With the development of internationalisation and globalisation on campuses, more and more universities encourage their students to participate in study abroad (SA) programs in a foreign language and culture. The programs offer a wide range of options and set various goals for SA students to achieve. According to the statistical data reported in this book, there were 2.7 million students receiving higher education overseas in 2004 and the number continues to increase.

Making use of poststructuralist and sociocultural perspectives, *Language, Identity and Study Abroad: Sociocultural Perspectives* addresses ‘the nature of language learning, identity (re)construction, and the development of intercultural communicative competence and intercultural personhood in L2 sojourners and also tests contemporary sociocultural perspectives by investigating the actual experiences of L2 sojourners’ (p.11). The book reports on an ethnographic study of the Special English Stream (SES), a short-term study and residence abroad program for English majors at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, which is designed to enhance the language and cultural learning of participants and investigate the development of bilingual (multilingual) and bicultural (multicultural) identities across time and space.

The book, as the author explains, particularly explores ‘how adult advanced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners view themselves and use languages (Cantonese, English and Mandarin Chinese) in their home environment before, in and after travelling to an English-speaking country’ (p.2). By presenting the experiences and voices of L2 sojourners in their exhilarating and sometimes tumultuous journeys of discovering Self and Other as they travel from their home environment to the host culture and back again, the book illustrates the complex individual processes of language and cultural learning and identity (re)construction which were often underrepresented or marginalised in previous studies.

This book is divided into ten chapters. In the opening chapter, the author provides an overview of the book and briefly reviews studies on SA since 1995 from the perspective of applied linguistics, cross-cultural psychology and intercultural relations. She points out that these studies often consist of large-scale surveys and statistical analysis but fail...
to probe the actual experiences, perceptions, and transformations of individual L2 sojourners.

Following the introductory chapter are two chapters of literature review. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT), Bakhtin’s conceptualisation of dialogism and cultural-linguistic hybridity, and Bourdieu’s theory of language, power and social life are reviewed in Chapter 2. Building on the constructs in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 discusses poststructural theories of language, identity and cultural socialisation, a contemporary theory of situated learning, namely, communities of practice (CoP) and integrative identity negotiation theory (INT). Concepts of ‘thirstspace’ and the ‘intercultural speaker’ relating to border crossing are also analysed.

The fourth chapter introduces the author’s ethnographic study of Hong Kong university students who participated in a five-week SA program in England. It includes a description of the program, an introduction to the methodological framework, including procedures in data collection and analysis, and an overview of the organisation of each case study reported in the following four chapters.

Chapters 5 through 8 present the individual case studies of the four female participants: Ada, Cori, Elsa, and Niki (all pseudonyms). In each case-study chapter, the author explores the personal journey of the women as they travel from Hong Kong to England and back again by dividing each case into three different phases. The first phase focuses on the participant’s pre-sojourn characteristics (identities, language and cultural background), aspirations and concerns about living in England. In the second phase, their five-week experiences in the host culture were tracked and presented in chronological order. In the third phase, the women’s post-sojourn perceptions and reflections on experiences in England and reentry to Hong Kong were investigated. Though all are Hong Kong Chinese, Ada, Cori, Elsa and Niki had different experiences in sojourning and the outcomes of their sojourning vary. When experiencing miscommunication across cultures and sociopragmatic failures, Ada and Cori resisted using English in social situations, found it hard to build relationships with their host and were more ethnocentric. Elsa and Niki, on the other hand, had a more positive attitude, actively taking advantage of linguistic affordances, cultivating a close relationship with their hosts and gaining more exposure to social discourse and the relevant CoP.

In Chapter 9, the author links the findings of the participants’ contradictory, relational and dynamic identity shifts with the theoretical notions reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. While exploring the links between language, culture and identity (re)construction, she also problematises both the assumptions of the INT (Ting-Toomey, 2005) and the construct of CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991) in relation to stays abroad. For example, Jackson
claims that the assumption, integral to a CoP approach, that sojourners’ L2 and intercultural communicative competence will be enhanced dramatically ‘simply by being present in the host speech community’ (p.212) cannot stand since it ignores the role of individual differences in determining sojourning outcomes. Besides this, it is oversimplification for CoP advocates to attribute obstacles to language learning (symptoms of culture shock, unsatisfactory intercultural experiences, fewer opportunities for using English and cultural enhancement, etc.) to the sociocultural environment since the situated learning of L2 sojourners is far more complex. Factors such as a language learner’s response to the environment, different levels of investment, agency and host receptivity, the distance among cultures, the L2 sojourner’s ‘outsider’ status in the host country and so on all weigh a lot in this short but complex journey.

In the final chapter, the author suggests that further studies are needed on SA program design and delivery that investigate the perspectives of short- and long-term student sojourners from other language groups and contexts using both qualitative and quantitative measures. She also suggests that the perspectives of hosts might yield new results and could be valuable to scholarship in this area. She discusses the implications of her study: for preparation of the L2 sojourner; for selection, preparation and support of host families; and for participant reflection and self-analysis during the sojourn. She also shares her detailed questions and procedures for collecting research data in the field.

The strengths of the book include the integration of classic theories and perspectives with contemporary poststructuralist notions of language, culture and identity. Additionally, the adoption of powerful first-person narratives throughout the text foregrounds the often marginalised voices of L2 sojourners, increasing the transparency of narrative and having the effect of allowing the reader to identify with the experiences of the L2 sojourners. Readers will also appreciate the rich data presented by the author. For the pre-sojourn phase, data comprise program application essays, interview notes, bio-surveys, homestay forms, two interviews, a cultural identity narrative, an intercultural reflections journal, a pre-sojourn survey, group discussions and field notes. During the 5-week sojourn, the participants kept diaries and language use logs. There were also weekly surveys and debriefing sessions, as well as the researcher’s field notes. Post-sojourn data include an interview, surveys, participants’ ethnographic project reports, group discussions and field notes. These multiple data sources enhance the validity of the research and help to verify both ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ interpretations of the study.

On the other hand, the validity of the research can be critiqued since gender identity issues are not well articulated in the book and the participants in the four case studies are all female. The question arises whether, if the participants were males, their sojourning
trajectories might be somewhat different. Additionally it is not clear in what ways the focus on Hong Kong Chinese only may have affected the study.

Despite this minor shortcoming, this book provides a unique, interdisciplinary perspective on SA research and practice, addressing issues in second language acquisition, second/foreign language teaching, sociolinguistics, cross-cultural psychology, sociology, postcolonial studies, race relations, speech communication and intercultural communication. This broad relevance makes it an important resource for a range of audiences, from students in SA programs, to graduate students in applied linguistics or intercultural communication as well as to international educators, second or foreign language students, international business people or indeed anyone who crosses cultures in today’s globalised world. The broad relevance of the book is captured by the front cover which shows three overlaid globes with a shining point in the middle of the innermost globe, in a setting of different letters and languages, implying an obvious correlation between internationalisation, globalisation and intercultural communication.

Review by Hongyan Yang
Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University

REFERENCES