan undergraduate students, with the intention of understanding the way(s) in which they described and evaluated their Erasmus experience and, ultimately, (re)constructed their identities, at three different stages (pre, while, post). The main overarching research question was how these students discursively (re)construct the impact that their sojourn abroad had on their sense of self, while taking into account their initial expectations/motivations for going abroad, their accounts of what actually occurred once abroad and the aftermath that remained once they had come back to their home country. In this sense, the study has aimed to contribute to a greater understanding – not testing – of the *process* that the students undergo, and which ultimately affects the discursive construction of their identities upon return, while making reference to the impact (or the lack of it) that the SA experience had on their sense of self. This process involved their contact and coexistence with people from other countries, their experiences not only as second language learners, but also, for some of them, as first-time-second-language-users, their adaptation to different dynamics within and outside university (e.g. schedules), and, for most of them, the fact of having lived alone for the first time without the parents' support.

As proved by this thesis, these circumstances have not had the same meaning for all the participants in this study; instead, the analysis of the students' discourse has illustrated the diversity regarding, not only their evaluation of these circumstances, but the way(s) in which they have influenced the students' individual experiences and, ultimately, their reporting of the impact of the sojourn abroad. In this sense, the focus was not only on the 'outcomes' of the stay or on the 'post-sojourn' stage, but also on the pre and while stages, which proved to be useful in order to gain insight into the evolution of all those aspects which appeared to be salient in the students' discourse (e.g. their interest in learning a foreign language) and which determined the way(s) in which they finally constructed their sense of self. Echoing the words of Jackson (2008: 240), in order to develop and ensure a SA programme's success, "all phases of the experience

[pre-sojourn, sojourn and post-sojourn] merit attention". In order to examine the evolution of the students' discourses over time and, ultimately, of their identities, this thesis sought to answer the following specific research sub-questions related to the qualities of the three stages of the study abroad experience (pre, while, post):

a) What are the students' expectations and motivations for going abroad (prior to departure) and how are these presented as being part of their imagined identities as future Erasmus students? Do the students' discourses on mobility align with that of the UdL at this pre-stage?

b) How do the students construct their identity as Erasmus students once abroad? In what ways is is their discourse on mobility and, therefore, their construction of their identities changing at the while-stage?

c) What impact has the Erasmus had on the students' identities and what are the factors that, according to them, have determined the characteristics of such impact? Do the students' discourses on mobility align with that of the UdL at this post-stage?

In order to analyse the data, while delving into the students' evolution of their identities, the ethnomethodologically informed method of *Membership Categorization Analysis* (MCA) and the conceptual tool of *stance* were deemed relevant. On the one hand, and taking into account the importance of the social dimension of the study abroad experience, the analysis of the data through MCA has allowed us to systematically capture the way(s) students categorize the people that are part of their SA experience. This has permitted the examination of how this category work has implications for the construction of their and others' identities. In particular, the method was deemed relevant for examining how the students discursively constructed 'culture' by often building up *category-implicative descriptions* (Stokoe, 2009) of *the Other* (and, thus, implicitly of the Self) always marked by his/her national mask. On the other hand, the conceptual tool of *stance* has enabled the identification of the subjective and constantly (re)negotiated meaning that each of the participants attributed to the different

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elements – or *stance objects* (Du Bois, 2007) – that were part of their SA experience (e.g. their social networks, the language(s) used in order to interact with the different networks and their self-perceived linguistic abilities to do so). In other words, a longitudinal focus was placed on the students' evaluative content of their discourses; on their (affective/epistemic) positioning towards and/or evaluation of the objects of stance through evaluative language and always within an interaction, while recognizing that the role of the researcher "cannot be seen as an inanimate machine that records the interviewee's responses uncontaminated by human interaction" (Burr, 2015: 172). Despite this, an attempt has been made to follow an emic approach to the analysis of the data and to focus on the students' voices and the meaning that *they* attributed to the different elements that appeared to be relevant in their experiences.

