Emotional Investments During the Year Abroad: A case study of a British ERASMUS student in Italy

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This article focuses on the shaping of social identities and emotions of one British young woman who spent a Year Abroad (YA) in Italy as an ERASMUS student. I have examined her negotiation and (re)construction of social identities during her experience abroad from a poststructuralist perspective, which sees individuals' identities as dynamic and changeable sites of struggles (Norton Pierce, 1995 and 2000). In order to analyse the participant's accounts of her language learning and emotional experiences during her YA I have used the notion of emotional investment developed by Pavlenko (2012). This notion has helped me to understand how, why and to what extent the participant in the study gained access to Italian communities of practice and to explain her discursive construction of a new linguistic identity during her stay in Italy. There are clear gaps in the literature on identities and emotions in the YA research context. Recent work on the YA shows a growing interest in identity and second language learning (e.g. the work by 2007 and by Jackson, 2008), but the emotional dimension of such experience is still under researched territory, hence my focus on it in this article.

Keywords: emotions, identity, language learning, Year Abroad

1 Introduction

This article is concerned with the shaping of second language identities and the expression of emotions during a sojourn abroad. More specifically, this is a study of the lived experiences of a British undergraduate student who spent an academic year (2006-2007) in Italy as ERASMUS student as part of her course of study and her perspectives on these experiences.

Little work has been done on the emotions of language learners and the construction of identities in Italian surroundings during the year abroad research context. Although interesting longitudinal studies (e.g. Block, 2007, Crawshaw et al., 2001, Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2009) are now starting to flourish in relation to international students' mobility and their social, cultural and linguistic experiences as second language learners, no research has been

undertaken so far concerning English ERASMUS students who have lived in Italy.

The main aim of the article is to show how the emotions of this young woman are bound up with the construction of her second language (L2) identity and her year abroad experience of language learning. In order to do that, a poststructuralist perspective (see Norton Pierce, 1995), which sees individual identities as dynamic and changeable sites of struggles, has been adopted. The study was guided by the following question: *what effects does the retrospective, emotional evaluation of the Year Abroad experience have on learners' negotiation of facets of second language identity*?

Emotions are conceptualised as a key lens on the learning of language and culture and on forms of investment in the language learning process (Pavlenko, 2005). In order to explain some of the ways in which the participant in this study described and represented her experience of emotion in her accounts of intercultural encounters, her *emotive communication* has been considered, namely those references to emotions which she used consciously and strategically to express her emotions (Arndt & Janney, 1991). In addition, a poststructuralist stance on L2 identities and language learning has been taken. The notion of emotional investment developed by Pavlenko (2012) has also been considered, in order to investigate the discursive construction of second language learner identities during a sojourn abroad.

2 Review of existing research on language and emotions

This section offers an overview of earlier research on emotions that are relevant for the present study. The research is based upon perspectives on emotions from the fields of social psychology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics. The fields of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, in particular, have experienced a shift within the last decade towards the use of new and unified conceptual frameworks in research on emotions (see Pavlenko, 2005). Within these pragmatic and discursive frameworks, emotions are considered as part of socially-constructed, dynamic and fundamentally interactive processes expressed through specific emotive linguistic devices, such as prosodic or lexical cues (Arndt & Janney, 1991).

According to Arndt and Janney (1991), "emotional communication" needs to be clearly distinguished from "emotive communication". They define *emotional communication* as spontaneous and often unintentional responses to internal states, and *emotive communication* as the conscious, strategic modification of socially learned, cognitively mediated and intentionally performed affective signals (Arndt & Janney, 1991: 529).

Research on prosody in emotive communication has started to appear only in the last two decades (Arndt & Janney, 1991 and Caffi & Janney, 1994). This research focuses on a variety of prosodic cues in stretches of emotion discourse, particularly on emotive contrasts signalled in speech through cues such as pitch placement, prominence and direction (Arndt & Janney, 1991: 535), and on the use of contrastive devices (e.g. positive/negative, confident/doubtful, clear/vague, more/less) as indicated by Caffi & Janney (1994).

As far as research into emotional communication is concerned, its conceptual frameworks can be found in the hitherto embryonic, interdisciplinary research tradition that combines linguistics, sociology and psychology (e.g. Bloch, 1996; Retzinger, 1991; Scheff, 1990; Scheff and Retzinger, 1991 and Pittam, 1994).
This study focuses on the participant's retrospective talk about emotions, namely on her *emotive communication*, adopting a propositional and semantic analysis. This means that the focus has been exclusively on the participant's direct-verbal cues to emotions in naturally occurring situations. These types of cues are described by Planap et al. (1996) and consist of terms used consciously by the participants (in her oral and written accounts), which refer to the expression of her emotions, such as "I am/I feel happy, I am sad/I feel sad etc."

2.1 Emotions and identity from a poststructuralist perspective

A poststructuralist approach sees social identities as non-unitary, mutually constitutive and changing over time and as sites of struggle. According to this theoretical standpoint, individuals' identities are seen as multiple and contradictory (Weedon, 1997). Moreover, a critical poststructuralist perspective argues that there are dominant discourses of identity (e.g. about femininity or about successful language learning) that circulate in society (in powerful institutions like the media, the academy and so on) and individuals have to navigate these discourses, accepting, recasting or contesting them.

