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Emotional Issues in Language Learning: A Case Study of Korean Female Students in Short Term Study Abroad

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This paper examines study abroad students' emotional issues when they first arrived in the target culture. The participants in this study had problems in communicating with the target language and also confronted personal problems such as loneliness, discrimination, homesickness, as well as feeling powerless. This made them easily emotional and venerable, and this influenced their learning, too. The language learners' emotional problems could be considered as a timely matter that would go away as time passes. However, it was important to look at the problems closely and think about how we could help the learners deal with their emotional breakdowns and concentrate more on learning. This qualitative research aims to explore affective part of language learning process in language learners' particular social and cultural environment. Data was gathered by conducting in-depth interviews and shadowing observations in various settings. Field notes were filled, and the conversations were taped and transcribed. The research suggests that emotional problems students face during study abroad can be an important cue that shows how they manage their language learning. Therefore, the findings of this study will identify emotional elements bothering the language learners and provide the ways the learners got over them and become more confident.

[study abroad/emotional issues/second language acquisition]

I. INTRODUCTION

Short-term study abroad is a popular activity for college students. Many Korean college students choose going away from home to learn communication skills in English (Park, 2007; Nam, 2007). According to the Korea National Statistical Office, 76,629 students left Korea to participate in short-term study abroad programs in 2005 followed by 91,538 students in 2006. These students went to countries where they could be immersed in the

environment of the target language, hoping that they could learn English communication skills. The advantage of study abroad could include better understanding of the target culture, gaining global awareness, and acquiring the specific and appropriate language in the particular social and cultural contexts.

However, many of the previous research have suggested that study abroad could be a hard experience and even impede language learning in the context outside the classroom (Day, 1985; DeKeyser, 1986; Freed, 1990 & 1995; Higgs and Clifford, 1982; Krashen and Seliger, 1976; Krashen, Seliger, and Harnett, 1974; and Spada, 1985 & 1986). Among many barriers students experience, a language learner's real life problems including unpleasant experiences and stress outside the classroom were detected critically, and they were involved with students' emotions (Aveni, 2005).

Even though emotional issues tend to be not addressed directly in scholarly articles based on the assumption that dealing with emotion is a "risky business," the discussion on emotional issues of language learners in study abroad needed to be brought out in this article (Boler, 1999, p. xv). Throughout the fieldwork I learned that emotions were not only personal feelings but also a site of language learning difficulties. Emotional issues were important cues to notice language learners' learning processes. Therefore, this study attempts to discuss emotional issues where language learning difficulties lie in a study abroad context.

This research will try to explore this affective part of language learning process in the language learners' particular social and cultural environment. The purpose of the study is (1) to present the importance of language learners' emotional issues in language learning, and (2) to suggest that emotional problems students face outside the classroom can be a significant factor in second language acquisition. There are two main research questions that I will answer later in this paper, and they are:

1. What are the emotional issues that language learners may face outside the classroom in the beginning of their study abroad experience and in what situations do they have those challenges?
2. How do language learners deal with their emotional issues in relation to the language learning process?

In this study, the answers to the research questions are investigated with a qualitative method; the data was collected mostly from interviews and participatory observation. The findings of this study will give implications to language learners on how effectively they can deal with their emotional challenges.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, literature on study abroad and sojourn experience will be introduced. Among them, scholars' accounts related to the study abroad context, emotions in cross-cultural experiences and communication failure are main focus.

1. Study Abroad Context

The students expect that their study abroad provides learning space both inside and outside the classroom. While they have a typical English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom at an intensive English Language Institute (ELI), they have learning opportunities outside the classroom that can be natural, spontaneous, and adventurous. The conversation outside the classroom is considered more real and authentic than one inside the classroom.

Even though many people believe that one must go to the country where the target language is spoken everywhere on a daily basis in order to learn the real language and culture, we can also predict that one cannot just be fluent in the target language as s/he starts to live in the target culture. There are many factors that can impede the learning process. Many researchers show that the outside-the-classroom environment in study abroad situations may not be as effective as people generally imagine. Freed (1995) and other scholars such as Day (1985), DeKeyser (1986), Freed (1990), Krashen and Seliger (1976), Krashen, Seliger, and Harnett (1974), and Spada (1985 & 1986) suggest that "out-of-class contact does not necessarily enhance students' learning" (Freed, 1995, p. 6). Higgs and Clifford (1982) argue that outside contact "may even impede second language acquisition" (Freed, 1995, p. 6). These scholars show that outside-the-classroom situations may not be ideal or safe learning spaces because often the language learners are not ready to face uncertain situations, and they do not simply know how to deal with them.