The analysis of the students' discourse, in relation to the research questions, revealed the existence of three significant emerging themes, which appeared to be relevant for the students and around which the students constructed the impact of their SA experiences: foreign language learning and use; encountering cultural difference; and personal growth. Unlike that of personal growth, which the students highlighted upon return, the first two are indeed recurrent themes that the students made relevant in their discourse not just prior to departure, but also during and after their sojourns. The presence of these "recurrent schemas" could be interpreted as "point[ing] to the existence of shared representations about self and other identity that, in turn, may be seen as basic to the construction of a collective identity" (De Fina, 2003: 181), in this case, as mobile (Erasmus) students.

Prior to departure, we have seen how the participants in this study discursively represented their *imagined identities* (Barkhuizen & De Klerk, 2006; Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2001) as improving their foreign language skills and as encountering 'cultural difference(s)' through their contact with people from other countries. In this respect, at the pre-stage, there is a clear alignment between the students' discourse on their expectations about the benefits of the Erasmus experience and that of the University of Lleida. However, a study abroad

experience has been proven not to automatically foster the desired goals of linguistic and cultural development (e.g. Allen, 2010b). These depend highly on "internal and external factors [which] can result in different outcomes" (Jackson, 2011: 127), as has been observed in the current project. Despite the fact that the students shared the same motivations and/or expectations about the Erasmus experience, which were probably influenced by commercial narratives of study abroad (Zemach-Bersin, 2009), the analysis of the data has shed light on the meaning that *each of them* attributed to the Erasmus; a meaning which is not objective and/or homogenous, but which showcases the individuality, uniqueness and/or heterogeneity of their experiences and, therefore, the importance of taking into account the role individual differences play (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Jackson, 2008, 2011; Kinginger, 2013; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Pellegrino-Aveni, 2005). Therefore, the results of this study consist of the interpretation of the diverse individual trajectories of the participants' 'Erasmus journey', as well as of the identification of the factors that determined their trajectories.

During the stay, and as regards the students' language learning/use experiences, we have seen how they evaluated their early days abroad as 'difficult' (Mònica, DK) and/or 'hard' (Amanda, UK), mainly due to their poor self-perceived competence in English – *the* common language or the *shared practice* (Kalocsai, 2014) within the 'Erasmus bubble' (mainly among international students) in the three contexts (UK, Denmark and Italy). Those students who went to the UK and Denmark subscribed to the (English) 'user' identity – and, some of them, even to (English) user-for-the-first time – rather than that of the 'learner' (Benson et al., 2013). However, '(English) language use' became in itself an *object of stance* (Du Bois, 2007) towards which the students displayed an affective stance that indexed their lack of confidence to communicate with other exchange students and/or to create the so necessary social fabric (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002) while abroad.

Apart from their perceived poor competence in English, the analysis of the students' discourse has allowed us to capture the diversity of attitudes towards *English-as-a-lingua-franca* and, at the same time, towards the local languages of the host destinations. In relation to this, three different profiles can be distinguished,

which are conditioned by one of the main determining factors: the sociolinguistic context of the host destination. First, the students who went to Wales (UK) evaluated English as essential in every domain of their lives abroad (within and outside university). This evaluative stance contrasts with the one displayed towards Welsh – a language they described through evaluative adjectives and phrases such as 'nonexistent' (Roger, UK), 'not heard' (Amanda, UK), and 'not used' (Marina, UK). Second, similarly to the students who went to the UK, the ones who went to Denmark evaluated English as an essential language that they needed and with which they could survive *as Erasmus students*; that is, as temporary sojourners. Danish, however, is a language that they evaluated as 'not needed' (Ariadna, DK) as Erasmus students, but which they recognized they would evaluate as 'necessary' if they considered staying in Denmark for work purposes. Joan's words 'I would probably learn it if I stayed there for work' (*potser l'aprendria si em quedés a treballar allí*) illustrate this. In this sense, the temporary and academic nature of the Erasmus stay appears as another key factor that somehow determines the students' stances (and practices) towards the different languages encountered abroad.