Research on social identities during sojourns abroad has proliferated in the last two decades. Indeed, a number of recent studies have investigated the development of second language identities in year abroad contexts (e.g. Block, 2007, Crawshaw et al., 2001, Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2009). In the context of this study, the notion of social identities proposed by Norton Pierce (1995) was found particularly useful, since it helped to understand the participant's story and to explain the circumstances in which she spoke Italian or, conversely, remained silent. As stated by Norton (2000: 14), "poststructuralists take the position that the signifying practices of societies are sites of struggle, and that linguistic communities are heterogeneous arenas characterized by conflicting claims to truth and power" (cf. also Bourdieu, 1977, 1991 and Heller, 1982).

Relations of power are at the heart of poststructuralist thought about discourse. They are considered as key elements for the understanding the shaping of individuals' identities. In this view, discourses about identity are continually being imposed, negotiated or contested. Weedon (1997) links this concept of power to a theory of *subjectivity*, namely the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of individuals, their sense of themselves and their ways of understanding their relations to the world (Weedon (1997:32). According to her, it is within this sphere of subjectivity that identity emerges and manifests itself, changing over time and acquiring connotations of a diverse nature.

In a similar manner, Norton (2000: 5) also espouses the poststructuralist views about identity as a site of struggle. She uses the term identity "to reference how 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". Norton (2000) was one of the first to draw attention to the fact that language is central to language learners'

construction of identity. Drawing on Bourdieu's definition of power and cultural capital (1991), she also argues that the study of relations of *power* (often unequal) and interactions between language learners and target language speakers are very important in building an understanding of identity. Norton (2000: 7) defines the term 'power' as "the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which material [e.g. money, real estates and capital goods] and symbolic [e.g. language, religion, education and friendship] resources in a society are produced, distributed and validated". She carried out a longitudinal study among five immigrant women, who were learning English in Canada. She constantly emphasised the struggle her participants had to undergo in order to construct and negotiate their L2 identities. This was due in part to the relations of power her participants encountered, and also to other factors, such as motivation, ethnicity, gender and class.

Human agency is a major feature of the poststructuralist view on identity. Individuals have the ability to resist others' positioning within a particular social discourse, hence the notion of struggle. They can say 'no' to unequal relations of power and to the imposition of particular identities, and they might even "set up a counter-discourse, which positions the person in a powerful rather than marginalised subject position" (Norton 2000: 127). Poststructuralist views of identities as socially and discursively constructed run parallel to the 'theory of positioning' developed by the discursive psychologists Davies & Harré in the late 1990s (see Davies & Harré, 1990, 2001 and Harré et al., 2009). The theory presupposes a flexible and ephemeral view of individuals' roles in society, and it highlights the role of language (or discourse) in the ways in which people assume subject positions or are positioned by others.

Building on poststructuralist thought, Norton also demonstrates in her study that the concept of identity is not fixed, and can dramatically change over time. The same standpoint is taken by Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) who analysed the concept of identity through the first-person narratives of their participants. Their study provides revealing insights into the life stories of people, who have struggled through cultural border crossing before (re)constructing their identities as L2 learners. In Pavlenko and Lantolf's study (2000) the function of narratives becomes crucial, as it is used to tell stories and to construct individuals' own reality. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) imply that we all construct our own narrative so as to give a cohesive sense to our lives; and when unexpected events happen, we need to adjust the narrative, since failure to adjust to or to accept new events could lead to cognitive and emotional instability.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) also emphasise the importance of narratives in individuals' lives and in their negotiation of L2 identities (cf. Pavlenko, 2007). It is, indeed, through narratives that we can resolve tension and impose coherence between the past, the present and the future (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). In this view, identities are seen as dynamic and individuals as continuously involved in the production of selves, in the positioning of others (cf. Davies & Harré, 2001) and in the revision and creation of identity narratives, which give value to new modes of being and belonging (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) identify three main phases in the process of identity (re)construction in second language learning: a phase of loss, a phase of

recovery, and finally a phase of (re)construction becoming a second language speaker. Nevertheless, they also emphasise that:

> It is ultimately through their own intentions and agency that people decide to undergo or not the frequently agonizing process of linguistic, cultural, and personal transformation [...]. This decision may be influenced by various factors, including one's positioning in the native discourse and the power relations between the discourses involved. (Pavlenko & Lantolf 2000: 171)

What Pavlenko and Lantolf describe as an 'agonizing process' can be related to what Norton calls 'site of struggle', as they are both trying to portray the experiential side of negotiating L2 identities. According to these poststructuralist views the (re)construction of identities turns out to be a tough and painful process along the way; a process which is inevitably linked to a range of emotions (cf. Pavlenko, 2005 and 2006).

2.1.1 Language investment

The notion of language investment was introduced by Norton Pierce (1995) as a way to reconceptualise the literature on motivation for language learning from a poststructuralist point of view. In more traditional motivation studies, the focus has been more on individual differences than on the impact that the social context can have on learners' second language acquisition (Cf. Dörnyei 2001, 2003, 2005; Gardner 1985 and Ushioda 1996).

Norton Pierce (1995: 9) proposed the notion of *investment* to capture the complex socially and historically constructed relationship of language learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and to speak it. According to her, language learners' investment in a second language acts as a mediator between their desire to speak the language and their motivation to go through the long drawn out process of learning new language forms and conventions of use.