2. Emotional Issues in Language Learning

Language learners in their early study-abroad period feel difficulties in coping with their daily lives because they shifted from their homes to a foreign place, from their native language to their target language, and from their known identities to their unknown identities. Students who change language environments experience difficulties dealing with their unusual emotional outbreak, and this may affect their interactions in a target culture. Boler (1999) explains that emotions are "embedded in culture and ideology, as embodied and situated" (p. xix). This means that language learners may have to learn how to feel in

order to speak appropriately in the target language. In the beginning of the language learners' sojourn period, they often experience emotional problems such as loneliness, suppression of emotions, and feeling powerless.

In study abroad situations, language learners usually start to live all by themselves and are supposed to be independent. Bystydzienski & Resnik (1994) studied women who traveled thousand miles from their nations to live in a foreign country, and the women in their book say when they leave home, they leave not only their families, friends, and their favorite places, but also "a feeling of belonging" (p. 6). Likewise study abroad students, especially in the beginning period, are not familiar with people, places, language, and customs, and they may find themselves being alone in their dormitory rooms feeling lonely.

Bystydzienski and Resnik (1994), in the collection of women's cross-cultural experiences, say, "several of the women point out that in order to adapt to their new environment, they had to suppress what they were feeling" (p. 4). The women writers in this book inform us that they had to endure and try not to feel what they felt in order to behave appropriately in a new culture. To be accepted in mainstream culture, they had to "[cut] off [their] emotions" (p. 4).

Along with loneliness and suppression, language learners often feel powerless especially outside the classroom because of their limited proficiency or non-native accents (Benesch, 2001). When non-native speakers speak English with an accent or lack English proficiency, they are easily considered to be still learning, or even handicapped (Benesch, 2001; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999, p. 129; & Thomas, 1999, p. 9). Amin (1999) argues that "speaking normal, unaccented English" is expected for "people in power" (p. 98). Therefore people who speak with accent may feel "accent discrimination" and can feel powerless according to this construction (Amin, 1999, p. 98).

3. Communication Failure

When the situations in the target culture are new, the students who have learned their target language in their home country can experience difficulties applying their previous linguistic and cultural knowledge in various situations in the target culture. While language learners are trying out their language performance, it is true that they sometimes feel depressed by failures of communication. During various situations, they would make errors in communication, and some learners even feel like unintelligent people (Brown, 2001).

Allen and Herron (2003) also say that misunderstandings cause discouragement. Language learners might feel embarrassed when they make errors outside of the classroom with native speakers. In addition, their low proficiency in not being able to understand the native speakers' linguistic or cultural context may cause them to feel ashamed.

Furthermore, these misunderstandings can result in inconveniences. Therefore, misunderstanding or miscommunication, whether it is because of linguistic failures or cultural differences, happens more often in the beginning period of study abroad and is definitely embarrassing. It also can lead to a loss of confidence for language learning students.

III. METHOD

This study is designed with a qualitative method and heavily depends on in-depth interviews, observation, and field note techniques. Through these techniques, I tried to listen to, witness, and reflect on what happened to the participants from their perspectives. I believed that the qualitative method gave both my participants and me opportunities to learn and understand their processes of language and cultural learning in their particular situations.

The process of fieldwork took about four months started in December and finished in April. The major fieldwork places were in the English Language Institute (ELI) and in participants' home, located in a small college town in the southwestern state of the United States. The participants had just started to live there as language learners, and they were classmates in the conversation class for low-level students at the ELI. During the fieldwork, I could hear my participants' dramatic stories about their sojourn experiences. Those experiences sometimes are never told because they may be very private and embarrassing stories. I appreciated my participants who shared their own stories, and I learned important variables to language learning from them.