Third, those who went to Italy presented the use of English as a clear category-bound activity of the Erasmus community and, thus, became aware of the importance of being able to use this language in order to create a social network that is not only formed by co-nationals. English is, therefore, suggested to be essential within this community. Yet, their stance towards this language changed when making reference to the reality outside the 'Erasmus bubble' in Italy, where English was not always enough and where 'speaking English bad' was treated as a category-bound feature defining the members of both 'Italians' and 'Spaniards'. For these participants, it was very difficult not to remain mostly with other co-nationals precisely because they did not feel they reached the minimum linguistic threshold in English, which appears as another determining variable: 'the problem is that if I could speak English as I can speak Catalan (...) I would obviously be able to speak more wi··th_ with these people and I could make social contacts\' (Verònica, IT). For them, the stay awakened their interest in learning the local language of the host country in order to fully function in a context where English

did not facilitate the fact of establishing personal relationships with certain types of networks (e.g. the 'locals'). Patrícia's words 'here [in Italy]_ (...) you need to know the local language to make yourself understood\' *però aquí·_ [a Itàlia] (...) necessites saber l'idioma d'aquí per entendre't*) clearly illustrate this.

In brief, it can be concluded that the Erasmus community does not adopt a language other than English, "the Tyrannosaurus rex of the linguistic grazing ground" (Swales, 1997: 376). Instead, this dominant language, which has been claimed to be "involved in more language-contact situations than any other" (Coulmas, 2005: 225, as cited in McKay and Bokhorst-Heng, 2008: 8), seems to be the priority of those students who went to UK and to DK and, thus, "the only game in town" (Block, 2010: 27). These results have implications regarding the internationalisation of higher education. The linguistic dilemma that the students faced are not but a small-scale reflection of the dilemma that European universities with international aspirations are facing nowadays (e.g. the offer of courses taught either through the English language or through the local language/s). The Englishisation of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007) is also present in bottom-up discourses, those of international student communities, as are absent any efforts to learn other languages. However, the story changes when turning to those students who went to Italy, who displayed a very different evaluative stance towards this language (English) as being not always enough and, therefore, as challenging the common assumption that English is *the* international language or the *only* contact language among those who do not share the same L1.

Upon return, with regard to language learning and use, the students' 'learner' and 'user' identities (Benson et al., 2013) evolved and/or changed as a result of having studied abroad. Indeed, the Erasmus experience had a positive impact on the L2 perceived competence of those students who went to the UK and Denmark. Once back, these participants displayed an affective stance (Du Bois and Kärkkäinen, 2012) towards their performance in English, by overtly expressing their emotional state as *feeling* more confident when *using* English and less worried about making grammatical mistakes. For most participants, intelligibility or their communicative success in this foreign language was prioritized over

grammatical correctness and/or their "language proficiency achievements" (Kalocsai, 2014: 32) – the latter being a concern which they reported as being very present in the classroom context in their home country, where the majority of them had learnt, and not necessarily used, the language for some years: 'the important thing is_ to be able to say wha·t I want to say_ without having to think about_ is this correct/' (Marina, UK). This explains why most of them expressed their surprise at (a) their initial inability to use and/or communicate in and through a foreign language they had been *studying* for years; and at (b) their holding of a language certificate, which the university also required them to have for going abroad, and which the students claimed did not guarantee them (a minimum of) confidence for "using (i.e. performing in) [that] second language" (Mitchell et al., 2013: 20). In any case, this thesis, although from a qualitative perspective, complements other quantitative research studies on the linguistic outcomes of SA, which demonstrate that studying abroad certainly contributes to the students' second language acquisition (e.g. Foster, 2009; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Shively, 2011). However, it has to be noted that, despite the fact that those students who went to the UK and to Denmark finally positioned themselves as feeling empowered to use English, the beginning of their experiences abroad was evaluated as difficult, due to their poor L2 perceived communicative competence, which ultimately hampered their socialization abroad and which, on some occasions, also caused their inevitable dependence on compatriots. It may, therefore, be the case that the language certificates required by the students' home university for going abroad were not coherent with the communicative needs the students reported as encountering once abroad. These would, for instance, include the fact of being able to use this foreign language in all domains and situations in which they took part while abroad. For instance, Marina (UK) expressed her frustration at not being able to order Internet for home through English; Joan (DK) mentioned that he lacked basic vocabulary to talk about domestic tasks; and Ariadna (DK), Mònica (DK) and Amanda (UK) displayed a negative affective stance towards their difficulties in shifting from only being learners to also users of English.