The concept of investment builds on the notion of *cultural capital* developed by Bourdieu and Passeron in the late 1970s (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 1990). This was a metaphor borrowed from the language of economics, and adapted for the analysis of other fields of action or social contexts (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991). In this sense, 'fields of action' are intended as the places where different kinds of resources or forms of capital are distributed. According to Bourdieu (1991: 14), there are different forms of capital besides 'economic capital' in the strict sense (i.e. money, stocks and shares, property, etc.), there are also other kinds of capital, such as 'cultural capital' (i.e. skills, knowledge and other cultural acquisitions), 'symbolic capital' (i.e. honour or accumulated prestige), and so on. In his view, one form of capital can be converted into another, for example educational qualifications can be converted into profitable jobs, and the maintenance or alteration of the distribution of such capital requires continuous 'struggles' by individuals in order to pursue their aims, namely to generate 'returns' on their *investments* in these fields of action.

Norton Pierce (1995) adapted this concept to second language learners, taking the position that if learners *invest* in another language they will acquire a greater range of symbolic and material resources, which will consecutively enlarge their

cultural capital. According to Norton Pierce (1995: 17), the amount of profitable return obtained from learners' investment (i.e. accessibility to previously remote resources of target language speakers) will depend on the amount of effort they make to learn the second language.

Learners' investment in a new language involves a constant struggle for access to social networks within target language communities and a struggle to avoid marginalization and alienation from them. The idea of individuals' struggle in building up new identities as competent speakers of the shared communities is central to the poststructuralist conception of identity as a subjective way of understanding the world (Weedon, 1997).

2.1.2 Emotional investment

The notion of emotional investment builds on the notion of language investment. The process of (re)constructing and negotiating identities in new contexts, particularly through a second or additional language, can be agonizing and emotionally draining. In particular it requires individuals to put in a great deal of effort in order to deal with their emotions (Cf. Gross 1998, 1999 and 2002; and Gross & John 2003, for current perspectives on the emerging field of *emotion regulation*).

A great deal of emotions can accompany the dynamic and transformative real-time process involved in individuals' (re)construction of their identities: language learners' can feel proud and content about reaching their linguistic goals, or, on the contrary, they may experience shame and loss in confidence for not doing so. These emotions are bound up with learners' *investments* in desired L2 identities. As stated by Pavlenko (2012: 9), language learners' awareness of the kinds of emotions that are triggered by different language learning experiences can be of great help to them since they can evaluate the outcomes of plans, make changes in goals, persist, abandon, or modify their plans and goals and take action.

Becoming aware of one's own emotions implies a process of continuous self-reflection, a compromise between one's personal and social identity, namely a balance between internal thoughts and emotions and the happenings around individuals. Through reflexivity individuals can manage to give voice to their 'emotional commentaries', defined by Archer (2000: 195) as gaining access to interaction not only with the social world but also with the inner self. Emotions can help individuals to become more aware of situations and to select a set of new social roles when living in new social and cultural contexts, such as during a sojourn abroad. Hence, the importance of emotive communication, namely the conscious and intentional talk about emotions. For instance, Alice, the participant in Kinginger's (2004) ethnographic longitudinal study of French language learning, felt frustrated and sad, sometimes even angry, bored and depressed, about being deliberately marginalised by her second language (French) and withheld by people in positions of relative power, such as her teacher (p. 230). She was aware of the whole gamut of emotions she was feeling and she consciously expressed them in her narratives, showing in this way a constant dialogue with her inner self. Her desire to move beyond her past and to accomplish her professional aspirations, accompanied by an awareness of her emotional struggles within the new contexts (therefore her *emotional investments* in the target language), paid off in her efforts to achieve L2 competence, when

she eventually managed to gain access to informal interaction with French language speakers (p. 241).

Sometimes the communities of which learners wish to be part are only 'imagined communities' (cf. Anderson, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) sustained by a romantic image of the target language (country, people, culture etc.) together with the desire to make this image real (Kinginger, 2004: 227). As pointed out by Norton (2001), learners' imagined communities lead to imagined L2 identities, and therefore learners' (language and emotional) investments must be considered within this context. Norton (2001) argues that since different learners have different imagined communities, these "are best understood in the context of a learner's unique *investment* in the target language and the conditions under which he or she speaks and practises it" (pp. 165-166). It can be argued that while language learners' investments in a second language act as mediators between their desire to speak the language and their motivation to learn it, learners' emotional investments can act both as mediators and deterrents between individuals' L2 desire and motivation. Indeed, as shown in section 5, learning new language forms and conventions implies going through not only a cognitive but also an emotional process, which can influence language learners in their choice to interact within new social and cultural contexts and to pursue their investments in the new language.

In this article, drawing on Pavlenko's views (2012: 3) about emotions in multilingual contexts, L2 identities are considered as *emotional, discursive sites of struggle,* in which L2 speakers are seen as inclined to feel and talk about their language learning experience and the struggles they go through "to establish their legitimacy in the face of indifference, disinterest, and sometimes linguistic, ethnic, racial or gender discrimination". Central to this view is the concept of emotional investment in new or desired L2 identities.