1. Participants

Three young women, Jeongmin, Minju, and Heeyeon (all pseudonyms), joined the study as participants. They were short-term study abroad students from South Korea who enrolled at the English Language Institute (ELI) in the University of South Western Virginia for their first semester. All three participants happened to be female students. In a qualitative study, the number of participants can be small. I actually started with one participant and added two more later. In this process my first participant was female, and the others were her friends who were also female. Neither did I have any intention to include only female participants. For this reason the research is not intended to speak for both genders.

The first participant, Jeongmin, just graduated from university, and both Minju and Heeyoen took a leave of absence for a year from their universities. Jeongmin majored in

English, Minju majored in Education, and Heeyeon majored in Art. Jeongmin was the key participant because she allowed me to follow her extensively from her arrival to her departure. The other two participants, Minju and Heeyeon contributed in an intensive interview and permitted me to gather information through sequential observations on them.

2. Data Collection

Data was collected through systematic semi-formal interviews and shadow observations. The data collection took about four months from Jeongmin's arrival (December 19, 2001) to her departure at the end of spring semester (April 24, 2002). I developed a 14-page log and 39-page transcriptions from four in-depth interviews; 15 full printed pages of text and 78 pages of hand-written field notes including participant observations and shadowing observations. (See Table 1)

TABLE 1

Data Collection

Fieldwork Period	December 19, 2001 ~ April 24, 2002		
Methods	Interview	Observation	Field notes
Number of pages developed	39 pages of transcription	78 pages of hand written journals	
	14 pages of the shadowing log	15 pages of fully printed journals	

1) Interviews

The first informal interview was conducted with Jeongmin on her fist day, December 19, 2001, and three semi formal interviews were followed starting in January in 2002. I also conducted one long in-depth interview with Minju and Heeyeon together in March. Each interview question was open-ended, and the interview was semi or non-structured. Open-ended questions can allow the participants to reflect on their behavior and their ideas (Merriam, 1998). The interviews lasted for about an hour and half. Among four interviews, two interviews were conducted in public places: a coffee shop with Minju and Heeyeon, and a shopping mall with Jeongmin. Another two interviews with Jeongmin were conducted in private places, in her apartment, and in my car. After tape recording the interviews, I transcribed them and stored them in my house. (See Table 2)

The interviews were in Korean which was the participants' first language. In their native language, the participants could articulate their detailed experiences and delicate feelings.

Sometimes English was used to in talks with the key participant, Jeongmin. She wanted to speak English during shadowing observation. The conversations were taped in English. (See Table 2)

TABLE 2

Interview

Participant	Jeongmin			Minju	Heeyeon
Interview	3 semi formal interviews			1 long in-depth interview	
Time (in 2002)	January 26	February 24	April 6	March 22	
Place	In the car	In the shopping mall	In her apartment	In the coffee shop	
Language	Korean/English	Korean	Korean	Korean	

2) Shadowing Observation

While the participants moved from one place to another throughout the fieldwork period, I observed their natural communication and interaction with people in natural settings, such as at the mall, grocery stores, or their home. It was difficult to follow them to observe their ways of communicating day and night, but worthwhile. Shadowing surely needs prior time to get to know the participants and build trustful relationships with them. Before any shadowing is planned, participants' permission is necessary. A researcher should make sure that her/his participants do not mind her/his presence in their activities (Jones, 1996). In addition, a researcher should use observations "only when [s/he] genuinely wants to learn what is going on in a setting, [and] only when [s/he] can approach the setting with an open mind"(Jones, p. 69). This was an important tip that was followed during the entire observation period.

3) Field Notes

Field notes were produced on the days of observation and interviews. As a qualitative researcher, I tried to be as descriptive as I could. I tired to remember what I observed in order to write down the observation in the field journal as soon as I found a chance to include it. However, memory may not be perfect, so researchers should do their best to take more field notes when they are actually in the field. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) emphasize the importance of keeping field notes and say, "the sense that field-notes get in the way of intuitive understanding and deeper analytic insight reflects a theoretical commitment to grasping the 'big picture' and to identifying broad patterns of activity

rather than to tracking day-to-day routines and processes" (p. xii). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw point out, "through trial and error field researchers evolve distinctive practical styles for writing jottings" (p. 20). Filed note taking itself was an important part of data analysis because it helped me focus intensively on the research questions for trying to solve the problems.