Unlike those who went to the UK and to Denmark, the students who went to Italy, whose interactions abroad were generally limited to what they reported as being the predominant Erasmus group in Italy – co-nationals, did not present a different Self upon return as regards their learning of or self-confidence in Italian. The Erasmus experience raised their feeling that learning local languages (other than English) is necessary and advisable. In fact, their interactions with 'the locals' were successful in spite of not using English. Instead, they would stick to their Romance language and communicate through what Block (2010) names *Romance-esque*[25]. In addition, their initial language stake changed in the course of their Erasmus experiences because they seemed to later prioritise other activities such as travelling and hanging out with other (international) students (most of which, compatriots). In this sense, it could be claimed that language proficiency was neither a compulsory requirement the students' had prior to departure nor a priority while abroad.

As noted in chapter 5, the participants in this study expected not only to be thrown into direct contact with linguistic otherness but also with cultural otherness. Indeed, the students left with a clear thirst for encountering cultural difference and/or for the exotic Other, who was "boxed into solid [national] categories" (Dervin 2016: 27), and about whom they built categorial descriptions always marked by his/her national mask and considered to be what Hester and Eglin (1997: 3) name "presumed common-sense knowledge". Their essentialist and stereotypical mode of thinking prior and at the beginning of their stay was characterised by a belief in national cultures as "the prime units of cultural identity" (Holliday, 2016: 2) and by, thus, grouping members who can be defined under the same features (e.g. 'the Danish eat more natural products' – Joan, DK; 'the British are not so open and friendly as Catalans' – Amanda, UK).

However, the Erasmus experience definitely had an impact on the initial stereotypical thinking or *discourses of Othering* (Dervin, 2016) of those students

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[25] Block (2010: 25) reports on his past language learning experiences in Paris and in Barcelona, which have led him claim that, among speakers of Romance languages, English is often not needed and that "these speakers can communicate with each other using the different languages that they speak".

who finally succeeded in forming a social network of international students – not co-nationals (Marina –UK, Amanda –UK, Joan –DK, Ariadna –DK, Mònica –DK and Josep Miquel –IT). These students moved from "distance-maintaining judgements [about the other] because they are not familiar with local rules and symbols related to social identification" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003: 111) to finding commonalities that, in spite of having a different nationality, their networks may share. Once abroad, they became aware of the fact that their initial pre-conceived ideas about members of a given nationality somehow "mar[red] the game prior to departure" (ibid, 2003: 111) and that the lack of familiarity often leads to a vision of culture that does not necessarily match 'reality' (e.g. Marina finally concluded that the category-bound predicate 'chauvinist' did not apply to *all* 'Hindus', as she would have claimed prior to departure). Therefore, the impact regarding the students' discourses of Othering is clearly determined by another influencing factor, which is the students' social networks while abroad. There is no sign of evolution as regards the culturally essentialist discourse of Roger (UK) – who spent most of his time abroad in the library because his priority was to get very good marks; and that of Verònica (IT) and Patrícia (IT), whose social network was mainly formed by co-nationals. It is important to note that the creation of a social fabric abroad may be affected by the following factors: (a) the students' priorities while abroad; (b) the students' previous experience abroad and their preconceived ideas about people from different countries; and, ultimately, (c) the students' self-perceived competence (mainly) in English.