3 The study

This article draws on a wider study that included case studies of students' mobility, which involved extensive engagement over time with three English Erasmus students, who spent a year living in Italy (Gallucci, 2011). The focus here is on just one research participant: the fictitious name she chose for herself was Daphne. During her stay abroad, Daphne lived in Ferrara, a city in the region of Emilia Romagna in the north of Italy. The reason why this participant was chosen is mainly due to the fact that she showed openness and flexibility when describing her lived experiences in the new Italian contexts. Indeed, she provided a detailed account of her opinions and emotions throughout the whole project, both during the interviews and in her diary entries, which she wrote for an extensive period of time.

The study is situated within the transnational mobility research context. In this article, the abbreviation YA (Year Abroad) will be used to refer to my study and to the lived experiences of the research participant, since she spent one year abroad, as most students of foreign languages in the British higher education system, who are required to spend *one year*, namely a quarter of their course of study, in the country where the language they are studying is spoken as a native language. Indeed, Alred and Byram (2002) use the term Year Abroad rather than

more generic ones, such as 'residence abroad' or 'study abroad', since as they assert, "the Year Abroad (YA) is a peculiarly British phenomenon" (Byram & Alred, 2002: 339).

Research on the YA has proliferated over the last four decades (Carroll, 1967; DeKeiser, 1991; Dyson, 1988; Magnan, 1986; and Milleret: 1990 and Willis et al., 1977), with a growing interest in factors other than linguistic proficiency, such as individual differences and intercultural learning (Coleman, 1995, 1998; Freed, 2008; Kramsch, 1993; Pellegrino, 1998 and Wilkinson, 1998).

As regards studies involving language perspective, there are now a number of studies on topics related to international students' mobility and to their social, cultural and linguistic experiences as second language learners (e.g. Byram et al., 2001; Freed, 2008; Roberts et al., 2001). These studies adopt different perspectives: while some studies emphasize awareness of cultural difference and the development of intercultural competence, others bring out the need for research-based practice which orients language learners to an ethnographic approach in language and culture and the negotiation of second language learner identities during sojourns abroad (Block, 2007; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger 2009). However, only a few studies have focused on the emotional dimension of second language learning *in situ* (e.g. Pavlenko, 2012; Piller, 2002, Piller & Takahashi, 2006; Takahashi, 2012). Indeed, we need to investigate further both the cognitive and emotional experiences of students during their sojourns abroad. More specifically, specific sociocultural aspects of the YA, such as the ways in which students socialise and operate within "a sphere of interculturality" (cf. Kramsch, 1993), and also specific social psychological dimensions of this experience, such as the perceptions and emotions of people involved in exchange programmes, need to be explored more in depth. This article aims to make a contribution to this area of research, which still remains relatively unexplored.

4   Methodology

As mentioned above, the study reported in this paper forms a part of a wider project, which involved ethnographically informed case study research (cf. Mertens, 1998; Gillham, 2000) and took into account the life of three students in the new Italian contexts, in which they found themselves. In this context only the experiences of one student have been considered, for the reasons explained above.

The study was conducted with three British young women, who were studying in three different British Universities in the U.K. I initially contacted by email the students who were studying Italian in a university where I used to work. Daphne was the only student who got in touch with me and so I decided to meet her in person before she left for Italy. The other two participants, whose fictitious names they chose for themselves were Ilaria and Lucy, were already in Italy when I started the project. I got in touch with them through the ERASMUS office in Sardinia. The reason why I got in touch with this office was mostly for practical reasons. This is where I grew up and where many of my relatives live, thus a very familiar place for me, where I could go more frequently during data collection. Furthermore, having taken my first degree over there and knowing

the university system very well, I felt I could have been a reassuring figure for participants, and that they could have relied on me, for university-related problems. After acknowledging my research focus and main aims, the ERASMUS office in Sardinia contacted the students currently doing their year abroad in Cagliari, urging them to contact me if they were interested in the project. Six students got in touch with me. However, four of them showed very little commitment and having realized after a short time that they were not willing to take part to the project anymore, I had to withdraw them from the project. The study became then a multiple case study, with three participants: Daphne in Ferrara, Ilaria and Lucy in Cagliari.

In the course of the investigation, interviewing was used as the main research method. Specifically, I conducted with them six interviews at regular intervalsgiving them the choice as to which language they wanted to use in each interview. In the course of my research I also used diary-based interviews to gather my data. I set up one semi-structured interview with each of the participants based upon their written accounts. I asked them to keep a written diary in an open format, for at least two consecutive weeks, including Saturday and Sunday. One participant (Ilaria) sent me an electronic and very concise version of daily activities. Another participant (Daphne), on the other hand, kept very detailed accounts of day-by-day activities, together with personal comments and impressions. Lucy provided no written diary entries. Subsequently, I carried out semi-structured and in-depth diary-based interviews only with the two participants who had written their diaries. Diary-based interviews were used to gain insights into the significance of particular facets of the participant's social life as well as into her inner perceptions, which she may have found difficult to articulate (cf. Alszewsky, 2006.

A diary-based interview method was first developed by sociolinguists conducting research on bilingual literacy practices (Jones et al., 2000). In an ethnographic account of the use of diary-based interviews with bilingual adults in two different workplace settings, Jones et al. show that this research method is particularly well suited to sociolinguistic research that is critical and dialogic in nature, since it can shift the positions of researcher and researched and allows for the development of more natural interactions in which the interviewee defines the agenda.