3. Data Analysis

Important themes emerged during the fieldwork, and they were constantly categorized and organized. Writing was an important part of analysis. As Merriam (1998) says, themes and patterns arise during interviews, observation, and field note writing. While writing journals and filed notes, I could reflect on what happened, and it allowed me to plan what I would do in the next visit or interview with the participants.. Doing the entire fieldwork should be part of analysis since the researcher of a qualitative study is also a research instrument herself/himself.

In this study there were two types of data that needed conversation analysis. One was the natural conversation in shadow observations, and the other was the interview transcript. During shadow observations, the participants were occasionally engaged in conversation mostly with their classmates, ESL teachers, and other native speakers. These conversation parts were analyzed to see how their emotional stress had been illustrated, described, and shaped. Also the interview transcripts directly implied a lot of information on participants' emotional challenges. However, differently from linguists' traditional meaning of conversation analysis, this study includes analysis used as to understand what the participants implied, meant, and connoted. Conversation excerpts were pulled from the transcripts to provide the evidence of contents in the findings.

4. Limitation of the Study

This study covers a short term of Korean study abroad students' lives. This study is focused only on the beginning period of their living experience in the target culture. The findings about the students' experiences mainly reflected on the beginning or the middle of their whole journeys of second language and cultural learning. This study does not explore the whole process of their language learning, so that discussion was limited and was not sufficient to bring out other important aspects such as acculturation and gender issues.

IV. FINDINGS

The study abroad students considered the world outside the classroom as a continuation of their language classroom, but more often in their real life outside the classroom, they faced everyday life problems which were not directly related to their language learning. Many times, they had to deal with more serious and unexpected problems than language learning such as their loneliness, time management, food, and relationships. In addition, they failed to notice the fact that they had big changes in their daily lives. In other words, they did not know what to do with these different realities. Everyday lives were different in all aspects from those whom they met, where they went, and what they did to how they should think and act through a sudden transition (Schlossberg, 1984).

There surely existed deficiencies between two languages and two cultures, so it must be natural for language learners who arrived "fresh off the boat" not to be able to know how to express their needs and feelings in the target language immediately. This was stressful and gave them a hard time to adjust to the new environment. Especially in the beginning period of study abroad, language learners went through unusual emotional problems that were important cues to recognize their difficulties in adjusting to the new culture and the new language. By recognizing their emotional problems, I learned where language learners' difficulties lie and how they dealt with their difficulties.

In this section, direct quotes and comprehensive descriptions provide evidence in their emotional breakdowns in the beginning of their experience and their progress. The research questions are again listed below as a reminder.

1. What are the emotional issues that language learners may face outside the classroom in the beginning of their study abroad experience and in what situations do they have those challenges?
2. How do language learners deal with their emotional issues in relation to the language learning process?

1. Facing Emotional Issues

The participants felt stressed and often said that they just wanted to go back home. There may have been a couple of reasons for having stress and homesickness, and these reasons are consequences of one another. Among three participants, Minju and Heeyeon expressed their feelings about being apart from their families and physical symptoms of homesickness during the interview. The interview excerpt (March 22, 2002) shows how they felt about being apart from their family and friends. (See Excerpt 1)

Excerpt 1
Minju: I was depressed. I got homesick.
Researcher: How did you find out?
Minju: It's very dry here. I had a skin problem. I thought I had a serious illness. It was not a bug bite. You know, when you are sick, you miss your home. I was sick like that for about 10 days.
Researcher: How serious was it?
Minju: I just wanted to go back home. There was nothing to do with it. I felt that time passed so slowly here.
Researcher: Did you sometimes cry?
Minju: Yes. While I was writing my daddy an e-mail note...
Heeyeon: I had that, too. Even though I am living with my (Korean) relatives, I felt like an outsider. I had to make sure that I don't bother them. I had unusual pimples on my face. (Interview with Minju and Heeyeon, March 22, 2002)

Minju and Heeyeon expressed that language learning was stressful for them. It was more stressful because they did not have close friends or family to share with their difficulties with. Minju and Heeyeon both experienced unusual physical signs such as skin problems and often cried due to loneliness. Jeongmin also wrote in her email on February, after about 2 months of staying in America, "I think I got homesick. I don't like to go out and talk to foreigners. I don't know why I am feeling this way" (e-mail conversation, February 18, 2002) Like Minju and Heeyeon's skin problem, Jeongmin had a physical sign of stress. She developed a chronic stomach ulcer over time. Her sickness was out of stress that she didn't realize before, but she believed her stress and anxiety came from her desire to speak English well (Jeongmin, interview, April 6).