In brief, during and after the stay, those students who managed to create a rich social fabric seemed to (a) highlight the *threads* (Holliday, 2016) or commonalities that they share with the students from other countries they have met abroad (e.g. Joan [DK] expressed his surprise at the fact that Romanians had a similar sense of humour to Spanish people; Mònica [UK] reported having many things in common with a girl from the Philippines; and Josep M. (IT) concluded that 'at the end you realize that we are all young people·· and we are all looking for the same\'); and (b) become aware of the fact that there also may be *diverse diversities* (Dervin, 2009) among people who have the same nationality (e.g. Joan [DK] expresses his disalignment as regards the way some Spanish students

behave). In this sense, the students' experience abroad finally fostered their willingness to travel abroad and to meet and/or to live with people from other countries[26].

Despite highlighting the similarities that they shared with other students, the participants did not get rid of the use of national labels to refer to them; but instead refused the idea that certain category-bound features apply to *all* the members belonging to a particular national category, as they did in the pre-stage. In this sense, we can observe, as suggested in the previous chapter, that there was in fact a certain evolution, a positional movement along the continuum essentialist-non-essentialist view of (national) 'culture', from a mainly essentialist, block-based positioning to a positioning where blocks and threads (boundaries and similarities) were combined (Holliday, 2016). Such a change evidenced the dynamic and flexible nature of identity, as was the hypothesis of this study, and simultaneously placed these 'Erasmus students' closer to the ideal of the 'intercultural speaker' (Byram et al., 2001), that language learner who is at the same time open to diverse perspectives and capable of mediating among them; able "to be 'at home in the world'" (Wilkinson, 2012: 296) or to extend his/her sense of 'home' (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002); and for whom national labels, although still employed, are no longer presented as uncrossable borders.

If we acknowledge this shift in the students' intercultural behaviour, we could claim that this study's results align to some extent with the "new" tenor that the Erasmus programme is acquiring: from a mere "education policy towards an identity policy" (Striebeck, 2013: 198), aiming at increasing social cohesion within Europe, broadening horizons and raising European consciousness, for which "culture and cultural policies are, in this context, considered to be tools for the construction of a common European identity" (Striebeck, 2013: 192). The Erasmus experience has finally had an impact on the students' identity, and its novel

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[26] Although this was not the focus of the present research, many students informed me that they decided to study or work abroad, the academic year after their Erasmus experience.

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cultural asset, as claimed by the EU Commission (e.g. in EU, 2008[27]), is made evident in the students' discourse.

Apart from the gains in the linguistic and (inter)cultural dimensions of the SA experience (Coleman and Chafer, 2011), few studies have focused on the impact that it may have on the temporary sojourners' personal growth (Tracy-Ventura et al., 2016) – one of the gaps the present study has somehow filled. As has been suggested in section 7.3, there are very few studies which, by often combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, touch upon personality changes as a result of study abroad, mainly as regards the exchange students' enhancement of their independence, confidence and/or maturity in coping with unfamiliar situations inherent in the SA journey (e.g. Bakalis and Joiner, 2004; Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004; McLeod and Wainwright, 2009).

In relation to the participants in this study, there is clear evidence that their final evaluation or stance towards their SA experience was positive for most of them – this was, in fact, suggested by the title they gave to their Erasmus stories –, both in relation to (a) their perceptions of cultural differences and their consequent willingness to travel abroad, and (b) their empowerment to *use* – rather than to learn – English. Nonetheless, it was striking to see how, *after* their stay, a new theme emerges in some of the participants' discourse in relation to the impact that their stay abroad had on their identities: personal growth. This was an impact reported by seven participants (Ariadna –DK; Mònica –DK; Marina –UK; Amanda –UK; Roger –UK; Patrícia –IT; and Josep M. –IT) for whom personal development comes before the linguistic and cultural dimensions. When asked about the ways in which they perceived that they had changed personally speaking, the students would mention, on the one hand, their ability to handle difficult situations on their own (e.g. their searching for a flat; ordering home Internet connection), in a new environment and, often, through an L2 in which they initially felt not competent enough. On the other hand, they somehow presented the Erasmus experience as a life and highly emotional lesson that