The use of multiple data sources proved to be very useful for the study, since the data (collected through interviews and diary entries) provided a penetrating inner view of the participant's life which would otherwise have been inaccessible. They also provided insightful views on the participant's learning experience in Italy from her own perspective, including a deeper understanding of her behaviour in the new environment.

Daphne was the only participant who provided a very detailed written account of her experience abroad, showing reflexivity and introspection more intensely and for a more extended period of time than the other two participants. This is shown for instance in the diaries entries, which she continued to provide also after the diary-based interview had been carried out.

Daphne was doing a degree in Italian Studies with French in a British university, which she completed successfully with a first class honours the year after her YA. As indicated, a series of consecutive interviews were untaken with the three participants, Daphne was the only one, however, who used both English and Italian in the interviews with no code-switching between the two

languages. In other words, she showed a clear distinction between the two languages and a distinctive linguistic command which became gradually stronger over time. Hence, a part from obvious reasons of space constraints, these are the main reasons why this article focuses on the experiences of Daphne only.

4.1   Researcher as an ethnographic interviewer

Conducting the interviews with the participant was a challenge during the data collection process. When interviewing, the research goals and the social identity of the researcher can shape the ways in which the interviews unfold, therefore it is important to avoid the imposition of the researcher's agenda and, as far as possible, to reduce the power imbalance between the interviewer and the interviewee. In order to do this, open-ended or semi-structured interviews were used, along with diary-based interviews, to gather information in a less formal way, so that the researched could see there was not a strict agenda (cf. Arskey & Knight, 1999) and she could also experience an active agenda-setting role in the interview process, especially in the diary-based interviews. Consecutive interviews were also conducted, and this allowed the building up of a trusting relationship with the participant over time.

   As a native speaker of Italian, I as the researcher was familiar with the socio-cultural contexts in which the participant was living, and this helped in understanding the specific cultural details mentioned in the interviews. As Briggs (1986) notes, our ontology may affect the methodological process, therefore, it is important for the researcher to be reflexive and to be aware that one's perspectives and actions (including the asking of questions) may influence the direction of topic development and/or the stance taken by participants on their topics (Briggs, 1986: 118). All this was born in mind when analyzing the data, as well as the fact the interview is interaction and a discursive space for constructing meaning (Blommaert & Dong, 2010 and Freebody, 2003) Since   the main aim of an ethnographic interview is to gain understanding of the participant's life from her emic point of view, a decision was made to explore her perspectives on her experience abroad through her accounts of her intercultural encounters. In order to achieve the most comprehensive perspective on those experiences, the participant was allowed to choose the language in which she wanted to undertake the interview (English or Italian).

5 Daphne's emotional investments: insights from the interviews

Daphne responded in different ways to the opportunities to use Italian and make new friends in Italy and so, over time, she (re)constructed her identity as a second language learner. Her desire and willingness to achieve her linguistic and personal goals, hence her *emotional investments*, contributed considerably to her chances of improving her second language and to what extent she adapted to the new society. The purpose of this section is to describe Daphne's ability to sustain emotional investments as she attempted to enlarge her cultural capital, and the extent to which she was successful in her interactions with Italian native

speakers. It also documents the ways in which she was able to plan, sustain and/or convert her L2 investments into new forms of capital.

Transcription conventions can be found at the end of this article. In the interview transcripts, the following abbreviations are used: G: Gallucci (the researcher), D: Daphne (the participant).

During Daphne's experience abroad, she invested considerably in making a broad range of friends, including other ERASMUS students or local people: the staff in the supermarket or in the local bar, her flatmate, Italian or international students at the university. Indeed, meeting and becoming acquainted with local people can be considered as one of her main *emotional investments* in Italian.

As she stated in the first interview, undertaken before leaving for the YA, her main aims were to get to know the new culture, to meet a lot of new people and to be able to be understood in different Italian contexts. As shown in the excerpt below she appeared very determined to invest her time and energy to obtain the desired outcomes, and this prospect made her feel very excited.

>   *Excerpt 1 (May, 2005)*
>   the CULTURE is so different and it would be, everything I'll do, will be NEW and it will be really fun, and I will meet lots of people, who are completely different .. to English people, because I don't really know anybody who is not English.

Over time, the positive outcomes of Daphne's plans accompanied by positive emotions such as pride, joy and satisfaction, increased her language learning motivation and helped her to adjust her goals and to consider new ones, e.g. (1) undertaking more complicated conversations and talking about complex issues, as she stated in her diary entries in November 2006: "*I try to talk about more complex topics and that's why I have a new difficulty*" [my translation]; (2) speaking in public in service encounters, as she stated in an interview in April 2007 "*I want to be able to.. er.. to go out with a group of all Italians and.. to speak … er.. with the guy of the supermarket, with the waitress at the bar… more fluently*" [my translation]; or (3) comforting her flatmate, as shown in the excerpt below, taken from a diary-based interview.