There were incidents where Jeongmin went for her chance to practice her English, but her lack of knowledge about how to act and say in different situations made her depressed. One incident happened when Jeongmin was invited to her roommate's friend's birthday party in a restaurant. Jeongmin said that she was "kind of shocked" because she had to pay for her dinner and tip as well. She thought that a girl who invited her was going to pay for the food, which was common in Korea. These American young college students insisted on "going Dutch" even at someone's birthday party. Jeongmin was frustrated when her roommate asked her to pay for her meal. Moreover, Jeongmin was even hurt by the birthday girl who overtly showed disappointment for the birthday present from Jeongmin. Jeongmin guessed that she was invited just because she looked rich, and that the birthday girl expected a rather expensive present. I was not able to check if Jeongmin's interpretation was right or whether she misunderstood the birthday girl. In the interview,

she said that she did not enjoy the party at all and decided not to go back to any other party with Americans. She said that she definitely felt like an outsider at the party (Jeongmin, interview, January 26, 2002).

Another incident showed that Jeongmin felt discriminated against. Jeongmin once reported that she had a verbal fight with a supermarket manager. Jeongmin was shopping with her Japanese friend Tomoko. When she waited in the line at the cashier's counter, she found that she did not want to buy one item she had picked up. Jeongmin told the cashier that she did not want it, and the cashier said something that Jeongmin did not understand. At that moment, communication broke down. Jeongmin thought that the cashier was rude to her and wanted to talk to the manager about the cashier's rude actions. However, instead of an apology, Jeongmin got another long English explanation from the manager that she could not understand either. Jeongmin was still upset when she decisively told me that the manager was a racist.

Jeongmin said that it was an incident of discrimination of people who could not speak English; however, at the same time it could be an incident of failure in communication. Jungmin failed to understand the manager, and the manager failed to make her understand his English. There were chances that Jeongmin could have understood the manager better if Jeongmin knew customs in the supermarket in the United States: how to refund or exchange. Whatever the reason is, the more important thing in this discussion is that Jeongmin was upset and felt bad because she thought that she was treated poorly because of her limited English proficiency. Unfortunately, the participants in my study and my other Korean friends said that they felt that some native speakers of English have treated them almost like stupid persons or disabled persons.

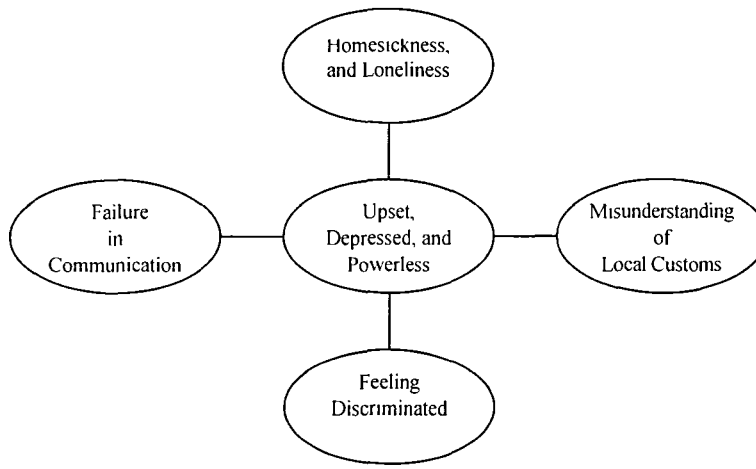
The language learners were sensitive to other people's reactions. They often faced puzzled looks from their interlocutors which meant that they failed to convey the messages. Many times, as a stranger in a new place and culture, they did not know how to act or talk in a situation. They were often embarrassed and felt English to be more difficult. For example, during the first few days, when Jeongmin moved into a four-bedroom apartment with three American undergraduate students, she was invited several times to have meals together with her roommate Kate (Jeongmin, interview, January 26, 2002). Jeongmin accepted her dining invitation every time Kate asked. However, Jeongmin felt something wrong because after a few invitations, Kate avoided her, especially at mealtime. Jeongmin said that Kate intentionally ate after Jeongmin finished her meal. It turned out that Kate's invitation was just a courtesy. Whenever she said, "Would you like to have some?" Jeongmin said, "O.K. Thank you." Jeongmin did not know that Kate was actually asking a rhetorical question. She learned from this experience to say, "No, thanks."