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[27] "It [the Erasmus programme] enriches not only the students' lives in the academic field but also in the acquisition of intercultural skills and self-reliance".

contributed to their becoming independent adults who had to combine their academic life with housework ('I've become more independent: I have to combine University with household things' –Marina; 'now I do the laundry at home' – Ariadna; 'you have to get used to doing things you didn't do before_ like co·king_ doing the laundry_ hanging the clothe·s_' –Josep M.). Indeed, this had an impact on those students for whom the Erasmus constituted the first experience of emancipation, without the physical support of their parents[28]. The students' previous experience as emancipated young adults acts as the core factor conditioning this outcome. This was, in fact, suggested by Verònica (IT) and Joan (DK) who claimed that the Erasmus has an impact on those who leave home for the first time. For all the participants except for Verònica and Joan, the Erasmus has been a transformative experience at a personal level, which could be claimed to have been a *rite de passage* (Krzaklewska, 2013) from youth to adulthood.

The present study has contributed to the body of research on SA in manifold ways. A first contribution of the present study is the fact of presenting a more accurate view of the Erasmus experience that reflects its complexity and brings to the fore a series of internal and external factors that interplay with one another and, ultimately, influence the direction and characteristics of its outcomes. These factors, which have been previously illustrated, are summarized in the following lines with respect to each of the outcomes that they influence.

First, the students' evolution of their identity as L2 users, especially of English, and thus their empowerment as competent users as a result of the SA, appears as dependent on: (a) the sociolinguistic context where the students are immersed while abroad (e.g. the students who went to Italy did not have as many opportunities touse English as those who went to the UK or to Denmark because it was not the language of instruction at university), which may in turn depend on the destination chosen; (b) the students' self-perceived L2 competence, being it necessary for them to have a minimum L2 linguistic threshold that allows them to

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[28] It has to be noted that, although they were "partly liberated from family constraints" (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002: 74-75), most participants were receiving economic support from their parents and, therefore, were not enjoying financial autonomy.

function in all domains of an Erasmus stay (e.g. Verònica's perceived poor competence in English entailed her tie mostly with compatriots), (c) their previous experiences as second-language-users, and not just learners, for which most participants found themselves in the need of actually *using* English for the first time (e.g. Mònica had to struggle in order to use English in her daily life abroad, given that she had not had any previous experience as an English user); and finally, (d) the individuals' priorities once abroad, for which they might or might not prioritize L2 learning over other activities such as travelling, partying or studying (e.g. Patrícia claimed her priority was no longer the learning of Italian but travelling around Italy with other Spanish Erasmus students).

Secondly, with reference to their language attitudes, these are affected by the sociolinguistic context of their destination, within and outside university (variable 'a' above); and (e) the length and nature of the SA, for which temporary and/or academic-only stays would discourage students from learning local languages (other than English) (e.g. Joan asserted that he would learn Danish if he stayed in Denmark for work purposes – English is enough for a temporary sojourner).

Thirdly, as regards their identity as 'intercultural speakers', this is influenced by (f) the students' social networks during the Erasmus (Marina's contact with students from other nationalities made her question her initial stereotypes), which in turn might depend on their L2 self-perceived competence (variable 'b' above) and on the students' individual priorities once abroad (variable 'd' above); and (g) their previous experience abroad, for which some students may had already started their move towards national-cultural relativism before their Erasmus (e.g. Ariadna, who had had previous experience abroad, appeared to be very open to establishing a relationship with other students regardless of their nationality). And, finally, their identity as 'independent adults', as has been shown, depends highly on (h) the students' previous experience as emancipated young adults (e.g. Roger and Amanda claimed that doing the housework helped them mature).