>   *Excerpt 2 (November, 2006)*
>   G: […] on Saturday the 21st again you start .. your diary by saying "*é troppo frustrante*" [*it is too frustrating*] and then something happened, you went out with Sara, you went to a restaurant and then she told you something about her life, yeah? […] And you wanted to give her some advice?
>   D: Yeah she was having like a .. a problem […] and I wanted to help her and it was quite annoying because I wanted, I wanted to help, but I couldn't even think what or say so .. mm.. it was quite hard because I felt like I wasn't being helpful.

Daphne's L2 investments were constantly accompanied by a great deal of language-related emotions, often worrying ones, such as anxiety, fear, nervousness and frustration. In excerpts 3 and 4 below Daphne reports that these emotions did not hold her back from her linguistic goals; on the contrary, they reinforced her willingness to achieve them and to invest more in new ways of using Italian.

Excerpt 3 (November, 2006)
G: I see, I see, ok, then you had a terrible experience, because you said "The Professor asked me to stand and talk about English history in front of the Italian class! It was terrible" […] I can read here, that you had this experience on Tuesday, and then on Wednesday again you said "I had to talk again in front of the whole class], so you had to talk […] I wasn't quite as nervous, because I was expecting it". [my translation]

Excerpt 4 (June, 2007)
G: And what about the[:] your opinion about the university, the Italian university system? And.. have you taken any exam? Or .. did you like them or not?
D: Erm .. yeah.. I did an exam, last week, which was an oral exam, because almost all the exams are oral, which erm … was quite a change because in England all the exams are written. I was quite' no, I was very nervous in the beginning, I was shaking and I was so nervous […]
G: [[how]] did it go, your exam?
D: It was all right, eh eh, even the teacher was so nice, I think he liked the foreign students, because he gave me and my friend the top marks. Even though, eh eh, .. yeah

Daphne's emotional investments in Italian led her to seek as many opportunities as she could to speak her second language. She was aware of her emotions and how these could help (or inhibit) her in achieving her L2 goals. For instance she was very nervous about speaking in her L2, but at the same time she was also determined to improve her communication skills in Italian, so, she managed to regulate her negative emotions (such as fear, nervousness and anxiety) in order to pursue her emotional investments. Speaking with Sara (Daphne's flatmate) was definitely a good opportunity to practise the target language. Daphne made good use of the cultural capital available at home and obtained a profitable return, when she was able to follow up conversations with her and eventually to improve her L2 fluency.

However, Sara was ten years older than Daphne and spoke a very refined Italian, so Daphne re-evaluated her early emotional investments in speaking mainly with her flatmate, and also looked for opportunities to speak with people of her same age and to learn more colloquial expressions, along with slang or swear words. She felt happy about her L2 progress and about the fact that she was becoming closer to her Italian flatmate, but she also felt eager to learn more and felt dissatisfied about the limited resources for informal, colloquial conversations she had access to in the new Italian home. These emotions prompted her to look for more opportunities to practise her L2 outside the domestic walls. Indeed, when I asked her, in our second interview, why she wanted to speak "slang", this was her answer:

Excerpt 5 (November, 2006)
Yeah I'd like to, I'd like to learn something like the swear words and stuff, just because that's the way people actually speak, and Sara doesn't use those expressions, I hadn't really heard them […] because you can't find those

expressions in the dictionary and teachers in England they are never gonna say these things.

Being able to understand Italian colloquialisms and slang as well as Italian humour proved to be quite difficult for Daphne, who found herself in embarrassing and unpleasant situations. However, these kinds of language-related emotions led her to modify her goals in order to achieve her new emotional investments.

Daphne's emotive accounts of her L2 investments were also triggered by her strong desire to be part of an Italian community and to join the local social networks. Her desire to belong to the local communities of pracrices is to be understood not in the sense of a romantic attraction to its target language members (cf. Piller, 2002), but as a desire to match her idealistic image of the Italian language (including people and culture) to a real one she could experience in Italy (Cf. Kinginger, 2004). This desire led her to pursue a romantic search for boundaries between ways of reconciling her imagined micro-domains and the reality of the Italian macro-domains (Cf. Kinginger, 2004; Piller & Takahashi, 2006).

In this search, Daphne showed a great deal of agency, since she was able to contest institutional discourses of power, which positioned her as disadvantaged or "foreign" (Cf. Davies & Harré, 2001) and reverse them in her favour, by taking control of interactions in Italian and among Italian native speakers. These power asymmetries, which Daphne experienced in L2 interactions, made her often feel nervous, as well as frustrated and embarrassed. Her negative feelings can be understood in terms of her refusal to be positioned in a marginal role by Italian native speakers. The excerpt below shows this quite clearly.

> *Excerpt 6 (November 2006)*
> G: Ok, ok on Friday the 27th you went to a party, again, and you said "it was very nice"... but "I felt a bit er ... excluded because I'm a foreigner"... so what do you mean by that? You felt a bit ... isolated.
> D: Mmm. I think it was because I was in another party for graduation, and it was quite, there's a lot of tradition[:]   a n d ....I just don't know, and 'cause (…) well it's hard to explain, but I didn't know the traditions, so[:] I didn't know what was going on some of the time, so I felt really awful, I don't know ... and a lot of times, not a lot of time, WHEN I feel excluded, it's quite often because there's a ... it with jokes a lot of times. And I think because erm....they're quite subtle sometimes, I think it's a quite hard thing, they usually play on words or ...like swear words or ... they're quite particular and also if somebody else is talking, you don't understand, it's a kind of 'annoying but it's all right, it's kind of wait … until they change their subject to something I understand. If everyone starts LAUGHING and I don't get it, it's a, I don't know it's a ... quite, maybe it's just a more obvious s i g n   than a conversation, I don't know if it does make sense.