Jeongmin could articulate her situation of not being able to behave properly. She said that she appreciated her housemates for being kind and helpful, but their kindness made her

feel small. She continued to say that she felt powerless before them. She even made up her mind to pretend to be powerful by murmuring the word, 'powerful' over and over before she went out of her room (Interview, January 26. 2002).

I found that the participants of this study experienced homesickness, loneliness, feeling discriminated against, failure in communication, and misunderstanding of local culture. These negative experiences have made the participant feel depressed and powerless. Consequently and unfortunately they avoided possible interactions and learning opportunities. The consequences are shown in the figure one.

FIGURE 1
Emotional Issues in Consequence



2. Getting over Emotional Issues

As everyday practice accumulates, the participants became more easygoing and less stressed. Time could cure their broken hearts, but study abroad language learners still need to feel good about themselves while learning the target language and living in the target culture. They need experiences that encourage them to participate in the communication events and activities. The participants of the study learned that they felt better when they had successful experience in communicating with other people. When their English was understood by people, they could get over their depression. In addition, they felt much better due to the fact that they courageously tried and actually talked in the target language.

Jeongmin was always looking for the opportunity to talk to people. Jeongmin chose living with American college girls in order to have more opportunities to interact with native speakers easily. Jeongmin said, "When my roommate's door is open, I feel free to go

and talk to her, but when the door is closed, it means 'do not bother'" (Jeongmin, interview communication, January 26). She added that most of time the conversation with her roommate was initiated by her asking for a favor. Jeongmin pointed out that "90% of the conversation" usually happened in her roommate's room (Jeongmin, interview communication, January 26). This means that Jeongmin actively initiated conversation with her roommates, and she did it for the purpose of learning English. She said that she felt more comfortable with her roommates around because she understood them better and they understood her better than before. She assured me that her English improved in listening and speaking (Interview, February 24, 2002).

One of the easiest but costly activities that study abroad students look for can be commercial encounters for communication practice. Language learners can attempt to talk to clerks, waiter, waitresses, and cashiers at various commercial places such as restaurants and shopping malls. One day, Jeongmin continued to talk to the clerk after she bought a swimming suit at the mall. Jeongmin felt comfortable asking some questions and tried out her English with the nice shopping clerk. The next shown below is an excerpt from the conversation between Jeongmin and the shopping clerk at the mall. (See Excerpt 2)

Excerpt 2

Jeongmin: Yeah. Can I ask? Where can I find "Express" or "Limited?" (for ladies' clothes)

Clerk: Find what?

Jeongmin: Ah. "Express." That is a store's name maybe. Name of store.

Clerk: "Express?" No. I'm not familiar with it. No. Sorry.

Jeongmin: One more question? If you don't mind.

Clerk: Not at all.

Jeongmin: (laugh) If I don't like this, until when can I exchange this?

Clerk: Whenever you need to. You know. Tomorrow if you'd like. Or next week. You know, couple of weeks from now. Just you know, whenever you need to. We'll be fine.

Jeongmin: Thank you very much.

Clerk: You're welcome. Y'all have a nice evening.