A second main contribution of this study to the body of research on SA and identity is the deconstruction of what is often asserted as "common knowledge" (Stokoe, 2012a) in many circultating discourses about this type of migrants. 'Erasmus student' is certainly a meaning-laden category to which certain features (activities and predicates) are somewhat automatically attached. The performed or constructed reality present in many discourses about participating in an Erasmus is that foreign language learning and meeting a new culture are unquestionable outcomes of the students' study abroad experience. In fact, as has already been suggested, the students initially aligned with this construction of 'reality' prior to their departure. However, the longitudinal analysis of the students' discourse has allowed to capture (a) the evolution of their discourses in relation to mobility and, on some occasions, their deconstruction of the attractive "common knowledge" prevailing in various circulating discourses), and, therefore, (b) the evolution of their identitites (e.g. some of them felt more empowered as a result of studying abroad whereas others did not, given that their social networks were limited to co-nationals; some of them evaluated English as necessary and indispensable worldwide, while others considered it was not always enough). This evidences the performative (Butler, 1990) and changing nature of identity lacking in "existential coherence and stability" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 33) presented in the chapter on the conceptual framework, as well as the "constancy-change dilemma" (Bamberg et al., 2011: 188) by which the participants in this study were asked to "engage in discursive practices of identity maintenance, as well as in underscoring and bringing off how they have changed". In brief, the students' discursive construction of their individual trajectories can be regarded as undermining what is often assumed to be 'common knowledge' about the Erasmus experience. In other words, this thesis brings to light the existence of a multiplicity of discourses around study abroad that do not always construct 'the Erasmus culture' from an essentialist view and, thus, by highlighting the blocks and/or the homogeneity of the experiences and outcomes of those who participate in it. This is certainly common in many circulating discourses as the one of the University of Lleida which has been analysed in this study. Instead, the multiplicity of discourses showcases the fragmented nature of the 'Erasmus culture', or the complexity and

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heterogeneity of both the experiences and outcomes of the stay which are, in turn, conditioned by internal and external factors.

A third contribution of this thesis revolves around the European Union's aspiration to foster a European identity through the Erasmus mobility programme. In this respect, although the students in this thesis present their Erasmus experiences as an 'identity journey', this does not take the direction that the European Union claims. In fact, the participants' discourse shows no traces of enhanced Europhilia as a result of their SA experience, as had also been defended by Sigalas (2010) and Van Mol (2012). This might, however, be a minor challenge for the EU, since another very important, though not so much popular, aim may be accomplished through the Erasmus programme: that of generating a mobile workforce, formed by university trained workers who are willing to move according to the demands of the labour market and beyond national borders. The participants' enhanced eagerness to travel as a result of the Erasmus matches with such aspirations.

Apart from the contributions mentioned above, the current thesis carries practical implications seeking to improve the qualities of the study abroad experience, by taking into account the voices of those who experienced it in first person and by ensuring that the objectives of the programme are finally met. First, and as regards the linguistic dimension of SA, the findings of this project suggest that the language certificates required by the home university should not only validate the students' 'knowledge about the language' but also their 'knowledge about how to use the language in those social domains in which they will presumably engage abroad'.

Second, the students' discourse on culture still shows, after the SA, little evidence of 'critical' thought. This resonates with Lee's (2011) findings on the high reliance of students on teachers' guidance and feedback for the articulation of critical thinking. It is not, thus, unreasonable to consider that the students' critical thinking about cultural difference – which may, in fact, also be found in their home country, city, university class and/or house, and not necessarily abroad – could only, or at least more easily, be achieved by means of guidance, in the form of pre-

departure courses (like Holmes et al.'s, 2015) or even post-SA instruction. This would contribute to their refraining from stereotypical discourses about certain 'cultures' and/or from certain expectations or myths about study abroad (Dervin, 2008; 2009). An example of a myth about SA could be the fact of seeing this experience as *the* means *par excellence* that will enable students to satisfy their hunger for 'encountering (cultural) difference' – an idea which, as has already been pointed out, is probably influenced by other circulating discourses, such as the one of the University of Lleida which presents the fact of 'meeting new cultures' (*conèixer noves cultures*) as a benefit of any SA programme. Putting an end to ethnocentric beliefs (Holliday, 2010) would, ultimately, generate more rewarding relationships formed while abroad; and would facilitate the students' learning to enjoy and to *apprendre à apprendre* from the *diverse diversities* (Dervin, 2016) that exist both at a local *and* global level.