In excerpt 6, taken from an interview conducted in April 2007, we can see Daphne taking control of L2 interaction when ordering food in an Italian restaurant, since her Italian friends were too drunk to speak. In this particular situation, she refused an interactional marginal role and became the primary interlocutor in L2 conversations. Her ability to deal successfully with this

situation shows visibly that public discourses, which position L2 users as disadvantaged, can be challenged and that power asymmetries can be reversed.

> *Excerpt 7 (April, 2007)*
> G: Then you had a very amusing evening, with your friends, a friend wasn't very happy, she was a bit down, because something had happened to her, however, you say, that "it is strange because it was me who was the most able to speak Italian". Why?
> D: [yes] because the other two.. were a bit drunk (eh), so they hadn't spoken a lot, because usually in a restaurant I[:] don't order, because for an Italian it's easier, but this time the other two were not able to speak, so I did it [my translation]

Daphne's emotive reports of nervousness and frustration, when recalling power asymmetries were also related to the academic environment. As mentioned above, her main L2 investment was to be part of a local community, including taking part in informal and formal conversations in Italian. Despite this nervousness, however, she decided not to remain silent in the face of such inequalities, but her way to challenge them, was indeed to speak out loud in front of Italian native speakers (students and professors) and make them hear her voice as a potentially knowledgeable and confident "second" language learner. This aspect is clearly shown in the excerpt below from the same interview.

> *Excerpt 8 (April, 2007)*
> D: [[mh mh, yeah]] and I think it's probably because it's just make … mmm... he [the Professor] always points out that I'm a foreign student' although there are others, there are quite a few Americans in the class, and we're always... we all sit together and if somebody doesn't understand the question, we can help each other to work out how to say it. But … yeah it just makes... points out the difference between me and the Italian students, I think.
> G: And you stand up in front of the class now?
> D: No, I don't stand up, but I do speak if he asks, sometimes.

Daphne constantly challenged being marginalised by Italian native speakers in asymmetrical positions of power. Indeed, when confronted with unequal relations of power, especially in Italian academic environments, Daphne decided to speak up by making them hear her voice as worth listening to. It seems that her proactive attitude and her perseverance in trying to achieve her investments helped her in the development of her identity as a second language learner. Her interactions in Italian, within formal and informal environments, proved to be fruitful in the achievements of her investments as they helped her to overcome the struggles she experienced when speaking in a new language and when dealing with individuals in different positions of power. Indeed, her accounts suggest that it was indeed through these interactions that she managed to gain full acceptance in society among native speakers of the target language communities.

Daphne's desire for and investments in Italian led her to seek as many opportunities as she could to speak her second language. As time passed by, the

linguistic situation improved considerably for her. From our last three interviews, conducted in April, May and June 2007, it progressively emerged that her linguistic proficiency in speaking Italian was improving, so was her language confidence and her understanding of local people's attitudes. She was now able to have conversations in Italian with local people, including her flatmate, without being worried about making mistakes.

The positive outcomes of her L2 investments were influenced by the conscious ways in which she dealt with the whole gamut of emotions she experienced during her sojourn abroad. Emotions helped her to become more realistic in terms of L2 goals, and to modify them according to the symbolic and material resources to which she had access in the new social and cultural environments. Hence, Daphne's emotional investments acted as motivating factors between her willingness and her desire to speak her second language. She was able to maintain her emotional investments while trying out ways in which she could enlarge her cultural capital (e.g. by looking for more opportunities to speak outside her Italian home). She planned and modified her initial L2 investments into new forms of capital (e.g. by selecting new friends from whom she could obtain a more profitable return). Her ability to endure the cognitive and emotional dimensions of her L2 learning while abroad influenced her choice to speak in her L2, despite the power asymmetries she experienced in the new local communities of practice. The vision and desire she had of being a competent L2 speaker, helped to pursue her emotional investments and to become successful in her interactions with Italian speakers as a first language.

Daphne succeeded in turning her initial anxiety and nervousness into an ability to speak with members of Italian society, to face struggles in making future investments and to deal with them in a constructive way. Hence, she accepted the struggles in order to claim rights to new Italian identities (e.g. by becoming a more competent L2 speaker) and coped with other identities that were imposed on her (e.g. by refusing to assume a marginal role in conversations among Italian speakers).

6 Discussion

The ways in which the participant in this study (re)constructed her L2 identity during her period of study abroad was greatly influenced by the ways in which she planned to obtain profitable returns from her emotional investments, namely, by pursuing her visions and desire to obtain positive outcomes regarding her L2 goals. This suggests that the extent to which language learners negotiate their identities in new sociocultural contexts can be influenced by their conscious and continuous appraisal of their own emotions as well as a desire and motivation to learn and speak a new language.