Jeongmin: Thank you. (Observation and tape recording. February 24. 2002)

When I asked her about her conversation with the clerk, Jeongmin said that she felt good about her trial. She got to learn how to get over her feeling anxious. Minju and Heeyeon had also a similar experience at a Subway restaurant (Minju & Heeyeon, interview, March 22, 2002). When they first went to Subway, they did not know how to order. First they could not understand what the "foot long" meant, and then they did not know how long the sandwiches were: foot long or 6-inch. Minju said that once she did not remember the English word for "lettuce" to her embarrassment. She said that she knew the word but

could not remember it at that moment. It was hard for her to describe the vegetable when people were lining up next to her waiting to order. However, they liked the sandwiches and returned to the Subway restaurant quite often, which was the closest lunch place to the English Language Institute. By the time I interviewed them, having lived for about two months in the States, they could order with their eyes closed. Their needs of negotiation in communication significantly reduced over time in commercial encounters, but they gained confidence.

Actually the more times my participants practiced and the more interactions they made, the better they felt. Whether it was for buying something, paying money for their food, or asking directions, it took time for the language learners to get adjusted and familiar with the situations. Temporarily they were disappointed with their poor performance at the first encounters, but they got better and better with the situations, and finally it was no longer the problem at all. They knew they were accustomed to the particular rituals of everyday life. Then they even forgot how difficult it was to begin living in a foreign country.

Taking each opportunity to act in a real life was the key way for language learners to get over their emotional issues while avoiding situations could only delay learning. As their understanding of how native speakers speak and act in that particular local culture was developed, they became confident and would not make the same mistakes or misunderstand as they did when they first arrived in town. However, it does not mean that the emotional challenges would all go away after they lived a couple of months in a foreign country. Stress could be reduced progressively, but it was still there until the language learners were sure about what they said and did with the target language in the target culture.

V. CONCLUSION

The result of the study shows that all three female participants had emotional issues in their beginning period of study abroad. They experienced emotional breakdowns, and these experiences affected their language learning in problematic ways. During the fieldwork, I heard and witnessed my participants' emotional hardships. When I met my participants for the first time, they felt more tired and stressed. They got tired of being anxious. While they were trying to communicate in the target language and understand the target culture, they became highly stressed in both their mind and body. They neglected to look at their transitional difficulties or emotional problems and even got very sick physically. Furthermore, these language learners in the target culture were somewhat segregated from native speaking college students or native speakers in the community, and felt and

experienced being marginalized because of their less-than-proficient English.

One can easily assume that emotional breakdown is part of language and culture learning as an affective factor, but it is also true that language learners' emotional problems are either overlooked or ignored. We often think that emotions are separated from our rationality, and learning, not emotion, is how we activate our knowledge. Students' parents or classmates back home can simply say that language learners' emotional problems are dispensable, or the problems which go away automatically as time passes. They think that study abroad students have paid so much money to live and study in a foreign country, and they should live with the emotional consequences of their choice.

However, the findings of the research prove that language learners were surely stressed and vulnerable, and their emotional conditions influenced their performance in language learning. Since emotion is closely related to social and cultural learning, learners may overcome with the emotional problems as their understanding of the local society and culture grew. Once the language learners gain linguistic and cultural fluency, they might not even remember how difficult it was to adjust in the new community as strangers. For this reason it was necessary to collect data directly from newly arrived students who faced the problems at the beginning of their stay in order to see how they coped emotionally with challenges in a foreign country.

In conclusion, language learners need to learn how to empower themselves by taking opportunities in various social and cultural situations inside and outside the classroom. They should participate in the communication events around them as much as they can to understand two cultures, their own culture and the target culture. They should also interact with native people as resources to understand their social and cultural practice. Meanwhile, they need to give themselves time to speak and act appropriately in the target culture. They do make mistakes and errors linguistically and culturally and should it is okay to do that. More importantly they should take this as a learning opportunity.

Johnson (1939) says: "language learning is 'not an acquisition of knowledge, but a growth in power, not a process of accumulation of a certain number of essential facts about the language, but a process of developing skills in using the language as a tool to understand the thoughts of others, and, to a lesser degree, to increase one's power of self-expression'" (Byrnes, 2000, p. 478). Study abroad experience should not be simply an experience of learning English, but also of gaining power to express oneself through the learning process in students' daily lives. Language learners in study abroad programs can be better prepared for their emotional challenges if they have better understanding of the language learning process inside and outside the classroom. Language educators also should not overlook their students' emotional issues but look for them to help their learning.

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Examples in: English
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