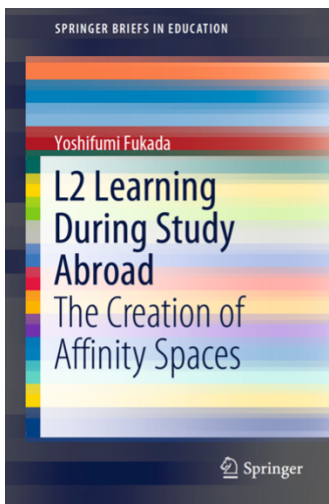# L2 Learning During Study Abroad: The Creation of Affinity Spaces

Fukada, Y. (2019). Springer. ISBN: 9789811375453

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The increasing number of international students engaged in Study Abroad (SA) programs in English-speaking countries has brought to language acquisition scholars' attention the challenges and difficulties involved in their efforts to improve the target language (TL) in local communities. Whether studying in English-speaking countries or non-English-speaking countries, international students who participate in SA programs seek opportunities to socialize with native speakers in their host countries, which has been demonstrated to be difficult. In his dissertation-turned-book, *L2 Learning During Study Abroad: The Creation of Affinity Spaces* (2019), Yoshifumi Fukada draws on his own SA experiences and those of two other international students and presents the impact of creating affinity spaces for international students to construct TL-mediated socializing opportunities where they can interact with native speakers within the local communities in the U.S. and Japan.

In Chapter 1, Fukada (2019) introduces that the impetus of his research was his own SA experiences years ago, which encouraged him to collect survey and interview data from Japanese students who were engaged in SA programs in English-speaking countries. His preliminary findings

indicated that many international students experienced difficulties when they tried to interact with locals in their English-speaking host countries. He attributed this struggle to internal factors, such as being nervous, lacking confidence in their English-speaking skills, and not engaging in social activities in the local communities. Fukada (2019) also connected these difficulties to external, sociocultural, and environmental factors, such as students' busy and varied schedules, a tendency to spend time with people from the same cultural backgrounds, and subjective negative perceptions that native speakers do not like to communicate with non-native speakers who cannot speak English well. Fukada (2019) also makes it clear using an intimate autoethnographic lens that the goal of the research is to understand how international students construct opportunities for TL-mediated socialization, based on his own experiences and those of other international students.

Chapter 2 gives a detailed account of Fukada's (2019) research on SA experiences as well as the theoretical framework he applied. Many scholars have pointed out the utility of situated learning where learners acquire TL skills through meaningful social interaction with their local host communities. These opportunities are effective in improving SA students' TL skills, intrinsic motivation, positive attitudes toward differences, and self-confidence. After noticing the gap between theories and the actual practice, Fukada (2019) sets out to address the gap through autobiographic, autoethnographic, and qualitative case studies exploring participants' perspectives in depth. It has been noted that most research done on this topic has focused on students' experiences, but less attention has been paid to the researchers themselves, which is why Fukada (2019) decided to include his own experiences as a SA student and language learner to provide more in-depth insight into the matter. He also introduces the concept of "affinity spaces" in this chapter, which refers to the social contexts where people interact with one another through shared interests, activities, and goals, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Affinity spaces provides people with opportunities to gain new identities through their shared engagement with others in social interaction, as may occur during a SA student's identity construction.

Chapter 3 focuses on detailed explanations of the methodology and analysis. Fukada (2019) takes a postmodern, social-constructivism, epistemological standpoint to analyze how TL-mediated socialization, social spaces and affinity spaces, and capital are all related to this research. He also describes the backgrounds of the three focal participants, including the author himself who was a Japanese professor conducting research at the University of Hawaii, a Japanese international student who was studying at the University of Hawaii, and a Chinese student who was studying in Japan. Fukada (2019) justifies his use of autobiography by discussing the benefits of

combining autobiographic and autoethnographic approaches. He also explains in detail the ethnographic approach he employed for the Japanese international student, the qualitative case study method for the Chinese student, and the reason why he studied these two participants in different ways. It is worth noting that Fukada (2019) utilized member checking, an important technique in which researchers share transcripts with participants to avoid bias.

Chapter 4 presents research findings and discussion along some narrative examples from the data, allowing the readers to immerse themselves in the vivid stories of each participant. Fukada (2019) analyzed his autobiography within the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter and through a critical lens by referencing theories and past research rather than simply describing his own stories. Themes that emerged from the autobiography, autoethnography, ethnography, and case study include, active TL-mediated socialization through an affinity space, positive engagement with the local community through common interests and goals, and active investments in multiple social contexts in the TL community. Overall, the participants transitioned from feeling unempowered and vulnerable in the host country and over time achieved a sense of belonging and security through actively creating affinity spaces in various social contexts.

In Chapters 5 and 6, Fukada (2019) offers educational implications and limitations of the research. He suggests that for SA students, affinity spaces are ideal for them to acquire the target language and achieve overall improvements. Additionally, SA students or TL learners should be encouraged to co-construct and socialize with the local community in their host country through affinity spaces. He also suggests that language instructors can play a vital role in helping international students construct affinity spaces and promote active TL-mediate socialization.

With rich narrative descriptions from each participant, the research provides a deeper understanding of international students' experiences in socialization in their local host communities. However, as noted by Fukada (2019), the sample selection procedures of the discussed research yielded language learner participants with strong motivation and relatively introverted personalities, limiting the reliability and generalizability of the research. Although generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, it should still be noted that findings from Fukada's (2019) study might not be as applicable to international students who are not very motivated to learn the target language or to those who are more extroverted. Moreover, the issue with researcher bias arises from the autobiographic approach that Fukada (2019) takes. It is true that valuable findings can be derived from the researcher's experiences, especially when the researcher has gone through similar events to other participants. However, such an approach could cause some readers to question the validity and objectivity of the research, since the

researcher is involved as a participant. Fudaka (2019) acknowledges the need to involve more subjects and collect more data to provide a more comprehensive picture of the lived experiences of SA students.

These potential shortfalls aside, Fukada (2019) presents an outstanding work that is well organized, straightforward, rich in description, and relevant to current international students who are in SA programs or plan to engage in future SA programs. It is likely that many international students will resonate with the perspectives and experiences that he has described through this scholarship. Readers and practitioners should also be able to derive inspirations from the cases in the study and take proactive steps to create their own affinity spaces to aid SA students. This book will be of benefit to those language instructors who would like to gain an in-depth understanding of what motivates their SA students or language learners. Finally, for language programs and institutions, Fukada's book can also provide practical suggestions on how to better assist language learners and international students in creating affinity spaces and constructing TL-mediated socializing opportunities. In summary, Fudaka's (2019) work makes a great contribution to SA programs, language learners, and international education fields.

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