The participant in this study, Daphne, invested considerably in Italian during her YA. The positive outcomes of her initial investments (e.g. becoming acquainted with local people, understanding and being understood by Italian native speakers) helped her to develop an awareness of the ways in which she could understand her relationships with the new Italian contexts. This awareness raising process was accompanied by a great deal of emotions which helped to evaluate the potential of her investment as convertible capital and,

therefore, to modify her strategies (e.g. speaking to people of the same age and undertaking more complicated conversations) or to consider new ones (e.g. understanding Italian humour and being less shy when speaking in public) in order to obtain a good return on her investment (e.g. becoming fluent and being accepted in the new social contexts, with a view to looking for jobs in Italy after graduating in the U.K.).

Daphne's determination and self-awareness helped her to sustain her language learning motivation and subsequently to achieve L2 investments; however, this may not be the case for all YA students. Indeed, some students may experience a loss of motivation during their period of study abroad and this may lead to a decrease of interest in learning the new language and eventually to a withdrawal from the host society. This is why it is important to make students aware before they leave for their YA that in order to improve their L2 skills and to integrate themselves in the new contexts, it is crucial to have a clear vision of future achievable investments. This can help them negotiate their L2 identity while abroad and to embrace (instead of resisting) the (re)construction of new language identities.

Daphne's investments in Italian were characterized by constant efforts and a strong willingness to achieve her linguistic goals. She felt an initial sense of anxiety when speaking the target language, but her commitment to achieve her investments and the vision she had of such achievements helped her seek more opportunities to speak Italian and eventually to engage successfully in informal and formal conversations with local people.

Her access to symbolic resources at home (i.e. her friendship with her flatmate Sara, who then became her best friend in Italy) helped her investments to build up cultural capital (e.g. by widening her L2 knowledge and skills) which she converted into a profitable return (e.g. by passing her university exams with excellent results). Daphne's perseverance to constantly invest in Italian and to seek alternative means through which she could enlarge her cultural capital (e.g. in the local bar and supermarket or at the university), opened up new horizons for her in which she could deal with the struggles to claim rights to new identities along with those imposed on her by Italian native speakers. Hence, her emotional struggles actually contributed to her L2 learning, and this led her to pursue her initial investments (e.g. speaking in public), to persist, modify and consider new ones (e.g. by taking the oral exams in the Italian university).

7 Conclusions

The lived experiences of Daphne during her YA in Italy clearly demonstrate that the ways in which individuals face and deal with new sociocultural and sociolinguistic realities can be influenced by their emotions and perceptions, or generate different emotions, which in turn are shaped by and depend on the contexts in which they continuously negotiate their identities as L2 learners capable of constructing legitimate and powerful discourse.

There is a clear gap in the literature in that although the Year Abroad is a flourishing area of research, there is clearly insufficient qualitative research which focuses on the affective and behavioural sphere of individuals' YA

experiences. We need to explore in depth specific social psychological dimensions of the YA experience, such as the perceptions and emotions of people involved in the exchange programmes. This study attempted to fill in this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of dimensions of the YA experience, other than linguistic ones. It also sought to highlight the importance of carrying out more longitudinal and qualitative studies, like the current study, in order to focus on the emotional dimension of second language learning *in situ*.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that students embarking on a sojourn abroad experience rarely have adequate knowledge about the host societies or the strategic abilities that could help them to cope with cultural difference. The ultimate aim of this study is that of gaining further insight into what it really means to be prepared for the YA, and to consider the ways in which we can help students to benefit from the experience. A longitudinal perspective has been adopted in this study to investigate further the sociocultural aspects of the YA, namely the ways in which the participant interacted and socialised during the YA, and her capacity to operate within "a sphere of interculturality" (Kramsch, 1993: 205).

There is a pressing need for more ethnographically informed case studies in this field. Such studies should investigate not only academic-related experiences but also, and more importantly, individuals' emotional and emotive experiences, including their perceptions of themselves and of others during the YA and the ways in which they deal with their experiences. A number of studies have made a significant contribution to research on processes of identification in transnational student mobility, and particularly, during the Year Abroad experience (e.g. the work by Block, 2007; Jackson, 2008 and Kinginger, 2009). However, it is also crucial to explore other dimensions of the Year Abroad experience, such as "the language attitudes, motives, emotions and self-construals of L2 speakers on stays abroad" (Jackson, 2008: 38). Indeed, not only the cognitive but also the emotional responses to border crossing, and how these responses shape the lives of Year Abroad students, need to be taken into account in our investigations of sojourn abroad experiences.

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Transcription conventions

word	stressed syllable/word/sentence
w o r d	slowing down
w o r d	stressed syllable/word/sentence and slowing down
WORD	louder tone of voice
WORD	louder tone of voice and stressed syllable/word/sentence
W O R D	louder tone of voice and stressed syllable/word/sentence, slowing down
..	micro pause (less than two seconds)
…	short pause (less than three seconds)
(…)	pause (between three and six seconds)
{…}	long pause (more than 6 seconds)
{…} {…}	very long pause (more than 12 seconds)
[[word]]	overlapping speech
word	misspelling/mispronunciation
[word]	my insertion (comment/lexical item or paralinguistic feature)
{ }	inaudible speech
[:]	prolonging the pronunciation of the final vowel/syllable
word'	truncation
'word	truncation
"words"	Italian or English lexical items (reported speech or diary entries)
words	relevant turns at talk
[…]	stretches of talk between turns that have been omitted
words	relevant turns at talk