Third, the UdL explicitly presents student mobility as a key strategy for its international aspirations. However, it does not make reference to any quality aspirations regarding this internationalisation activity, nor as for its consequences. Student mobility, in this respect, is treated more like an indicator for university rankings and marketing purposes than as a service for students-customers. Being the promotion cooperation in quality among European HE institutions one of the Bologna process' action lines (particularly, action line 5), it is striking to notice that its main hallmark, the Erasmus programme, lacks initiatives in such direction. In order for this to be changed, the quality of such exchange programmes should be monitored and increased by means of research, like this study, and informed policies.

It is also important to take into account some inherent limitations of the current thesis. First, instead of focusing on one main aspect of the study abroad experience, there were two main research focuses, which, in turn, also responded to the interests of the larger research project to which this study belongs: foreign language learning, on the one hand, and interculturality, on the other. The need to cover these two interests longitudinally hindered the depth of my exploration, given that some aspects remained necessarily underexploited (the teaching

methodologies of the classes they attended, the process of their creation of a social fabric abroad, their engagement with social activities outside university). Accordingly, a possible enhancement of this study, which could be considered for further research, would consist in focusing on one of these two main themes in order to exploit it fully and longitudinally. Similarly, mixing longitudinality with a great number of participants (data were collected from 30 individuals), though constituting an important milestone of the current study, became in itself an issue. In this sense, during the stay, it became complicated to receive their written reports more or less on a similar date; instead, they would send them to me at different times and, on some occasions, this made it difficult for me to read them in advance in order to later use them in the interviews or during my shadowing visits. Longitudinality, again, combined with time constraints, entailed the impossibility of piloting the data collection methods, and consequently some of them resulted not to be fully effective, being either too general and little focused, or not tackling core but side issues.

Finally, there is an ontological limitation in this study, inevitably tied to its nature: it being my *opera prima* in research, in identity studies, and in cultural studies. Concurrently to the change that my participants were undertaking, I myself experienced profound changes in diverse aspects *throughout* the study. I signed onto this project as a pre-doctoral student, with solid blocks of ideologies, offering myself essentialist and reductionist descriptions of main concepts, such as 'culture' and 'identity', which I would suggestively mention to the participants. And now I can assert that I disembark from it as a critical, non-essentialist, junior researcher, who is now more perceptive to the nuances that participants may contribute with. In this metamorphic process, especially at early stages of the research, there may have been the case of essentialist questions, visions and terms used for the elicitation of data, which I deemed as flaws and corrected in later stages.

Indeed, the present study has been a life learning experience for myself, but despite answering many questions, it also sets the basis for further inquiry. An aspect that could be further delved into has to do with the specific communicative

needs that students encounter abroad. Further research could focus on such communicative aspects and compare them to what is being tested in the language exams that the students are required to pass in order to participate in a stay abroad. In any case, the final aim of this study was to contribute to the improvement of the experiences abroad of Catalan Erasmus students and this could not be achieved without informed policies, for which studies like the current one are essential.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

(Based on Payrató & Alturo (2002) transcription system)

Laughter: Laughter particles are indicated with the @ symbol between the '+' symbol, approximating syllable number; utterances spoken laughingly appear between square brackets.

Lengthening: Dots (·) indicate pronlongation of the immediately prior sound.

Repetition: All voluntary and involuntary repetitions of words and phrases are transcribed.

Terminal pitch movement: Rising pitch movement is marked with a slash (/); falling pitch movement is marked with a backslash (\); continuing or level pitch movement is marked with an underscore (_). .

Reformulation of an idea: An asterisk (*) indicates that the speaker has reformulated an idea.

Omissions: words omitted are indicated with three dots between square brackets […]; a word that was started but left unfinished is indicated by the ampersand symbol &.

Non-Catalan speech: utterances in languages which are not the speaker's first language (Catalan) appear between square brackets with the language indicated.

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